

AAC STRATEGIC PLAN

Period: [01/11/2025] to [31/10/2026]

Background

Advisory Councils are bodies of EU interest, created by the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013.

The Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) was created in 2016. The AAC Recommendations include the opinions of its 50 stakeholder members represented in the Executive Committee (ExCom) with the following repartition:

- 60% - Sector organisations (Aquaculture producers, Feed, Veterinarians, Trade Unions...)
- 40% - Other Interest Group (Environment, Consumers, Animal Welfare organisations ...)

There are 20 seats in the ExCom. Currently, there are 5 empty seats belonging to the OIG stakeholders.

The AAC's General Assembly and ExCom are guided by the advice generated by our three working groups on Finfish, Shellfish and Horizontal issues. The members always seek for a consensus in the preparation of the AAC papers. In the rare cases in which a consensus could not be found, a dissenting opinion is included in the recommendation.

Focus groups can be formed by working groups to conduct initial discussions on the recommendation and prepare the first drafts. They are made up of members interested in working on the subjects under consideration. A focus group is open until all the follow up actions on the European Commission's replies to the recommendations have been completed.

An independent performance review was carried out in 2023. The ExCom has implemented the resulting action plan.

This Strategic Plan is prepared by the ExCom and adopted by the General Assembly in compliance with the provisions of the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/204 of 8 December 2021.

Mission and objectives of the AAC

The Aquaculture Advisory Council provides advice to the European Commission and the EU Member States on any measure that affects aquaculture.

AAC WORK PRIORITIES

Overarching long term and short-term work priorities

I. Introduction

The Aquaculture AC has been given some specific tasks by the European Commission in the implementation of the Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030.

To fulfil these obligations, the AAC plans in 2025-2026:

- To provide input to the DG MARE Aquaculture unit whenever requested at different stages of the preparation of the Guidance Documents foreseen for the implementation of the Strategic Guidelines;
- To constantly aim at improving the dissemination of information towards the EU aquaculture stakeholders, such as Good practices and Guidance.

- To disseminate among Members the EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism website and invite them to join as registered users. To propose, where relevant, information to be included in the Knowledge base of this website. To provide feedback to the European Commission and the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism on the usefulness of this website for AAC members and, if relevant, any suggestion to facilitate access to information therein or new relevant information.
- To support the work on the mid-term assessment of the implementation of the Strategic Guidelines due in the autumn of 2025 and on the follow up of the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy due in 2026.
- To contribute to studies ongoing or planned (e.g. study on feed for aquaculture).

The AAC will also contribute to the implementation or adoption of other European Commission's documents, such as the:

- Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture
- The Vision for Agriculture and Food
- European Oceans Pact
- Water Resilience Strategy
- Modernisation of EU animal welfare legislation

II. Resilience/competitiveness of EU aquaculture

- Food safety and food security
- Simplification of Administrative Procedures
- Enhancing competitiveness of European Aquaculture
 - o Sustainability of Feeds and feed ingredients used in Europe as a differentiation aspect;
 - o Consumer issues, including communication to consumers, e.g.: ecolabels;
- Level Playing Field
- Spatial Planning for marine and inland aquaculture
- Aquaculture production and management systems
 - o Organic aquaculture;
 - o Supply of seed and fingerlings;
 - o Low trophic and low environmental impact aquaculture species and practices, as well as IMTA and offshore conditions
- blue bioeconomy
 - o Implementation of the Algae Strategy.
 - o Support to the creation or take-over of aquaculture farm
- Climate change mitigation and adaptation
- EMFAF
- Energy Transition partnership for EU fisheries and aquaculture, decarbonisation
- Research on aquaculture and innovation priorities
- Alien and invasive species prevention and management

Aquatic Animal Health and Welfare

- Availability of veterinary medicines, and biocides considering the new EU regulations on VMPs and medicated Feed
- Norovirus and emerging risks

- Medicated feed
- Fish parasites
- A better understanding of microbiota
- Development and use of vaccines and assessment of the licencing and approval processes of vaccines (EU/MS level); autologous vaccines.
- Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)
- Improving aquatic animal welfare and production through a better understanding of their behaviour and ethology:
 - o Rearing and environments
 - o Live aquatic animals transport
 - o Stunning and Slaughter
 - o Behavioural and Operational Welfare Indicators
 - o Collecting data on important welfare aspects of aquaculture
- Reproduction and genetics
- Follow up of EURCAW-Aqua activities

III. Green transition

- Environmental issues and sustainability concerns
 - o Bioeconomy Strategy
 - o Circular Economy Act
 - o Green Deal implementation
 - o Zero Pollution agenda and evaluation of the Environmental Liability Directive
 - o Nature Restoration law and EU Nature Directives
 - o Water Framework Directive, water protection regulations for molluscs breeding and Water Resilience Strategy
 - o Marine Strategy Framework Directive
 - o Sustainability of feeds and feed ingredients
 - o Responsible management of predators
 - o Biodiversity
 - o Valuation of the ecosystem services provided by aquaculture, nature credits
 - o Marine litter
 - o Impact on wild fish: - sea lice, genetic contamination (escapees), etc.
 - o Industrial contaminants

IV. Social acceptance/consumer information

V. Knowledge/innovation

Work priorities identified for each Working Group and Focus Group (where available)

Working Group 1 (finfish):

The Working Group priorities are reflected by the existing Focus groups:

- Medicated feed and Veterinary Medicine Products in aquaculture
- Fish welfare
- Fish health management
- Domestication of new aquaculture species
- Octopus farming
- Sturgeon
- Eels
- Circularity of feed

Working Group 2 (shellfish):

DG MARE has presented to us its “aquaculture priorities” for next year, which in turn will become AAC’s Shellfish group priority:

- Background paper on the challenges to the bivalve mollusc sector (2025)

The Working Group other priorities are reflected by the existing Focus groups:

- Shellfish health and emerging pathogens
- Molluscan welfare
- Good Environmental Practices in Low trophic Aquaculture Farming
- Mapping of low trophic aquaculture
- Biosecurity of shellfish hatcheries and nurseries
- Climate change and EU mussels’ production level
- New EC tools to support Good Husbandry Practices
- Blue crab

Working Group 3 (horizontal matters):

DG MARE has presented to us its “aquaculture priorities” for next year, which in turn will become AAC’s Horizontal Matters’ group priorities:

- Document on promoting environmental and climate services of aquaculture (2025-2026)
- Document on management of predators (2026)
- Background paper on reporting obligations (2025)
- Study on feed for aquaculture (2025-2026)
- Background paper on circular economy opportunities for the aquaculture sector (2025-2026)
- Background paper on good practices in attracting investment to the aquaculture sector (2026)
- Document on good practices in the integration of aquaculture in local communities (2026)

The Working Group’s other priorities are reflected by the existing Focus groups:

- Industrial Emissions Regulation
- Industrial contaminant levels in aquaculture products and climate change
- Organic regulation
- Algae
- Youth in aquaculture

- Transfer aquaculture knowledge to younger generations
- Consumer Information
- Fish Waste
- Financing the ecosystem services provided by aquaculture farming
- CFP Evaluation
- Aquaculture Policy Reform
- Research prioritization for EU aquaculture
- Use of satellite data
- An EU Food strategy
- Mid-term assessment of the Strategic Guidelines
- Guidance document on Environmental Performance

Implementation of the EMFAF and use of other EU funding schemes relevant to aquaculture.

On top of that, the Working Group will follow up the implementation of EC's Strategic Guidelines and the Staff Working Documents and background documents by the Member States and the aquaculture sector.

With the agreement of the new multi-annual financial framework and the development of a new EU Competitiveness Fund, a 10th Research Framework Programme, an EU Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy (as part of the EU Ocean Pact) and the continuing development of European Partnerships, including a new partnership for aquaculture, AAC will consider research and innovation priorities for the sector, including with regard to increasing industry involvement in the development and execution of projects and the communication, dissemination and exploitation of research outputs.

The developments concerning Brexit and the involvement of ACs in the Consultation Processes between the UK and the European Commission are also followed up for information.

Other issues of interest if any:

The AAC secretariat attends the meetings of the Market AC as an observer to update the members on its activities. The AAC follows the MAC's work on labelling and level-playing field matters with interest.

The AAC works hand in hand with the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism to disseminate its surveys and calls for information and provides feedback as often as necessary on its drafts and instruments.

The AAC has been granted the status of Permanent Observer of the Agri-Food Chain Observatory (AFCO).

Regarding the dissemination activities (strategic guidelines and expected DG MARE deliverables)

- The AAC will carry out up to three webinars on dissemination of information to the EU aquaculture sector and for example on:
 - promoting in the aquaculture sector the implementation of the upcoming Staff Working Documents on environmental performance.
 - supporting and disseminating the code of good practice on fish welfare among aquaculture producers.
- The AAC will also:
 - promote the adoption by EU aquaculture producers of climate-adaptation/mitigation measures
 - support dissemination by members of the coordinated EU-wide campaign on EU aquaculture.

- disseminate the good practices on integration of the aquaculture sector in local communities and promote among members the involvement by the aquaculture industry of local stakeholders in their activities, as well as the need to show the concrete benefits of those activities to local communities, including through greater transparency.

Planned recommendations for year 2025-2026:

No	Issue/subject	Link with the CFP	WG/FG at the origin of the recommendation	Planned date of adoption (if available)
1	Animal health law: Restriction on moving fish from confirmed outbreak of ISA/IHN/VHS	Strategic Guidelines	WG1	
2	Taxonomy Regulation: uptake of fish farming	Strategic Guidelines	WG1	
3	Increased funding to support research on species-specific welfare indicators and humane slaughter including the effectiveness of stunning methods in the field	Strategic Guidelines	WG1	
4	Indicators on environmental, economic and social, including animal welfare, performances of shellfish aquaculture	Strategic Guidelines	WG2	
5	Potentials and constraints in the implementation of restorative aquaculture	Strategic Guidelines	WG2	
6	Data collection related to aquaculture	Strategic Guidelines	WG3	
7	Annual survey to Member States	Strategic Guidelines	WG3	

Planned participation to Commission public/stakeholders' consultations

Topic/subject	Link with the CFP	Deadline for the EU Survey (if available)	Planned date for adoption (if available)
Vision 2040 on fisheries and aquaculture			