

# Aquaculture Advisory Council

## WG3 Horizontal Issues

25 February 2026 (11:15-18:10)

Online – Interpretation available in EN - FR - ES - IT

## Minutes

### PARTICIPATION LIST

#### WG3 MEMBERS

Charlotte Epinay (Eurogroup for Animals, Chair),  
Yannis Pelekanakis (HAPO, Vice-Chair),

Leo Kirchmaier (ALFAA),  
Mélanie Haslauer (ALFAA),  
Giulia Malerbi (ALI)  
Lorenzo Gennari (AMA),  
Garazi Rodríguez (APROMAR),  
Andrea Fabris (API),  
Phil Brooke (CIWF),  
Florian Guillou (CNPMEM),

Pier Salvador (COPA),  
Brian Thomsen (Danish Aquaculture Producer Organisation)  
David Bassett (EATiP),  
Violaine Deneef (EBCD),  
Barbara Barbosa (EFFAB),  
James Hinchcliffe (EFFOP),  
Thibault Pivetta (EMPA),  
Danilo Santini (FAI CISL),  
Javier Ojeda (FEAP),  
Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP),  
Catherine Pons (FEAP),

Lone Flyvholm (FEAP),  
Maria Luisa Alvarez Blanco (FEDEPESCA),  
Alain Schonbrodt (FVE),  
Teresa Morrissey (IFA),  
Loic Maine (Ouest Coquillages),  
Ola Öberg (RECIRKFIK),  
Catalin Platon (ROMFISH),  
Paul Denekamp (Stichting Vissenbescherming).

**Excused:** Anne-Laure Prego-Cauchet (CNC), Philippe le Gal (CRC Bretagne-Sud)

#### OTHER PARTICIPANTS

**Invited:** Lorella de la Cruz Iglesias (DG MARE), Julian García Baena (DG MARE), Charlotte Gugenheim (DG MARE), Elizabeth Pek (DG MARE), Ian Cowx (EIFAAC), Mirabela Lupaescu (DG ENV), Ewa Malz (DG ENV), Javier Villar Burke (DG ENV) and Céline Frank (DG MARE)

**Observers:** Linn Hosteland (Norwegian Coastal Shipowners Association), Trude Nordli (Norwegian Coastal Shipowners Association), Wasseem Emam (Ethical Seafood Research), Pierpaolo Piras (Committee of Regions), Pedro Reis Santos (MAC) and Stefan Reiser (Thünen Institute)

**Member States Experts:** Marta Martínez López (Spanish Ministry of agriculture, fisheries and food), Luz Arregui (General Secretariat of the Spanish Ministry of agriculture, Fisheries and Food) and Kristaps Pilskalns (Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Latvia)

**European Commission:** Emilia Gargallo (DG MARE), Evi Lardi (DG MARE), Louise Roche (DG MARE), Lia Dimova (DG MARE), Alessandra Portis (DG MARE), André Navarro (DG MARE) and Robert Gampfer (DG ENV).

**Secretariat:** Cynthia Benites (AAC Secretariat), Alicia Mouthuy (AAC Secretariat)

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## MEETING MINUTES

### Welcome words by the Chair Charlotte Epinay

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The Chair welcomed the participants.

#### 1. Approval of the agenda

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The agenda was approved without any change.

The minutes of the last meeting (14 & 15.10.2025) were approved by written procedure.

#### 2. DG MARE updates

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- Presentation by **Lorella de la Cruz** (DG MARE), “Aquaculture Team”
- Exchange of views with the members
- Strategic Guidelines actions, Guidance Documents and Mid-term assessment

The European Commission has recently published several deliverables under the Strategic Guidelines, including the Code of Good Practices on Fish Welfare and general fish welfare indicators, as well as new Good Husbandry Practices factsheets for turbot, sole and meagre. In this context, a study on animal welfare indicators (including rainbow trout, European sea bass, gilthead seabream and common carp) is ongoing, with the next consultation

activity consisting of interviews with Member States scheduled for the beginning of the year. The Commission is also preparing online trainings on several Staff Working Documents addressing key challenges for the sector, notably climate change adaptation, energy transition, and access to space and water for freshwater and land-based aquaculture. Additional work is ongoing on guidance documents covering ecosystem and climate services of aquaculture, predator management, attracting investment in aquaculture, and reporting obligations based on input from Member States.

- Ocean Pact and related files including the Ocean Act and EU Initiative on Sustainable Aquaculture

DG MARE reported progress on several initiatives under the European Ocean Pact. The call for evidence on the Ocean Act, linked to the revision of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, closed on 9 February and feedback is being assessed. Work is also ongoing on the review of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, on the Ocean Observation Initiative, and the Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy. Preparations are underway for a Communication on Coastal Communities and a future Communication on Islands. In addition, the Commission is preparing the EU Sustainable Aquaculture Partnership, working towards a Blue Bioeconomy Innovation Partnership for 2027, and exploring voluntary targets for algae production.

- Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2040

DG MARE indicated that the Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture in 2040 is under preparation, with a call for evidence open until 24 March and adoption planned around September 2026. The initiative will also include the roadmap on energy transition. An implementation dialogue on aquaculture with the Commissioner and the Director-General will take place on 30 June 2026.

- EMFF and EMFAF

DG MARE noted that evaluations of EU funding instruments are ongoing. The ex-post evaluation of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the mid-term evaluation of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) are currently underway, with Staff Working Documents expected later in 2026.

- Evaluation of the CFP

The Commission reported that work on the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation is progressing. The Staff Working Document presenting the results of the evaluation is expected to be adopted later in May 2026.

- Upcoming technical studies

Several technical studies relevant to aquaculture are ongoing or nearing publication, including on GHG reduction pathways to net zero by 2050, aquaculture feed, and ecosystem services of bivalve and pond aquaculture. The Commission also referred to an EMFAF-funded study on scaling up seaweed and shellfish farming, including synergies with offshore wind. Further research opportunities will be available under Horizon Europe Cluster 6.

### 3. Results of the EU Communication campaign

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- Presentation by **Charlotte Gugenheim, DG MARE**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

**Charlotte Gugenheim (DG MARE)** presented the results of the EU-wide awareness campaign on aquaculture, which aimed to increase public understanding and acceptance of the sector by highlighting producers and sustainable practices. Feedback from Member States was generally positive, although some suggested improvements such as more localized content and a broader range of visuals. The campaign materials remain available for continued use, and **the Commission is preparing a future EU communication campaign on**

aquatic food to be launched in 2027.

#### 4. Cormorant predation and aquaculture

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- Presentation<sup>1</sup> of EIFAAC's [management plan](#) for the great cormorant by **Ian Cowx (EIFAAC)**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

**Ian Cowx (EIFAAC)** presented EIFAAC's management plan for the great cormorant. Many members reacted to the presentation, highlighting the need for breeders to protect their fish, while other members pointed out that reducing easy feeding opportunities for cormorants would be key, arguing that limiting access to readily available food sources is the only effective long-term way to reduce the population. **Julian García Baena (DG MARE)** acknowledged that predator impacts, particularly from cormorants, remain a major challenge for aquaculture and confirmed ongoing cooperation with DG Environment. He noted differing perceptions between environmental and fisheries authorities and suggested involving aquaculture experts in future discussions. He also indicated that guidance on cormorant management may be reconsidered, as existing practices are already widely known and seen as ineffective.

**The file will continue to be monitored and discussed in next meetings.**

#### 5. Bioeconomy Strategy

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- Presentation<sup>2</sup> of the [Bioeconomy Strategy](#) by **Mirabela Lupaescu (DG Environment)**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

**Mirabela Lupaescu (DG ENV)** presented the bioeconomy strategy.

Many members reacted to the presentation, highlighting the need to focus on food, aquaculture and nature credits. **The file will continue to be monitored.**

#### 6. Environmental Omnibus Package

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- Presentation on the [Environmental Omnibus Package](#) by **Ewa Malz (DG Environment)**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

**Ewa Malz (DG ENV)** presented the Environmental Omnibus Package, which aims to reduce administrative burden and simplify environmental legislation while maintaining existing environmental protection objectives. For aquaculture and livestock operators in particular, proposed changes include exemptions from certain reporting obligations under the emissions portal and more flexibility in environmental management systems. Overall, the Commission estimates that the package could generate up to €1 billion in annual savings if adopted, and invited stakeholders to provide feedback and support during the legislative process.

Many members reacted to the presentation, highlighting the need to avoid creating too many legislations. **The file will continue to be followed.**

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<sup>1</sup><https://aac-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/4.-Framework-for-a-European-Management-Plan-for-the-Great-Cormorant.pdf>

<sup>2</sup><https://aac-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/5.-EU-Bioeconomy-strategy.pdf>

## 7. Commission's plans to revise the Water Framework Directive

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- Update by the **Secretariat**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

The **Secretariat** informed members about the structured dialogues on the Water Framework Directive launched under the European Water Resilience Strategy to address implementation challenges and share best practices. Members were also informed about the RESourceEU Action Plan, under which the Commission plans to issue guidance on the WFD in early 2026 and is considering a possible review later in 2026, focusing on simplification while maintaining environmental objectives. A call for evidence is expected to launch the process.

The **Secretariat** will launch a call for a rapporteur to draft the AAC contribution when the call for evidence will be open.

## 8. Public consultation on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive

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- Presentation<sup>3</sup> on the [revision of the MSFD](#) by **Javier Villar Burke (DG Environment)**
- Exchange of views with the members and decision on next steps

**Javier Villar Burke (DG ENV)** presented the revision of the MSFD. Several members reacted to the presentation, stressing the need for microbiological indicators for aquaculture and noting that the proposed targets are too distant to be realistically achieved.

The **Secretariat** invited potential rapporteurs to express their interest in leading the work on an AAC contribution.

## 9. Taxonomy Regulation: uptake of fish farming

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- **Presentation** of a draft recommendation by **Javier Ojeda (FEAP)**
- Exchange of views with the Working Group members and **adoption** of the draft recommendation

**Javier Ojeda (FEAP)** presented his draft recommendation on the taxonomy regulation. Several members reacted to his presentation, suggesting changing the title of the recommendation.

The recommendation will be circulated at the WG3 for comments and approval, with the modified title.

## 10. MFF – Exchange in view of an AAC contribution

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- Presentation<sup>4</sup> by the **Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP)**
- Exchange of views by the members and decision on next steps

**Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP)** presented the context of the MFF and the key aquaculture-specific concerns, as well as the scope of the AAC recommendation. Several members reacted to her presentation.

Based on the members' input, **Szilvia Mihalfy (FEAP)** will draft a recommendation which will be circulated

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<sup>3</sup><https://aac-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/8.-Revision-of-the-Marine-Strategy-Framework-Directive.pdf>

<sup>4</sup><https://aac-europe.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/10.-MFF-%E2%80%93-Exchange-in-view-of-an-AAC-20260224.pdf>

for comments and approval.

### **11. Ocean Act - Exchange in view of an AAC contribution**

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- Presentation **by the Chair**
- Introduction by **Céline FRANK (DG MARE)**
- Exchange of views by the members and decision on next steps

**Céline Frank (DG MARE)** presented the Ocean Act, a flagship initiative of the Ocean Pact aimed at strengthening ocean governance by building on and revising the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive. The Commission is currently conducting consultations with Member States, with a public consultation planned for spring.

The Secretariat will launch a call for a rapporteur to draft the AAC contribution when the public consultation will be open.

### **12. Adoption of the letter and annex - Follow up on the AAC Recommendation on Small Scale Aquaculture**

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- Presentation by **Ola Öberg (RECIRKFISK)**
- Exchange of views with the members and adoption of the document

**Ola Öberg (RECIRKFISK)** reminded the draft letter and its annex that were presented to the last WG3 meeting in October 2025 and that aim to open the discussion with DG MARE. Several members reacted to his presentation, including on the need to include ecosystem services and to work with authorities.

The letter and its annex will be discussed during a WG3 meeting to incorporate amendments.

### **13. AOB and conclusions of the WG3 meeting**

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The Chair concluded the meeting.

The next meeting of this Working Group will take place in Brussels on **9 June (all day)**, which will be followed by the **AAC-MAC 10-year anniversary on 10 June**.