



# Recommendations on EMFAF for 2021-2027

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## I. Introduction

The European Green Deal is a growth strategy aimed at transforming the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy.<sup>1</sup> The Farm-to-Fork strategy identified European farmers as the key to managing the transition and contributing to the circular economy. It laid down a new approach to ensure that aquaculture will contribute appropriately to the EU's climate target plan.<sup>2</sup>

The strategic guidelines for the development of sustainable aquaculture offer a common vision for EU Member States (MS) and stakeholders for the development of EU aquaculture in a way that contributes to the EU's growth strategy. The guidelines acknowledge that aquaculture creates jobs and economic development opportunities in the EU's coastal and rural communities, and that it can help to decarbonise the economy, fight climate change and mitigate its impacts, reduce pollution and contribute to the preservation of ecosystems.<sup>3</sup>

The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) provides support to EU MS to help them implement the strategic vision for the aquaculture sector, as reflected in the Multi-annual National Strategic Plans. The EMFAF aims to guarantee long-term food security, as well as growth and employment, for EU citizens and contribute to meeting the growing demand for aquatic food.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have threatened the viability of the EU's aquaculture sector and caused significant disruption to markets, production, investments and innovation. The aquaculture food system was already especially vulnerable due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the new energy crisis has resulted in additional higher operational costs (raw materials, oxygen, packaging material and transportation costs). EU aquaculture is a highly diverse sector, and each element is affected with different degrees of intensity.<sup>5</sup>

More than ever, timely support to mitigate the impact of new crises and the rapid implementation of the EMFAF is necessary to strengthen the sector's resilience and achieve the objectives of the strategic guidelines.

The effective use of structural funds can be negatively affected by bureaucratic and administrative burdens. The European Commission (EC) should encourage MS to exchange good practices for simplifying the administrative procedures, especially for those MS with many regional managing authorities.

This recommendation aims to build on the lessons learnt from the implementation of the EMFF 2014–2020 and proposes actions to improve the effectiveness of the EMFAF 2021–2027 regarding the continuity of actions, the flexibility to tackle crises, the exchange of best practices to facilitate the recommendations' implementation and actions to improve transparency.

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2019) 640 (Green Deal)

<sup>2</sup> COM(2020) 381 (F2F)

<sup>3</sup> COM(2021) 236 (Strategic guidelines)

<sup>4</sup> EC regulation 1380/2013 (CFP)

<sup>5</sup> AAC 2022: Recommendation on the COVID-19 Impacts on the EU aquaculture food system



### **III. Recommendations**

#### **III.1 Ensure the continuity of support and a timely transition.**

Aquaculture operators first suffer during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now the energy crisis has caused significant disruptions to markets, investments and innovation. The EC and the Member States must ensure the timely transition from the EMFF to the EMFAF to provide support to aquaculture operators without delay.

#### **III.2 Adapt funding to face crises.**

The EC must explore all possible financial support options, apart from state aid, to overcome the current crises. MS should mobilise funds from the EMFAF and redistribute unused funding initially reserved for certain EMFF measures to mitigate the impact of the new crises and support aquaculture operators in light of their lost incomes and increased operational costs.

Special focus should be given to the completion of ongoing production investments that have been disrupted or delayed due to increased costs.

#### **III.3 Create a platform to provide guidance and examples of MS measures.**

The AAC calls on the EC to create a platform under the frame of the new EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism. The EMFAF is based on a simple architecture without predefined measures. This platform will raise awareness of the different measures and simplifications that have been introduced.

Special guidance should be given to measures related to the sector's resilience (e.g., climate change mitigation, stock insurance, animal health and welfare). This will also help to avoid confusion concerning eligibility criteria and actions.

#### **III.4 Provide transparency on the funding related to aquaculture activities.**

Most of the operational programmes will be submitted by the end 2022. Once this procedure is complete and the National Operational Programmes are approved by the EC, the EC should provide an overview of the total amount of funds allocated to the sector.

**III.5 The Member States should include information about the administrative costs** spent when implementing the operational programme as a part of their annual implementation reports.



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