



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.A.2/BVT

Subject: AAC recommendation on the definition and realities of small-scale aquaculture

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I would like to thank you for your mail of 15th December 2022 including the “*Recommendation on the definition and realities of small-scale aquaculture*”. I am aware of the difficulties that small-scale aquaculture primary producers face, as well as of their added value to the society.

The “*Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030*”¹ (hereinafter, the Guidelines) specifically refer to small-scale producers when underlining the value of producer organisations (POs) for collective action. POs provide small-scale producers more bargaining power when dealing with processors and retailers. They also make it possible to share resources and benefit from joint services (e.g. advice, promotion campaigns) that would otherwise be too costly for them. The Guidelines also acknowledge that it might be particularly difficult for small-scale producers to set up a PO and have it recognised under Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fisheries and aquaculture products.

As you know, the Guidelines identify “Producer and market organisations” as a key area for further work. To facilitate the recognition of POs and other professional organisations, and to extend their rules to non-members, the Commission has already prepared a non-binding guidance document². The Commission will organise workshops for relevant public authorities and industry to facilitate the establishment and recognition of POs by presenting good practices and facilitating the exchange of good practices between actors. In addition, as indicated in the Guidelines, we count on the help of the Aquaculture Advisory Council to promote among aquaculture producers the benefits of setting up POs and provide support for this if necessary.

¹ COM(2021)236 final

² See https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/sites/fisheries/files/docs/body/guidance-document-onimplementation-of-professional-organisations_en.pdf.

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In terms of access to information, as you know the Commission has set up an EU aquaculture website³ that compiles relevant information related to sustainable aquaculture. The website is a user friendly one-stop-shop that aims to be accessible for all stakeholders including POs and individual aquaculture producers. In particular the knowledge base that includes good practices should be very useful for small-scale producers. We welcome any input from your side to further populate and improve the website.

The Aquaculture Advisory Council specifically recommends to the European Commission:

- 1) *To commission a study with the aim of assessing how a mix of different scales of aquaculture primary production contributes best to societal values.*

The Commission could consider such a study in the future. I invite you to contact my services to discuss more in detail what would be the specific purpose and expected outcome of such study.

- 2) *To support professional organisations to increase 'hands-on' competence exchange between EU small-scale aquaculture primary producers in different Member States.*

The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) may provide funding for such projects on the condition that they are included in the national programmes, and in accordance with the eligibility rules defined by the Member States concerned. The EMFAF regulation provides a framework for supporting similar kinds of operations that were possible under the previous fund EMFF (European Maritime and Fisheries Fund), but without directly specifying possible type of measures in the text of the Regulation. You can check the eligibility of the projects for EMFAF support with the national authorities in charge of managing the operational programmes in the different Member States⁴.

- 3) *To give more acknowledgement to the innovations and applied research going on at the farm level by farmers.*

The Commission fully acknowledges the importance of innovations and applied research going on at farm level by farmers and is willing to include these project results in its website.

- 4) *To value applied research at the same level as other published research to enhance career opportunities for researchers that produce real-life useable research findings for small-scale farms and to ensure better communication of research results.*

The Commission supports research and innovation mainly through the Horizon Europe programme that funds actions covering all the spectrum of technological readiness level. Horizon Europe supports close to the market innovation particularly through the European Innovation Council that supports start-ups, SMEs and research teams developing high-risk, high-impact breakthrough innovation, with a particular focus on scaling up game-changing solutions. Additionally, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology strengthens Europe's innovation ability by powering solutions to pressing global challenges and by nurturing entrepreneurial talent. For aquaculture, these challenges include, indicatively, climate change mitigation and

³ <https://aquaculture.ec.europa.eu>

⁴ see updated list of contact points: https://oceans-andfisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding/emfaf_en#emfaf-support

adaptation, welfare and biosafety issues and breeding issues. In the frame of these projects aquaculture companies often recruit academic researchers enhancing cross-fertilisation between academia and business.

- 5) *To enhance the dissemination of EU research in ways that can be absorbed by small-scale producers. To enable this, finance an open method of coordination process between farmers, their organisations and scientists (for example, the mirror platform of the European Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform (EATIP)).*

As you know, the Strategic Guidelines recommend EU Member States to set up a framework of cooperation bringing together public authorities, industry, and research and educational institutions, both at national and regional/local levels. The Commission considers it more efficient to have a coordination set up at this level rather than an EU-wide coordination mechanism. In any case, there are already existing tools at EU level to ensure coordination and dissemination of EU research and innovation to producers, including the EATIP but also the existing Open Method of Coordination and the work of the Commission with the AAC.

The EU aquaculture website mentioned above will provide also information on EU-funded research projects on aquaculture and their results, making this information easily accessible to all producers and producer organisations.

The Guidelines also call to support life-long training for farmers on innovative approaches for the aquaculture sector.

In this frame, the Commission recently published a [portfolio analysis](#) where tangible and traceable results developed in Horizon 2020 projects are listed and highlighted so that aquaculture practitioners can consider them in order to implement the guidelines as well as to contribute to the aim of the Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030 for zero carbon circular aquaculture.

- 6) *To support Producer Organisations in informing small-scale producers of the benefits of engaging more in, for example, events and dissemination activities.*

As mentioned above the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) may provide funding for such projects on the condition that they are included in the national programmes, and in accordance with the eligibility rules defined by the Member States concerned.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Pascale COLSON, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (Pascale.COLSON@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.295.62.73), who will forward them to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

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