



# Second Recommendation on the Future Strategic Guidelines for the Sustainable Development of EU Aquaculture

**January 2020**



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In 2009, the Commission published *A new impetus for the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture* as a follow up to the EU aquaculture strategy of 2002. The Commission concluded that EU aquaculture had not grown since 2002, and the 2009 communication aimed “to identify and address the causes of this stagnation”. The communication pointed to key challenges. In 2013, the Commission published their *Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture*. The Commission concluded again that EU aquaculture production was stagnating and addressed four priority areas to unlock the potential of EU aquaculture. The European Parliament, in 2018, published an own-initiative report *Towards a sustainable and competitive European aquaculture sector*. This report states that EU aquaculture is stagnating and that the strategic guidelines “were not a match for the sector’s expectations”. The report points to many challenges. In 2020, the Commission will draft new guidelines for the sustainable development of aquaculture in line with the Member states’ update of their national strategic plans.

The past efforts have de facto not had the desired impact. The Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) has found that the main reasons have been the failure by public authorities to address specific key challenges and insufficient implementation by those of the guidelines. The AAC proposes that the revised guidelines be more focused and agile with an 18-month, revolving-review period. The AAC stresses the importance of the guidelines aiming to increase sustainable growth and reflecting sectoral, societal and environmental needs.

This recommendation lists specific actions that have been agreed by consensus in the AAC. These actions have been grouped into chapters with a similar scope. In each chapter, the actions have been classified according to the entity responsible for addressing them: the European Commission, the Member states or the AAC itself. The AAC recommends that these actions be included by the European Commission in its next Strategic Guidelines document for the sustainable development of European aquaculture and that the Member states take the recommended actions on board.

This recommendation also includes comments on the European Commission’s latest revised outline of the Strategic Guidelines. The objective of these remarks on the structure of the future guidelines is to provide the European Commission with clear recommendations for their review of the Strategic Guidelines in order to promote a sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture, which creates growth and jobs.

## A. List of recommended actions

### 1. Securing sustainable growth in aquaculture through optimising the licensing procedures

#### Actions for the Member states

- Put in place coordinated spatial planning for waters and land and secure an adequate allocation of space for sustainable aquaculture growth.

- Base aquaculture planning on an ecosystem-based approach.
- Identify licensing best practices and margins for improvement.
- Put in place measures to reduce the time and documents needed for obtaining an aquaculture licence and other authorisations.
- Collect information about the number of institutions involved, the length of the process and the costs for new and existing farms.
- Perform a screening of the main administrative burdens (time/costs) involved in the different types of aquaculture.
- Collect information on the number of new licences granted in 2014–2018, the success rate of the applications for licences and the main reasons for refusal.
- Involve (regional and other) authorities with competencies in areas not directly related to aquaculture – but in related fields, such as the environment, management of river basins – in the implementation of these guidelines.

## **Actions for the European Commission**

- Organise annual best-practice seminars.
- Prepare a guidance document addressing ‘environmental space’ for aquaculture in relation to the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
- Identify licensing best practices and margins for improvement.
- Prepare a guidance document aimed at speeding up the screening exercise under the Habitat Directive for SMEs.
- Collect information about the number of institutions involved, the length of the process and the costs for new and existing farms.
- Perform a screening of the main administrative burdens (time/costs) involved in the different types of aquaculture in the Member states.
- Reach out to second-level, competent authorities to make them aware of the Commission’s guidance efforts to promote sustainable aquaculture.
- Disseminate studies and experiences to help Member states in their planning.

## **Action for the AAC**

- Perform a screening of the Codes of Best Aquaculture Practices and develop recommendations.

## **2. Enhancing the competitiveness of EU aquaculture**

### **Actions for the Member states**

- Encourage improvements to welfare practices in all forms of aquaculture. Growth should concentrate on those forms of aquaculture that are sustainable and provide ecosystem services and higher animal welfare potential.
- Ensure that the funds of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) are appropriately allocated to support sustainable aquaculture, including the development of sustainable aquaculture products.

- Provide the highest level of EMFF aid to Producer and Interbranch organisations and other EU-recognised schemes.
- Introduce national strategic plans to promote aquaculture's effective actions to reduce the administrative burdens related to aquaculture.
- The issue of a single act by one institution to authorise aquaculture activity is valid as long as the lease/ownership act is valid and the specific legislation is abided by.
- Encourage Producer and Interbranch organisations and other officially recognised schemes to increase consumer information about the values of the EU's sustainable aquaculture products.

## **Actions for the European Commission**

### **General governance**

- Ensure the National Strategic Plans for Aquaculture address the reduction of administrative burden.
- Provide the highest level of EMFF aid to Producer and Interbranch organisations and other EU-recognised schemes.
- Ensure that the next EMFF is introduced in a timely fashion.
- Draft guidelines on how to define 'sustainable aquaculture'.
- Promote the transfer of EU research project findings.
- Reduce bureaucracy at the Member state level by identifying best practices for the administration of the EMFF.
- Coordinate and support research and technological development and innovation for aquaculture through all the relevant EU programmes and funds, including assessments on the climate impact of EU aquaculture.
- Organise annual best-practice seminars on the EMFF.

### **Animal welfare**

- Ensure that fish welfare is included in the work programme of an EU reference centre for animal welfare to co-ordinate and disseminate research, develop species-specific guidelines and produce training packages.
- Develop a strategy to improve fish welfare, in line with the intentions of EU legislation on farm animals and to encourage and support aquaculture operators to exceed the legislative requirements whenever possible. This includes developing effective parameters for the humane slaughter of farmed species; ensuring that the equipment is effective and stunning is delivered; developing suitable input/output indicators for the range of farmed species; developing best-practice guidelines on fish welfare; and ensuring coherence between existing regulations.
- Ensure that fish welfare standards are a part of the communication on the high quality of EU production.
- Encourage improvements to welfare practices should be encouraged in all forms of aquaculture. Growth should concentrate on those forms of aquaculture that are sustainable and provide ecosystem services and higher welfare potential.

### 3. Establishing a level playing field

#### Actions for the Member states

- Implement and control labelling (consumer information) requirements and provisions.
- Support the development of Producer and Interbranch organisations, including at the transnational level.

#### Actions for the European Commission

- Ensure that EU farming regulations are included in EU audits of third-country imports and in third-party auditing schemes for imports.
- Launch a communication campaign on the strengths of EU aquaculture.
- Highlight the differences between the aquaculture products that are farmed in the EU and those that are imported (on traceability, sustainability, fish welfare, workers' welfare and the societal benefits of the EU's self-reliance on food) in any decision.
- Come to a lasting solution with the Turkish government to ensure a level playing field on the import of Turkish-farmed fish.
- Improve the transparency of markets and disseminate markets' information on trends.
- Ensure that labelling rules (consumer information) are fully implemented.

#### Actions for the AAC

- Facilitate self-regulatory initiatives and help communicate them to the consumer.
- Support the structuring of aquaculture production and marketing, including certification and labelling.
- Contribute to improved market intelligence on the sector.

### 4. Improving the social acceptability of aquaculture and its products

#### Actions for the Member states

- Promote awareness of EU aquaculture among the public.
- Use the public procurement of seafood to drive improvements in fish welfare and sustainability.
- Promote gender equality in aquaculture.

## Actions for the European Commission

- Promote awareness of EU aquaculture among the public.
- Recognise and valorise certain types of pond fish and shellfish farming.
- Promote gender equality in aquaculture.

## 5. Improving the integration of aquaculture into the environment

### Actions for the Member states

- Set up aqua-environment schemes to support the delivery of the nature and ecosystem services of aquaculture practices, such as pond fish, shellfish and algae farming.
- Promote short consumption chains of locally produced fish by integrating aquaculture into the local economy.
- Encourage an increase in the sustainability of fish feed by improving the sourcing of all feed ingredients. Replace ingredients when viable ingredients are known (e.g. promote the use of by-products and trimmings, algae, insects, vegetable proteins and oils).

### Actions for the European Commission

- Recognise and valorise certain types of pond fish, shellfish and algae farming.
- Encourage an increase in the sustainability of fish feed by improving the sourcing of all feed ingredients. Replace ingredients when viable ingredients are known (e.g. promote the use of by-products and trimmings, algae, insects, vegetable proteins and oils).
- Investigate opportunities to support the EU's aquaculture organisations in updating the *Product Environmental Footprint and Organisation Environmental Footprint* guides for aquaculture.
- Promote a reduction in the environmental footprint of aquaculture.

### Action for the AAC

- Contribute, through support analysis, to the ecosystem services of aquaculture.

## 6. The specificities of shellfish farming

### Actions for the Member states

- Fulfil the obligations defined by article 6 annex iV.1 ii of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), and define the programmes and measures of protection, as defined by article 8.



## Actions for the European Commission

- Take legal action to force Member states to take action on water quality.
- Monitor the implementation by the Member states of articles 6 and 8 of the WFD and its annex IV.1ii (the establishment of a register of protected areas (article 6, theoretical deadline 2004) with programmes for the monitoring of water status (article 8, theoretical deadline 2006) as well as the establishment of river-basin management plans (theoretical deadline 2009, review 2015)).
- Ensure more coherence in the Member states' implementation of the various EU regulations relevant to shellfish farming.
- Set a requirement for Member states to bring existing and potential aquaculture sites up to A-class water standards.
- Specify the current method (or if specification is not possible, develop a new method) of detection for infectious forms of the Norovirus, so the method of detection can recognise different Norovirus genotypes.
- Encourage Member states to focus on the fight against pathogens in shellfish.
- Support research on the detoxification of molluscs.

## B. AAC comments on the latest outline document

### 1. In the Background to be considered

1. First AAC Recommendation on the Future Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture. Approved on 30 October 2019<sup>1</sup>.
2. First EC Outline shared with the AAC on 1 October 2019.
3. Joint EC-AAC-Member states experts meeting on the Future Strategic Guidelines, Brussels, 17 October 2019.
4. Revised EC Outline shared with the AAC on 13 November 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> AAC Recommendation. Future Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, October 2019.  
[https://aac-europe.org/images/AAC\\_recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_future\\_Strategic\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_sustainable\\_development\\_of\\_EU\\_aquaculture\\_.pdf](https://aac-europe.org/images/AAC_recommendation_on_the_future_Strategic_Guidelines_for_the_sustainable_development_of_EU_aquaculture_.pdf)

## 2. Comments

### In 1. Introduction

No comments.

### In 2. Updated Strategic Guidelines (SG) – General

Regarding the identification of areas to be addressed, the AAC suggests referring to 1. Recommendation and supports the suggestions in the draft concerning administrative procedures, spatial planning, consumer information, producer and market organisations, human and animal health/welfare, environmental performance, climate change, innovation and control.

### In 3. Sector-specific SG

The AAC is concerned that the overall inclusion of the sector-specific SG at this stage may lead to blurred guidelines. The AAC agrees that a specific section may be needed for shellfish.

The AAC proposes that it be given the task of drafting the sector-specific SG to be reviewed and included in the next review of the SG.

### In 4. Complementarity with the European Maritime Fisheries Fund and other funds

No comments.

### In 5. Regional cooperation – the role of sea-basin strategies and regional policy

No comments.

### In 6. International cooperation and contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The AAC supports the proposals in the draft but is concerned about the allocation of resources needed to draft the section and the recommendations. The AAC proposes that the recommendations await the next review of the SG.





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