



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Cabinet of Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius
Head of Cabinet

Brussels,

Aquaculture Advisory Council
Mr. Javier OJEDA
Chair
secretariat@aac-europe.org

Dear Chair, dear Members,

I would like to thank you for your e-mail dated September 22nd, as well as for the opportunity to take part in your General Assembly earlier that month. I have conveyed your questions to Commissioner Sinkevičius. Please find attached his answers on the matters raised in your message.

Commissioner Sinkevičius and I would hereby like to thank you for reaching out to us through your questions. We value the work of the Aquaculture Advisory Council and its various members. We would like to recall how important a representative opinion on the sector is for the Commission's work on supporting sustainable aquaculture.

Rest also assured that we recognise the important contribution of the aquaculture sector to the European Green Deal objectives.

Yours sincerely,

Marius Vaščega

Answers to questions from the Aquaculture Advisory Council

September 2020

1. WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ON THE FISH AND OTHER MARINE ANIMALS KEPT IN FARMS? HOW CAN THEIR WELFARE BE IMPROVED?

First, I would like to reiterate that animal welfare and the conditions of farming of animals (including farming of aquatic animals) are one important component of our European vision of sustainability. The **Farm to Fork Strategy**¹ confirms this by referring to the importance of animal welfare in sustainable food systems. We are convinced that ensuring fish welfare is also in the interest of aquaculture producers, since fish kept under good welfare conditions are less stressed. Thus, they are less exposed to diseases, which is obviously beneficial, in terms of both better quality and better growth rates.

As you know, EU rules on animal welfare also apply to farmed fish. The Commission however remains convinced that further action is necessary. The Farm to Fork Strategy has announced the review of the animal welfare legislation, including on animal transport and the slaughter of animals, to align it with the latest scientific evidence, broaden its scope, make it easier to enforce and ultimately ensure a higher level of animal welfare.

The Commission will also consider options for animal welfare labelling to better transmit value through the food chain. The **revised Strategic Guidelines** for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture will look into ways to ensure further the welfare of farmed fish, such as developing good practices on fish welfare during farming, transport and killing, as well as the definition of fish welfare indicators throughout the production chain and further research and innovation.

2. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT AQUACULTURE IS NOT GROWING IN THE EU?

Let me recall that, according to official figures, the performance of aquaculture production before the Covid-19 outbreak was improving. The 2018 Economic Report of the EU Aquaculture sector pointed to a continuous improvement in performance of the EU aquaculture sector. In 2016, EU-28 aquaculture production reached 1.4 million tonnes (6% increase compared to 2014) and a value of almost 5 billion EUR (8% increase compared to 2014). Profits doubled between 2014 and 2016. A new STECF report on aquaculture should be available next year with more up to date figures.

However, the Commission agrees that the full potential of the sector to meet the increasing demand for high-quality food, while preserving the environment, still needs to be reached. This is why the Commission has been working intensively with Member States and the Aquaculture Advisory Council to review the current Strategic Guidelines. The purpose of this review is to consolidate the lessons learnt and address the new challenges in order to make further progress in supporting the growth of EU aquaculture as a sector that is both competitive and sustainable. Furthermore, the Commission has invited EU Member States to review their multi-annual national strategic plans for aquaculture to take into account the work on the revised Strategic Guidelines. The Commission will continue to work with Member State administrations and stakeholders

¹ Farm to Fork Strategy - https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination, including with respect to the future implementation of the revised Guidelines.

3. WHY DO YOU THINK THAT SHELLFISH FARMING IS DECREASING IN FRANCE?

We are aware of the important challenges that shellfish farming is facing all across the EU. I had the opportunity, during my visit in September 2020, to directly exchange views with shellfish farmers from Brittany and Normandy. Water quality challenges, eutrophication and diseases such as Norovirus are some of the obstacles to the growth of French shellfish farming.

We are also aware of the need to clarify the multiple requirements in terms of water quality for mollusc farming in EU legislation. The Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of European Aquaculture should address this.

The Commission acknowledges the threat that norovirus in shellfish represents to the mollusc farming sector. Discussions between Member States and work following the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) opinion are ongoing and the Commission will continue to keep the European stakeholders informed.

4. REGARDING THE GREEN DEAL, THERE IS A LACK OF MILESTONES AND OF DECISIONS TO BE TAKEN IF SUCH MILESTONES ARE NOT REACHED. WITHOUT THOSE, WE ONLY HAVE A COLLECTION OF GOOD INTENTIONS! ARE YOU AWARE OF THIS LACK TO MAKE GREEN DEAL TRULY SUCCESSFUL?

The **European Green Deal**² (EGD) calls for a transformation of all economic sectors – and the aquaculture sector can be no exception. I would hereby like to recall that milestones and targets do exist. Milestones and key actions are available in the [Annex to the Communication on the European Green Deal](#), including an indicative timeline.

The main EGD targets related to aquaculture are indicated in the **Farm to Fork Strategy**³. Some of the targets announced in the strategy will be reinforced by legally binding targets set in legislation. Moreover, the Communication on the Farm to Fork Strategy clearly mentions that the Commission “*will review this strategy by mid-2030 to assess whether the action taken is sufficient to achieve the objectives or whether additional action is necessary*”.

The Farm to Form Strategy acknowledges the importance of *organic farming* as an environmentally friendly production method. A method, which also responds to a growing demand for quality food, produced with high environmental, biodiversity and animal welfare standards. It is for this reasons that it establishes a target of a significant increase in organic aquaculture production.

Furthermore, it also encompasses a target of *50% reduction of overall EU sales of antimicrobials for farmed animals, including aquaculture, by 2030*. The Farm to Fork Strategy brings this requirement as a guiding target. Although, not binding, this target is supported by a number of additional orientations. The **revised Strategic Guidelines for**

² European Green Deal - https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

³ Farm to Fork Strategy - https://ec.europa.eu/food/farm2fork_en

the sustainable development of EU aquaculture should support this target as well and promote alternatives to antibiotic use.

Water quality is essential for aquaculture production. This is why the Farm to Fork Strategy further pushes for a *reduction, by 2030, of the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% and of the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50%*. In addition, the Commission will act to *reduce nutrient losses by at least 50%*, while ensuring that there is no deterioration in soil fertility. When used in excess, nutrients originating, amongst others, from fertilisers, are lost in the environment. This is why a reduction in the use of fertilisers would help reduce the negative impacts caused to various Blue Economy sectors, including aquaculture.

The *animal welfare legislation* is another concrete example related to aquaculture. The Commission will evaluate and revise by the end of 2023 the existing animal welfare legislation to update it, based on the latest scientific evidence. The Commission will regularly assess progress in the implementation of the Farm to Fork Strategy and will adjust actions if necessary.

The **Biodiversity Strategy** also pushes for *extension of the EU's network of protected areas*, including marine protected areas (from 11% to 30%). At the same time, it calls to achieve good environmental status of marine ecosystems in order to protect food security, producers', fisherwomen and fishermen's livelihoods and seafood sectors. This is a clear target, which should benefit aquaculture and other maritime sectors. To this end the national maritime spatial plans, which Member States have to deliver in 2021, should aim at covering all maritime sectors and activities.

Therefore, and as you can see from the above, the various initiatives under the **European Green Deal** have an important set of targets and milestones.