



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/A2/MS(2022)

Subject: Recommendation on Aquatic Debris from European Aquaculture

Dear Mr Thomsen,

Many thanks for sharing with DG MARE the AAC Recommendation on Aquatic Debris from European Aquaculture, which includes very detailed proposals. We agree on the importance of addressing this issue.

As you know, the need to reduce marine litter from EU aquaculture is already part of the efforts in improving the environmental performance of the EU aquaculture sector, e.g. by ensuring that the environmental legislation is applied and its objectives are met, by further mitigating the impact of aquaculture, and more specifically – by limiting the contribution of aquaculture activities to marine litter.

Several of your proposals are furthermore already part of the Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 ⁽¹⁾, to which the Aquaculture Advisory Council has contributed. These guidelines provide that the European Commission and the Member States work on limiting the contribution of aquaculture to marine litter by:

- (i) ensuring environmental monitoring of aquaculture sites that includes discharges of any form of waste and litter.
- (ii) implementing the requirements of the Single Use Plastics Directive;
- (iii) supporting the replacement of plastic -based aquaculture gear with sustainable solutions and the adaptation of sites to minimise loss of material to the environment;
- (iv) ensuring the separate collection of waste; and
- (v) promoting innovation in the packaging of aquaculture and processed aquaculture products.

The above guidelines also recommend the AAC to play its role by promoting prevention, monitoring and reporting of marine litter by the aquaculture industry; as well as by disseminating relevant research for the improvement of environmental performance. Indeed, the AAC is in a unique position to work with EU aquaculture producer

⁽¹⁾ [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0236 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

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organisations to identify common issues and management needs, and to propose concrete actions.

While some of your proposed recommendations are already gradually implemented in practice (e.g. integration of aquaculture into the Maritime Spatial Plans), others imply significant cross-sectoral multi-stakeholder efforts (e.g. to develop aquaculture component traceability systems and to link those with licensing and other permitting / operator identification data). As a follow up to this letter, it would be beneficial to organise an exchange of views to better outline the responsibilities regarding the prevention and reduction of marine litter from aquaculture among the Commission, the Member States and the AAC.

As regards research and studies of marine litter, the European Commission has recently analysed the marine litter problem from fisheries and aquaculture and have proposed a way forward. We acknowledge your reference to the EMFF-funded project to prevent aquatic debris from aquaculture - [Aqua-Lit](#) - that has an excellent outcome and has already proposed measures and solutions, developed action plans, a toolbox, and policy recommendations and funding sources. In addition, the EMFF funded project [BIOGEARS](#) is looking into innovative solutions to reduce marine litter by developing biobased and biodegradable gears for aquaculture sector.

Regarding your proposal to research the impact of microplastic on marine biota, a lot has been done already ⁽²⁾, but further studies could indeed be initiated. Finally, regarding your proposal to develop aquaculture equipment that is easy to decommission and recycle at end of use, the European Commission has requested the European Standardization Organization (CEN) to develop a harmonised standard for a circular design of fisheries and aquaculture gear. The relevant Technical Committee ⁽³⁾ has been established and is currently developing a voluntary European standard. Any future research on your proposed topics has to build on best available knowledge, data and science and we would appreciate your further collaboration on this.

With this letter, I thank you again for your Recommendation and 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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⁽²⁾ See, for example, [MARMICROTOX - microplastics toxicity in marine environment](#) ; [GoJelly GoJelly - A gelatinous solution to plastic pollution](#); and [Organic matter interactions with microplastic in ocean surface](#).

⁽³⁾ [CEN/TC 466 Circularity and recyclability of fishing gear and aquaculture equipment](#).