EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/A2/EL (2023)

Subject: Decarbonisation of energy in aquaculture vessels

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I refer to your letter of February 2023 in which you recommend for the European Commission and the Member States to take various actions in the short and medium term for the decarbonisation of energy in aquaculture vessels:

DG MARE will, indeed, address the decarbonisation of aquaculture with the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism and a related document with information and good practices will be prepared in 2024. Practices in third countries and notably Norway as you suggest that participates in various EU programmes, such as Horizon Europe, will be considered. Additionally, the Commission has adopted the Energy Transition Initiative (ETI) to facilitate a transition towards carbon neutrality in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The ETI addresses decarbonisation also beyond the use of vessels. It aims at both the use of renewable energy and the improvement of energy efficiency for the whole aquaculture sector.

On promoting the energy transition through Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) or Producer Organisations (POs), under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), the Fisheries Local Action Groups (FLAGs) supported a number of innovative aquaculture projects through community-led local development. For example, the Djursland FLAG in Denmark has supported a local company which is piloting the integration of a vertical seaweed cultivation system into the recirculated aquaculture system (RAS) industry to reduce the environmental impact of land-based fish production. Additionally, Producer Organisations (POs) may also include measures aiming at accelerating the energy transition of their operations in their Production and Marketing Plans (PMPs). This is consistent with the objectives set by the CMO Regulation to aquaculture POs. It is however the responsibility of the MS to decide on the content of these PMPs and on the level of financial support for their preparation and implementation.

On your suggestion that EU Financial support is provided for the energy transition of aquaculture vessels, we inform you that for research such support is provided by the Horizon Europe programme and the Mission Ocean strand. Specifically, waterborne transport research and innovation is addressed under Horizon Europe cluster 5 (climate, energy and mobility)

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and through the waterborne transport partnership. The technology developed can then be transferred to vessels carrying out specific activities at sea including aquaculture. However, research alone is not sufficient. Its transfer to innovation has to be facilitated and subsequently its translation into investment, by looking at the whole life cycle of technology and removing the bottlenecks that hamper market uptake. The Smart Specialisation Blue Economy thematic platform was launched to sustain the innovation ecosystem and projects, including cross-European value chains in blue economy through the support also from the European Regional Development Fund.

Moreover, the EMFAF can be used to reduce the carbon footprint of the sector as it includes support for actions aimed at shifting to energy-efficient aquaculture production (including the use of renewable energy).

The Commission agrees that the data collection on aquaculture with regards to the energy transition needs to be improved to strengthen the monitoring of the progress made on the energy transition. Indeed, the effective monitoring of progress is essential for achieving the 2030 and 2050 objectives for the energy transition.

One of the actions in the Communication on the Energy transition in the EU Fisheries and Aquaculture sector, particularly, mentions that the Commission intends to assess the need for additional regular data collection in order to monitor the energy consumption and emissions of the sector. For this, the Commission will first explore what data is currently available and through which existing data streams the data collection can be improved, for example through the EU Data Collection Framework and EUROSTAT. This however not only relates to the energy transition for aquaculture vessels, but to all segments of the EU aquaculture sector including the different types of energy, such as fuels and electricity.

The Study, which the Commission is launching on costs and benefits of different technologies, will also shed light on CO2 emissions in aquaculture. I seize the opportunity to encourage you to contribute to the findings of the study. The Commission will also further address the topic of data collection and monitoring with the stakeholders under the Energy Transition Partnership.

On your recommendation to take into consideration that the EU aquaculture industry is mainly comprised of micro and small undertakings, we inform you that any policy making for the decarbonisation of the sector will be aimed at being coherent with this reality. Moreover, any legal framework that might be proposed will follow the necessary open and transparent procedures that would provide the requested predictability to operators and investors.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact the functional mailbox of the Advisory Councils MARE-AC@ec.europa.eu.

Yours sincerely,

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