



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/A2/EL (2023)

Subject: Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation in Aquaculture

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I refer to your letter of May 2023 in which you recommend to the European Commission and the Member States to take various actions for climate change adaptation and mitigation in aquaculture.

Your recommendations were submitted following our request for information in the process of preparing the Guidance document on adaptation of aquaculture to climate change, included among the actions for the implementation of the Commission Strategic Guidelines for EU aquaculture (hereinafter, the Strategic Guidelines). I would like to thank you for this input and convey that they will be taken into consideration by DG MARE and the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism (AAM) in the ongoing work to produce the document.

I would like to take the opportunity to reply to your letter and already provide information on some of your recommendations.

The Guidance document on climate adaptation under preparation will contain information so as to assist the Member States and the industry in drawing up plans and taking measures for both the adaptation of aquaculture to climate change in the short term, including to seasonal - extreme weather events, as well as to mid- and long-term effects due to climate change.

Regarding climate change and **Maritime Spatial Planning** (MSP), the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive includes resilience to climate change impacts as one of the objectives together with the development of a sustainable blue economy. In its report on the implementation of the MSP directive, the Commission calls for further aligning maritime spatial plans with national energy and climate plans and the objectives of the European Green Deal.

Demand for the use of marine areas for the production of marine renewable energy is expected to increase in order to cope with climate change mitigation targets. The Commission is supporting a number of MSP projects in this area.

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Several Member States, such as Belgium and the Netherlands, have identified areas in their maritime plans for multi-use activities and have developed some multi-use projects involving aquaculture production in offshore wind farms. This type of action is expected to increase in particular in the North Sea and in other sea-basins.

Moreover, several national and EU projects are supporting multi-use with pilot tests and business opportunities for aquaculture, including algae.

Regarding the **River Basin Management Plans (RBMP)**, climate change is not explicitly included in the text of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). However, the stepwise and cyclical approach (6 years cycle) in the management process makes the RBMPs well suited to handle climate change. Climate change can be included in different steps of the planning and implementation process: from characterization and identification of pressures to design of measures to achieve the objectives of the WFD.

I would also like to bring to your attention the WFD Common Implementation Strategy guidance “River basin management in a changing climate”, which is now under revision. This guidance does not address specific adaptation or mitigation measures, but rather addresses the issue at a general level.

With respect to **research**, Horizon Europe, including through the EU Mission Restore our Ocean and Waters, and relevant partnerships, is supporting a number of projects focused exclusively on aquaculture such as (i) combining aquaculture, biodiversity preservation, biotechnology and other uses, (ii) animal health and animal welfare in aquaculture, (iii) boosting organic aquaculture, (iv) low impact marine aquaculture and multi-purpose use of marine space and (v) minimising climate impacts on aquaculture.

In the coming years, Horizon Europe will continue supporting research and innovation in ensuring the resilience, circularity and resource efficiency of aquaculture systems and the resilience of aquaculture vis-à-vis climate change related challenges, notably to ensure food and water security. Knowledge and tools will be made available to the aquaculture sector to foster its sustainability performance as well as contribution to biodiversity protection.

On promoting the development of **aquaculture clusters**, Producer Organisations (POs) are an appropriate format of collective bodies to face the market consequences of climate change. By mutualising resources through the set-up of a PO, it should be possible inter alia to carry-out market analysis, to assess or identify new market outlets, to facilitate the route to markets, including through collective management of negotiations with actors down the value chain. The European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) can support the set-up and functioning of POs.

The EMFAF can also support local initiatives, through ‘community-led local development’. Under this tool, stakeholders from local communities set up a ‘local action group’ to develop and implement a local strategy. It fosters small-scale collective initiatives and promotes innovations that help develop the local blue economy and protect the marine environment.

Moreover, the interregional dimension of Smart Specialisation allows Member States, regions, and their stakeholders to partner up beyond their borders and promote the development of new interregional value chains. Since aquaculture has been addressed as a sector with a significant innovation potential, aquaculture clusters can facilitate this transition by accelerating innovation, engaging different stakeholders from the private sector, public

authorities, research and academia, and can support the emergence of innovative partnerships and smart value chains.

The opportunity to support specialised clusters also exists under the COSME program, especially for SME enterprises which are the majority of the EU aquaculture sector.

On your suggestion to conduct **Life Cycle Analyses**, including Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) assessments, across all EU aquaculture operations, I would like to inform you that Product Environmental Footprint Category Rules (PEFCR) are already under development for marine fish, including unprocessed farmed marine fish. A public consultation on the PEFCR is expected later in 2023. Similarly, PEFCRs for non-marine farmed fish could be launched by the industry, if there is sufficient interest. More information on PEF / PEFCR is available at https://green-business.ec.europa.eu/environmental-footprint-methods_en.

Regarding your suggestion for the development of **metrics to evaluate and award climate change mitigation progress** in the EU aquaculture sector with the support from the EMFAF, I would like to inform you that such support already exists. There is a framework in place across the European Structural and Investment Funds for tracking climate expenditure. Support under the EMFAF shall contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. That contribution is tracked in accordance with the methodology set out in Annex IV of the EMFAF Regulation, providing the different types of intervention with a climate coefficient.

You also recommend that the Member States include climate change and carbon footprint reduction strategies and measures in their **Multi Annual National Plans for aquaculture**. As you know, the Commission invited Member States to use the Strategic Guidelines as the basis for the revision of their multi annual national plans. These guidelines include recommendations on climate change and the decarbonisation of the sector.

The **Guidance document on adaptation to climate change** under preparation is aimed to assist the Member States and the industry in preparing climate adaptation plans. In addition, the future guidance document on environmental performance, which is also among the actions in the annex of the Strategic Guidelines, will include, in a second package to be prepared in 2024, good practices on the decarbonisation of the sector. This document will take into consideration the results of action in the context of the Energy Transition Initiative launched in February 2023. Depending on the results of these and other related initiatives, the recommendation on including such strategies and actions as you suggest can be reiterated to the Member States.

Furthermore, on your recommendation for the establishment of **monitoring indicators for the evaluation of EMFAF-funded climate change-related actions**, I would like to refer to Annex I of the EMFAF Regulation, which provides the list of common indicators of the EMFAF. These indicators relate to core performance, result and output. In addition, Member States are requested to report operations also into the INFOSYS database – which comprises a climate-relevant check box.

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

Yours sincerely,

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