



Stéphane Angeri
Working Group 2 on Shellfish
Aquaculture Advisory Council
Rue Montoyer, 31 - 1000 Brussels

Delilah Al Khudhairi
European Commission
DG MARE
Rue Joseph II, 99 - 1000 Brussels

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Subject: Emergency situation concerning Blue Crab and Aquaculture

Dear Mrs. Al Khudhairi,

The Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC)'s Working Group on Shellfish would like to raise your attention about an alarming situation affecting shellfish aquaculture in Italy at the moment.

Since last June, large shellfish farming areas, mainly of manila clams (*Venerupis philippinarum*) and, to a lesser extent, mussels (*Mytilus galloprovincialis*), located mainly in lagoons in the Po river delta, in Veneto and Emilia-Romagna, have been subject to predation by the species *Callinectes sapidus*, known as the 'blue crab'. At present, despite ongoing research activities, the causes of this sudden abnormal proliferation of the blue crab population have not been ascertained. It has been reported in Italian seas since 1949, but until now it has been present in very limited quantities that have never hinted at the possibility of such an abundant growth.

The economic and social damage caused by the blue crab now is extensive and is causing a drop in manila clam production of around 40 % in 2023, while it is estimated that predation on juveniles will bring the 2024 production down to less than 7,000-8,000 t, a drop of over 60 % compared to the 2021 harvest. To this must be added the huge losses to juvenile mussels bred in the lagoon areas of Veneto, which will compromise the next year harvest. Added to this is the entire workforce working in the ancillary sector, made up of



T +32 (0) 2 720 00 73
E secretariat@aac-europe.org
www.aac-europe.org

31, rue Montoyer
BE 1000 Bruxelles

cooperatives managing the breeding areas, product purification and packaging plants, transporters, and material suppliers. Worsening the situation is the fact that these areas affected by blue crab predation present few alternatives for the reconversion of breeders to other types of work activities, as they are areas where the prevailing economic activities are agriculture, aquaculture and fishing.

This situation is putting an entire shellfish production sector, made up of more than 3,500 farmers who have been dedicated to this type of farming for about 40 years, in crisis. It is also affecting other sectors such as fisheries or agriculture, and impacting endangered species such as eels. Furthermore, the problem could quickly spread to other parts of Europe.

The AAC's Working Group on Shellfish asks the Commission to:

- Express explicitly via a Communication to the affected Member States that the EMFAF funds can be used to take measures to assist farmers and to protect farmed animals against the blue crab spread and its consequences;
- Urgently request and fund a study this species' behaviour and its consequences on the economic activities;
- Call for the organization of an EU-wide conference on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

