



AAC Framework Recommendation for an Aquaculture Policy Reform

AAC 2024-01

February 2024



The Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) gratefully acknowledges EU funding support





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I. Background

More than **two decades** have passed since the European Commission published a Strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture. The last Strategy addressed a slowdown of growth and aimed at increasing aquaculture production, solving the conflicts for access to space and improved governance.

The **Commission concluded in 2009** that the volume of EU aquaculture production had stagnated and that main barriers included the access to space, water and governance. These conclusions were repeated in the **2013 Strategic Guidelines** and again in the **2021 Strategic Guidelines**.

The **AAC welcomes the Commission's proposal** of annual surveys to monitor progress and impact of the current EU instruments and anticipates discussing the results of the first survey in Spring 2024. In addition, the AAC takes note of the thorough assessment to be launched in 2025, the number of Commission guidelines that are still to be implemented and the 2029 evaluation of the Strategic Guidelines.

The AAC is confident that the Commission will deliver on the actions foreseen in the **Strategic Guidelines** and that the Commission guidelines will address the key issues related to aquaculture.

The **recent special report from the European Court of Auditors (ECA)**¹ concluded that the Member States (MS) made limited progress on their aquaculture production targets, that production has stagnated, the employment in aquaculture has decreased and that there are no indicators available to monitor the sustainability of EU aquaculture. The ECA concluded in 2014 that MS measures to support the sustainable development of aquaculture have not been well designed and implemented².

The fact remains that the EU aquaculture production has stagnated since 2000, that the objective in the **Common Fishery Policy's article 34**³ has not been met and that the EU's self-sufficiency rate for aquatic products reached its lowest level in 2021 at 38 pct⁴.

The AAC notes that MS presidencies of the Council include sections on agriculture and fisheries in their working programs, but nothing is included on aquaculture. This reflects the fact that agriculture and fishery, but not aquaculture, are recognized as principal areas with shared competence between the EU and the MS.

The AAC finds that the relatively lower policy prioritization given to aquaculture at MS level impairs the efficiency and the impact of the EU instruments⁵ - inter alia Commissions guidance - to facilitate the development of the aquaculture sector.

The EU institutions on the other hand acknowledge the need to give priority to aquaculture.

1 EU Aquaculture policy, European Court of Auditors, 2023

2 The effectiveness of European Fisheries Fund support for aquaculture, European Court of Auditors, 2014

3 Promote sustainable aquaculture to contribute to food security/supplies, growth and employment, CFP, 1380/2013

4 The EU fish market 2023, EUMOFA

5 Strategic Guidelines, MS multiannual national strategic plans, the "open method of coordination" and EMFAF.



The AAC concludes that **only an aquaculture policy reform** can disambiguate this paradoxical situation.

II. Recommendations to the European Commission

- **In the short-term**, the European Commission shall implement an aquaculture policy reform to align aquaculture policy with agriculture and fisheries by:
 - Introducing shared competence between the EU and the MS in aquaculture.
 - Considering key pillars including e.g. animal welfare, social acceptance, environmental sustainability, food security, economic sustainability.
 - Setting quantitative objectives for the development of sustainable aquaculture.

- **In the long-term**, the European Commission shall develop an overarching Common Food Policy as proposed by IPES⁶ and in line with the Sustainable Development Strategy proposed by the European Parliament⁷ (resolution 12 May 2016).

The AAC points out that this Recommendation paper is a framework Recommendation aiming at introducing the need for a policy reform. The AAC aims at supplementing it with a more detailed recommendation in the upcoming first half of 2024.

⁶ Towards a Common Food Policy for the European Union, IPES Food, 2019

⁷ Follow-up and state of play of the Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, European Parliament Resolution of 12 May 2016.



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