



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

Maritime Policy and Blue Economy
The Director

Brussels
MARE.A/DAK

Subject: Reply to the letter on emergency situation concerning Blue Crab and aquaculture - Ref: Ares(2023)8677359

Dear Mr. Angeri,

Thank you for your letter of 5 December 2023 in which you raise our attention about blue crab affecting shellfish aquaculture in Italy and express concern that this problem could spread quickly to other parts of Europe.

As indicated in my letter of 22nd December 2023, DG MARE is aware of the situation because the Italian authorities contacted us in relation to funding under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund – among other options - to take appropriate measures.

Your letter includes a number of specific recommendations for the Commission from the Aquaculture Advisory Council's Working Group on Shellfish. Notably, the Aquaculture Advisory Council's Working Group on Shellfish asks the Commission to:

- 1) *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.*

The Commission works closely with the Italian authorities to ensure that the financial support, provided through Italy's European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund⁽¹⁾ (EMFAF) programme is used to strengthen the resilience and the sustainability of aquaculture and fisheries operators. In this regard, the Italian EMFAF programme's Priority 2, Specific Objective 2.1 Action 5 - "Resilience, development and socio-economic environmental transition of the aquaculture sector"

(¹) https://oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/funding/emfaf_en

Stéphane Angeri
Working Group 2 on Shellfish
Aquaculture Advisory Council

can support pilot projects, research activities and application of new technologies ⁽²⁾ addressing the issue of the Blue Crab.

In addition, I would like to inform you that Greece is currently carrying out two EMFF/EMFAF projects on blue crab, including its commercialization.

- 2) *Urgently request and fund a study on this species' behaviour and its consequences on the economic activities.*

The Commission is currently considering the possibility of launching a study on blue crab, including the socioeconomic impact of this species. The expansion of these non-indigenous species is an issue of regional nature and as such it has been already addressed by the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). In recent years the populations of both species of blue crabs have significantly increased both in number and in geographical range, and there was a clear need for a common management strategy. Therefore, the GFCM adopted the Recommendation GFCM/42/2018/7 on the implementation of a regional research programme on blue crab in the entire Mediterranean Sea (including EU Member States and third countries), in order to properly evaluate their population status and maintain sustainable fisheries. The research plan is currently ongoing.

- 3) *Call for the organization of an EU-wide conference on this matter.*

The Commission does not think that an EU-wide conference on the impact of blue crab on aquaculture will bring any added value at the moment, as it is a priority first to improve and consolidate the scientific knowledge for these species, understand both the technical/technological and socio-economic aspects of blue crab fisheries while developing adaptive management measures at local, national and regional levels to keep blue crab populations at low levels. These are the expected outputs of the GFCM research plan.

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,

Delilah AL KHUDHAIRY

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⁽²⁾ The EMFAF programme for Italy is managed by the Italian Managing Authority. This means that projects co-financed by the EMFAF programme are selected by and implemented under the responsibility of the Managing Authority. The Commission is not involved in this process.