



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE/A2/EGG

Dear Mr Thomsen,

I would like to thank you and your young members for the “*Recommendation on Promoting the involvement of young professionals in aquaculture*” ⁽¹⁾.

I agree that promoting the attractiveness of aquaculture among young people is a key action for the sector. In the context of the implementation of the Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 (EC Strategic Guidelines) ⁽²⁾, the Commission is already working to address the challenges identified in your Recommendation.

The Commission will soon publish two guidance documents on i) the regulatory and administrative framework for aquaculture, and ii) the planning of space and access to water for marine aquaculture. The Commission is also working on guidance regarding other matters such as environmental performance, climate change, good husbandry practices, and access to water and space for freshwater and land-based aquaculture. These guidance documents will address Member States and industry as a whole, and as such also aim at supporting young aquaculture producers.

Regarding your concrete recommendations on strengthening the dissemination of innovations and providing a platform for EU Member States to exchange good practices, the Commission – with the support of the EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism – has set up an EU aquaculture website ⁽³⁾ that is a one-stop-shop for information on sustainable aquaculture. This website contains a vast amount of valuable information for aquaculture stakeholders, including for young aquaculture farmers. In particular, the section “Knowledge Base” ⁽⁴⁾ includes, amongst others, a repository of EU-funded research and innovation projects, and good practices on a variety of aquaculture-related topics that can be useful for young aquaculture farmers.

The Commission encourages Member States’ authorities and stakeholders to suggest and provide new content for the Knowledge Base. I recommend you and young members to

⁽¹⁾ Our reference Ares(2023)7394957

⁽²⁾ [EUR-Lex - 52021DC0236 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽³⁾ [Home | EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽⁴⁾ [Knowledge base | EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism \(europa.eu\)](#)

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use this tool to request specific topics to be covered, to subscribe to the newsletter ⁽⁵⁾, and to register to the “Users Area” ⁽⁶⁾ which aims to facilitate the cooperation between aquaculture stakeholders.

I would also like to highlight the BlueInvest initiative ⁽⁷⁾ that aims to boost innovation and investment in sustainable technologies for the blue economy including aquaculture. BlueInvest works closely with start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises, scale-ups, investors and stakeholders. In practice, it supports community-building, organising events, providing investment readiness and fundraising assistance to companies, coaching and matchmaking, investor capacity building and providing market intelligence.

Furthermore, the Commission has recently established a Smart Specialisation (S3) Platform for Sustainable Blue Economy, which supports the creation of a network of interregional partnerships working on innovation challenges. One of the first partnerships to be created is a Smart Specialisation Partnership on “Smart Circular Aquaculture” between 6 EU regions, industry operators and network/cluster representatives, which will focus, amongst others, on training of existing staff, zero waste and efficient use of energy and water.

Likewise, under the Pact for Skills ⁽⁸⁾, the Commission also supports the creation of large-scale skills partnerships to foster synergies between academia, industry, communities, and public authorities. To date, 19 skills partnerships in a wide range of industrial ecosystems have been set up ⁽⁹⁾, including one for the agri-food system. I therefore encourage you to thoroughly consider this initiative led by the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and invite you to attend the first Pact for Skills Forum taking place on 21-22 March 2024 in Brussels and online.

Also, I would not like to miss this opportunity to stress that the Common Fisheries Policy calls Member States on exchanging information and best practices on sustainable aquaculture ⁽¹⁰⁾. In practice, this results in several technical seminars per year chaired by the Commission where issues of common interest are being discussed. I will inform my services about the importance of discussing with young aquaculture farmers in this forum.

I take note of your suggestion to mention the role of young professionals in the upcoming EU-wide communication campaign on aquaculture. Given that the Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC) is part of the task force discussing the progress of the campaign development, you probably already know that aquaculture producers are already in the focus of the campaign. Therefore, we will look into the possibility for the angle of young producers to be included as well.

⁽⁵⁾ [EUROPEAN CLIMATE, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ENVIRONMENT EXECUTIVE AGENCY - Newsletter Archives \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽⁶⁾ [Users Directory | EU Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽⁷⁾ [BlueInvest - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽⁸⁾ A flagship action of the European Skills Agenda: [Pact for Skills \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽⁹⁾ List of partnerships under the Pact for Skills: [Industrial Ecosystems and Partnerships \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁽¹⁰⁾ Art. 34 of the Regulation 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy ([EUR-Lex - 02013R1380-20230101 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#))

In your document, there is a recommendation to the Member States which refers to the European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund ⁽¹¹⁾ (EMFAF). On behalf of the Commission, I would like to assure you that support for young people is an important aspect of the EMFAF. In addition, the EMFAF is based on a simpler structure than the previous fund and gives Member States a wide flexibility in deciding on measures and setting the eligibility rules.

Concerning your recommendation to link aquaculture to the wider food production industry, the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy provides a comprehensive approach to food sustainability. As such, aquaculture producers are recognized as valuable actors within the food chain, explicitly on par with farmers and fishers. Actions within the F2F strategy address producer professionalization, innovations, and communication. In addition, the EC Strategic Guidelines provide suggestions on how to best appeal to young consumers and the importance of appropriate skills development to be able to thrive in an innovative aquaculture sector.

Finally, with regard to professional development, the EC Strategic Guidelines in their annex call on the Commission and EU Member States to, *inter alia*, set up a framework of cooperation between public authorities and private industry to increase knowledge and innovation in the aquaculture sector. Moreover, the “Blue careers in Europe” calls for proposals under the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund ⁽¹²⁾ (EMFF) and the EMFAF to target concrete actions to close the skills gap, address unemployment and increase the attractiveness of blue careers among students and young professionals.

This last September ⁽¹³⁾, eight new projects kicked off ⁽¹⁴⁾. These projects aim to contribute to the development of the next generation of blue skills, including for the aquaculture sector. For example, the BlueAquaEdu project⁽¹⁵⁾ will explore gamification as a pedagogic approach to engage students and young people in sustainable aquaculture.

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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⁽¹¹⁾ Regulation (EU) 2021/1139 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2021 establishing the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund

⁽¹²⁾ Regulation (EU) No 508/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund

⁽¹³⁾ Previous editions of the blue careers call funded 18 projects with a total EU budget of €11 million.

⁽¹⁴⁾ [Eight EMFAF projects kickstarted their work to develop the next generation of blue skills - European Commission \(europa.eu\)](#).

⁽¹⁵⁾ [BlueAquaEdu project | Funding & tenders \(europa.eu\)](#)