



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,  
MARE.A.2/BVT

**Subject: AAC Recommendation on the biosecurity of shellfish hatcheries and nurseries**

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I would like to thank you for your email of 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024 including the “*Recommendation on the biosecurity of shellfish hatcheries and nurseries*”.

The Commission is aware of the problems that the shellfish sector is facing and explicitly refers in its “*Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030*” <sup>(1)</sup> to the growing number of mortality cases in recent years in mollusc farming associated with pathogenic organisms, harmful algae blooms, marine pollution, and the impact of climate change. The guidelines announced that the Commission and the EU Member States will support and promote research and innovation on shellfish diseases.

I will hereafter provide our reactions to the specific recommendations of the Aquaculture Advisory Council to the European Commission related to the biosecurity of shellfish hatcheries and nurseries:

- *To revise, in consultation with the competent authorities in Member States and representatives of the European shellfish industry, the criteria for defining the disease-free status for hatcheries and nurseries, taking into account innovations such as obtaining disease tolerant/resistant and disease-free larvae and spat through the non-destructive selection of pathogen-free broodstock from a zone that is not pathogen-free.*

Disease free status to shellfish hatcheries and nurseries can only be granted by the competent authorities for certain diseases regulated in and pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases (‘Animal Health Law’) <sup>(2)</sup>. The criteria to grant the disease-free status are laid down in Commission Delegated

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<sup>(1)</sup> COM(2021)236 final

<sup>(2)</sup> <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/429/oj>

Mr. Brian Thomsen  
Chairman of the AAC  
Email : brian@danskakvakultur.dk  
Rue de la Science, 10  
B – 1000 Brussels  
Belgium

Regulation (EU) 2020/689 <sup>(3)</sup>. These criteria are the outcome of expert opinion, of decades of experience dealing with mollusc diseases and are aligned with the standards of the World Organisation for Animal Health. The Commission is not planning at this stage to revise these criteria.

- *To develop, in consultation with scientists and representatives of the European shellfish industry, a certification/label that recognises the production of spat free of one or more pathogens by the hatchery and/or nursery concerned. This requires:*
  - *To support applied research projects, carried out by scientists and shellfish companies, on the biosecurity of shellfish production in controlled environments through water treatment in recognition of the proven effectiveness on the pathogens studied,*
  - *To develop rapid, high-performance analysis methods with enhanced sensitivity to detect the pathogens of interest at the earliest stages of production. Support work on stimulating immunity in bivalve molluscs, where initial results are proving interesting for hatcheries and nurseries, and work linked to genetic selection.*
  - *To support work on stimulating immunity in bivalve molluscs, where initial results are proving interesting for hatcheries and nurseries, and work linked to genetic selection.*

As you know, priority pathogens and infectious diseases in shellfish are in the scope of the Horizon Europe European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare.

Insofar as the second bullet point above and certain diseases regulated in and pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2016/429 are concerned, the prescribed diagnostic methods are duly available and need to be used by the competent authorities, who are supported by the EU Reference Laboratory for mollusc diseases and its network of national reference laboratories.

I am looking forward to our continued fruitful cooperation. Should you have any further questions on this reply, please contact Ms Julia RUBECK, coordinator of the Advisory Councils (Julia.rubeck@ec.europa.eu; +32.2.296.88.89), who will forward them to relevant colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

Charlina VITCHEVA

c.c.: Cynthia Benites: Cynthia.benites@aac-europe.org; [secretariat@aac-europe.org](mailto:secretariat@aac-europe.org);

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<sup>(3)</sup> [http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg\\_del/2020/689/2023-10-11](http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_del/2020/689/2023-10-11)