



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR MARITIME AFFAIRS AND FISHERIES

The Director-General

Brussels,
MARE.A.2/BVT

Subject: AAC Recommendation on Molluscan Welfare

Dear Mr Brian Thomsen,

I would like to thank you for your mail of 13th November 2024 including the “*Recommendation on Molluscan Welfare*”.

As you know, animal welfare is an important aspect of the “*Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030*” and we are working closely with the relevant Commission services to address this challenge. The guidelines also promote low-trophic aquaculture, like bivalve molluscs for which you rightly point out that there is currently limited scientific evidence available on their sentience.

On 17 January 2024, the Commission designated an EU Reference Centre for animal welfare focusing on the welfare of aquatic animals (hereafter the ‘*EURCAW aqua*’). The designation of the EURCAW aqua is a very important step to fulfil the gaps in scientific and technical knowledge regarding aquatic animals. The EURCAW aqua, amongst other tasks, has the responsibility to provide technical support and coordinated assistance to EU Member States carrying out official controls in the field of aquatic animal welfare. In addition, the EURCAW aqua supports horizontal activities of the Commission and of the EU Member States in meeting welfare requirements for aquatic animals. It will also conduct research to help in developing animal-based indicators for a better monitoring of aquatic animal welfare by inspectors.

As stipulated in the terms of reference of the call published by the Commission for its designation, “*The Centre’s main activities will concern the ‘aquaculture animals’ meaning any aquatic animal including eggs, reared in a farm, including any aquatic animal from the wild*”. The EURCAW aqua is currently preparing its multiannual work programme for the period 2025-2027. Aquatic species that are currently farmed in the EU and fall within the scope of the EU animal welfare legislation are therefore identified as the main priorities for the following working programme. Research activities on the assessment of “sentience” in aquatic species do not fall within the scope of the

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EURCAW aqua. The work programme will be published in the EURCAW aqua's website ⁽¹⁾ as soon as finalised.

Additionally, the Commission has agreed with the *European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)* on an indicative roadmap for future mandates (2023-2030) which includes aquatic animals ⁽²⁾. The roadmap is an indicative schedule, and a more precise timeline cannot be confirmed at this stage.

The "*European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare*" ⁽³⁾, funded under Horizon Europe, is addressing both terrestrial and aquatic animals. Activities on welfare of fish and crustaceans are on-going, but not yet on molluscs.

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,

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⁽¹⁾ [EURCAW Aqua - Home](#)

⁽²⁾ The roadmap is available here: https://food.ec.europa.eu/document/download/3bf1edbf-3822-4802-bc88-4bcd6081c90e_en?filename=aw_eval_revision_roadmap_efsa.pdf

⁽³⁾ [European Partnership on Animal Health and Welfare - Home](#)