



# **AAC Recommendation on the Dissemination, Communication and Exploitation of Research and Innovation for European Aquaculture**

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## *Recommendation on the Dissemination, Communication and Exploitation of Research and Innovation for European Aquaculture*

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## **I. Background**

Further to a previous AAC recommendation on priorities for research and innovation in European Aquaculture, the AAC has considered a second recommendation on research and innovation, but with a specific focus on the dissemination, exploitation and communication (DEC) of research outputs.

- Many within the aquaculture sector, most especially from the producers' perspective, but across the entire quadruple helix (research, industry, academia, civil society), have expressed frustration that research outputs are not being successfully or adequately transferred to end users. Furthermore, research efforts are often duplicated or fail to build on previous work. There is a strong feeling among producers that research actions fail to translate into practical applications or provide solutions to current/present problems.
- This frustration is not unique to the aquaculture sector, but, in common with other aspects of the farming and bioeconomy sector, the problem is exacerbated by the high percentage of micro and SME producers within European aquaculture.
- Further frustration has been noted over the failure of national and regional research organisations (Platforms, Research Councils, Funding agencies, Clusters) to engage with knowledge transfer activities, and to interact with regional, national or international trade associations and representational bodies.
- Disappointment has been expressed at the lack of synergies and alignment between European research prioritisation and research and innovation strategy/strategic objectives and the priorities of individual Member States (MS), including a consequent disparity of funding.
- A common view is that the structure of European research calls, in terms of application process and consortia development, pay insufficient attention and allocate insufficient weighting to the inclusion of end users and to the dissemination, exploitation and likely impact of project results.
- Such concerns have been noted, understood and echoed by representatives from within the European Commission (EC), national research authorities and other research funders.

In addition, specific tasks relating to DEC have been allocated against the AAC within the Annex to the Strategic Guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030<sup>1</sup>. These state:

*The AAC should contribute to:*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2021:236:FIN>

- *Encouraging aquaculture producers and other stakeholders to work together with research and innovation institutes and public authorities to find solutions to the challenges of the sustainable development of EU aquaculture.*
- *Disseminating information on research and innovation projects and their results among members*
- *Promoting the uptake by the EU aquaculture industry of existing innovation.*
- *Promoting in the aquaculture sector the regular training of aquaculture professionals, in particular on how to incorporate innovative practices.*

MS and EC also have specific actions to achieve regarding increasing knowledge and innovation, as detailed in the Strategic Guidelines.

Finally, the AAC is aware that, in the context of the new European Commission and the advent of the Ocean Pact, there is an intention to develop a Blue Economy Innovation Strategy by 2027 along with a 2040 Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture, alongside revised strategies for the Bio-Economy and Food. Both the AAC and AAC members await confirmation on how aquaculture stakeholders will be involved in the development of the Blue Economy Innovation Strategy, 2040 Vision, and other associated policies/strategies.

## **II. Justification**

With the development of the tenth framework programme (Horizon Europe 2028 – 2034), the new EU Competitiveness fund and multiple European strategies which are to include a component relating to research and innovation (Ocean Pact, Blue Economy Innovation Strategy, Bioeconomy Strategy, Water Resilience Strategy, Visions for Food, Agriculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture) there is an opportunity to consider aspects of re-design and improvement in relation to the structure and objectives of publicly funded research.

Both European aquaculture producers and policymakers have expressed concern at the lack of growth within European aquaculture, particularly when compared to elsewhere in the world. Recent reports (European Court of Auditors) suggest that support for the sector, including research funding, has not delivered the results hoped for in terms of increased and improved production and has not sufficiently addressed key bottlenecks and challenges. This reflects the wider concern at the pressing need to improve EU competitiveness, research uptake and innovation transfer.

The Common Fisheries Policy Regulation has called for a coordinated EU strategic approach to support the growth of the EU aquaculture sector while ensuring its economic, environmental and social sustainability. The Strategic Guidelines for European Aquaculture place an emphasis on sustainable growth and address a number of priority areas, all of which will benefit from greater research and innovation transfer effort. Priority areas include access to space and water, regulation and administration, animal health and public health, climate



change adaptation and mitigation, producer and market organisation, diversification and adding value, environmental performance, animal welfare, data and monitoring and control, and aspects of social licence. There is a strong feeling on the part of stakeholders that research actions and results are not being effectively implemented, and knowledge outputs are not being transferred. This is particularly challenging in the aquaculture sector given the diverse number of species and production systems and the high level (80%) of micro businesses and small and medium sized enterprises.

Aquaculture is predicted to have an increasingly important role in EU and MS food policy and food systems. Consideration should also be given to the important role aquaculture can play in the wider food system in terms of providing ingredients for animal feed, alongside pharmaceutical and nutraceutical use, and for use as a fertiliser (e.g. through sludge recovery or the use of algae).

European research activities are funded and undertaken through several different channels (e.g. Horizon Europe, European Partnership, Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) and Interreg, Life and Fisheries Local Action Group programmes) and it is important to avoid the duplication and repetition of research activities, to ensure synergies between projects and work programmes and for research results to be effectively communicated to stakeholders to ensure impact.

It is important to acknowledge the perceived failings in knowledge and innovation transfer, particularly in relation to those member states ranked higher on the EU innovation index than those ranked lower. Although well intentioned, regional and geographical call criteria concerning innovation transfer (S3, Interregional Innovation Investments instruments) have proved challenging to fulfil, particularly amongst bioeconomy actors.

Whilst it is acknowledged the certain EC Extension Services are made available (e.g. Horizon Booster, Horizon Results Platform) there is concern that these opportunities are not well known, and underutilised. Current extension services are perceived as unsuited to assisting with knowledge transfer of research outputs to primary producers and value chain stakeholders and consideration ought to be given as how best further assistance might be provided to project calls in the Food and Bioeconomy sectors.

Similarly, challenges exist in terms of engagement with current research archives. The facility of CORDIS is considered challenging by many potential end users of research outputs and there are concerns at the lack of engagement with new resources, such as the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism (AAM) Knowledge Base and EURCAW-Aqua reference materials, particularly on the part of producers and other stakeholders in the value chain.

In relation to the Strategic Guidelines, certain actions have been taken to address DEC considerations. These include:

- The AAC has now established a Research Focus Group and to consider research and innovation priorities and associated matters.

- The EC (DG MARE, CINEA) is funding the AAM, whose work has to date included the establishment of a [web platform](#) with [Knowledge Base](#) in addition to running Technical Seminars for both MS and invited stakeholders.
- Events have taken place (e.g. in association with the WESTMED and Black Sea Basin Assistance Mechanism) to promote the AAM.
- The AAC is actively considering knowledge sharing and DEC activities, including the proposal for three annual webinars. The first AAC Webinar on the dissemination of information to EU farmers took place in September 2025. The proposed topic was on Good Husbandry and could well exploit a Staff Working Document (SWD) created as part of the AAM output<sup>2</sup>.
- Member States and national competent authorities are to coordinate with the EU Reference Centre for Animal Welfare for Aquatic animals (EURCAW-Aqua), to harmonise welfare knowledge transfer.
- Through the European Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform (EATiP), a [Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform](#) has been established addressing [Circular Smart Aquaculture](#). Smart Specialisation Strategies are being strongly promoted by DG REGIO, DG MARE and DG RTD (amongst others) as an important inter-regional industry-focused innovation transfer tool.
- A number of high-level European and national aquaculture events and conferences take place where knowledge and innovation transfer are highlighted – e.g. the EAS Aquaculture Europe conferences, AquaNor (No), AquaFarm (IT), AquaFutureSpain (ES), and Aquavision (No).
- Transnational research access (TNA) programmes have been funded and encouraged (e.g. the AquaExcel Programme [FP7, H2020, HE] and the current AQUASERV project).
- As with TNAs, other research strands require long-term funding support to ensure results, this is particularly pertinent with breeding and selection programmes (requiring a timeframe of c. 20–30 years for results to be demonstrated).

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<sup>2</sup> [Good Husbandry Staff Working Document](#)

### **III. Recommendations**

#### **AAC Recommendations:**

##### **To the European Commission**

##### **Publicly Funded Research Call Design and DEC Requirements**

- EU-funded research and innovation calls should place increased emphasis on DEC actions within call design and project proposal templates including increased reviewer scores being allocated to DEC activities and innovation transfer.
- Where relevant, practical application of project outputs/findings should be encouraged and specified.
- Work should be undertaken to identify practical solutions contained within research results already undertaken, with a focus on application by primary producers and others in the aquaculture value chain.
- Industry partners should be encouraged and included within project consortia wherever possible, with increased weighting being given to those project proposals that include direct industry or other appropriate stakeholder engagement.
- The recruitment of external evaluators should be advertised and undertaken across all stakeholders, with assistance being sought from representative multi-actor organisations where needed (e.g. Advisory Councils, Research Frameworks, Partnerships, Technology Platforms, Industry Associations and Producer Organisations).
- The topics of the research calls should include market-driven areas that address current knowledge gaps and innovation challenges in the aquaculture sector. At the same time, policy driven call topics should be promoted subject to economic and market assessments.

##### **Aquaculture Research Annual Event**

- DG RTD/DG MARE, with due reference to other Directorates, reference centres and agencies should seek the assistance of / work with multi-actor platforms to run annual DEC research days, presenting portfolio analysis and project highlights from EU funded research (Horizon, EU Partnerships, EMFAF, LIFE, FLAG, ERDF etc.). Such events might follow the format of technical seminars and workshops<sup>3</sup>. Focus should be given on how best to reach producers at the farm / local / regional level. This may be supported through the AAM (see below) and undertaken with existing multi-actor platforms for aquaculture research (e.g. Technology and Innovation Platforms – EATiP, FABRE TP, FoodDrinkEurope).

##### **Infrastructure and Analysis**

- Continuing support should be given to Transnational Access to Research Infrastructures (TNAs), but TNAs must include industry consultation and engagement (e.g. through Industry Research Advisory Panels).

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<sup>3</sup> AAC Recommendation on Research and Innovation priorities for the aquaculture sector  
<https://aac-europe.org/en/publication/aac-recommendation-on-research-and-innovation-priorities-for-the-aquaculture-sector/>

- Regular portfolio analysis, with consideration of knowledge transfer and impact, should continue to be undertaken for all aquaculture sectors (Marine, Freshwater, Finfish, Shellfish, Algae, Value Chain, etc.).
- Consideration should be given as to how best research Extension Services might serve knowledge transfer to beneficiaries in the bioeconomy and food sectors.

### **Smart Specialisation Strategies and Regional Innovation Transfer**

- Greater support should be given, including financial support, for the Aquaculture Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform (TSSP) to foster and encourage inter-regional innovation transfer. Again, focus should be given on how best to reach producers at the farm/local/regional level and to promote uptake of S3 strategies for the Blue Economy at the regional level.
- Greater support should be provided for EU cluster actions relating to knowledge transfer, including testing facilities, incubators and accelerator programmes.
- Allocation of funds (e.g. EMFAF) to promote aquaculture research knowledge transfer (linked to S3 / clustering / regional activities) both at the European and MS level.
- Support, including financial support, should be made eligible for non-EU countries that are leaders in aquaculture research and innovation, allowing for successful technology and research transfer between regions.

### **Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism**

- Promotion and support for the AAM knowledge base, across the aquaculture quadruple helix (research, industry, academia, civil society), including funding more proactive measures in terms of research and knowledge transfer.
- An expectation stated in project call proposals for knowledge outputs and results to be shared and uploaded to the AAM knowledge base (subject to approval).
- Regular updates on the AAM knowledge base being presented to AAC / at events such as the above research focus info days.
- Surveying of industry research priorities (targeted on micro and SME businesses, with reference to industry trade associations) to ensure DEC actions are a two-way process feeding a responsive research information exchange process.
- The AAM should support knowledge transfer actions on the part of organisations such as EATiP and European Aquaculture Society, engaging with national or EU-wide trade bodies and other research networks (e.g. EMBRC, EFARO).
- Funding available for aquaculture research and innovation transfer should be actively promoted through the AAM.

### **To the EU Member States**

#### **Multi Annual Plans (MAPs) for Aquaculture**

- Allocation of funds (e.g. EMFAF) to promote aquaculture research knowledge transfer (linked to S3 / clustering / regional activities) both at the European and MS levels.
- Mapping and reporting of MS aquaculture research activities, as part of MAPs for aquaculture, with submission of information to the AAM knowledge base.





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- Surveying of industry research priorities (targeted to micro and SME businesses, with reference to national industry trade associations and aquaculture clusters) as part of the development of national MAPs for aquaculture.

**Member States / MS National Research Bodies**

- MS to require national and regional research organisations (e.g. Platforms, Research Councils, Funding agencies, Clusters, National Contact Points) involved in aquaculture research to engage with knowledge transfer activities, and to interact with regional, national or international trade associations / representational bodies / clusters in relation to aquaculture research and innovation transfer needs.
- Research undertaken with part EU funding or support (e.g. through EMFAF, LIFE, Interreg) should be summarised as above and should as a matter of routine be logged in knowledge sharing resources such as the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism.



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