

Striving for a sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture: the way forward

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The European Parliament adopted by 486 votes to 105, with 27 abstentions, a resolution on striving for a sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture: the way forward.

According to the Common Fisheries Policy, aquaculture should contribute to maintaining the potential for food production on a sustainable basis throughout the EU in order to ensure long-term food security, growth and employment for EU citizens, and help meet the growing global demand for aquatic products.

According to the latest data (2018), EU aquaculture production accounted for only 1.15% of world production in 2019. The EU was 41.2% self-sufficient in fish and seafood products, while only 10% of the seafood consumed in the EU comes from EU aquaculture, which represents only 2% of global production. Some Member States do not pay enough attention to the potential for aquaculture development. On the other hand, there is still significant potential for growth and diversification in terms of producing countries (Spain, France, Italy, Greece) and species farmed.

Parliament stressed that the **growth potential of the EU aquaculture sector needs to be developed in a sustainable manner**, taking all three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental – into consideration.

Aquaculture's contribution to the European Green Deal

Parliament underlined the potential contribution of the aquaculture sector to the objectives of the European Green Deal and stressed the need to ensure the long-term viability and resilience of the sector in the light of the COVID-19 crisis. As part of the transition to a sustainable food system in Europe, the aquaculture sector can play an important role in the circular economy and as a net contributor to the transformation of surplus nutrients into high-quality protein.

While welcoming the Commission's communication on strategic guidelines for more sustainable and competitive aquaculture in the EU for the period 2021-2030, Parliament stressed that these **guidelines need to be more ambitious** to stimulate sustainable production and the development of a truly successful and competitive European aquaculture sector. It called for quantitative growth targets for the sector to be set within the guidelines and stressed the importance of the Commission's supportive and coordinating role in implementation between Member States to ensure a level playing field for EU aquaculture farmers.

The resolution also stressed that EU aquaculture meets high standards in terms of product quality and animal health, but that there is **still room for improvement in terms of diversification, competitiveness and environmental performance**. The development of low-impact aquaculture and the environmental services of aquaculture could make an important contribution to the Green Deal, the 'farm to fork' strategy and a sustainable blue economy.

Parliament expressed its support for the establishment of the **new EU aquaculture assistance mechanism** as an innovative tool to help the Commission, Member States, regional authorities, industry and other stakeholders to develop new guidelines and consolidate best practices in various relevant areas. Members considered that all relevant actors, including the Parliament, should be involved in the creation of this mechanism.

The resolution stressed the need to:

- provide a sound legal framework and to make full use of the financial resources of the European Maritime Affairs, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMAF), as a funding instrument specifically dedicated to the objectives of fisheries and aquaculture management in the European Union;
- have precise data and statistics on aquaculture products;
- invest on a large scale to prevent and reduce the impact of disasters and extreme weather events on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors;
- support the creation of vocational training courses for the aquaculture sector, to attract younger people and enable the retraining of fishermen;
- provide sufficient support for environmentally friendly aquaculture, such as organic farms, closed circuit aquaculture, seaweed and shellfish farming;
- have a food traceability system in the EU that contributes to the sustainability of the aquaculture sector.

Main obstacles to aquaculture in the EU and possible solutions

Parliament urged the Commission and Member States to:

- ensure that **national plans** for the sustainable development of aquaculture take account of the main obstacles to developing the sector's potential, and recognise the need to provide space for the sector through appropriate land-use planning;
- launch **promotional campaigns** to encourage the consumption of EU aquaculture products and to raise the profile of the sector, and recognise the importance of EU-wide communication campaigns on sustainable aquaculture in the EU;
- establish a solid, reliable, clear and administratively **simple legal framework** for the use of space and licenses that provides confidence and security for investment in the sector;
- increase funding for **research and innovation** in the aquaculture sector; Members expressed strong support for innovation and progress in the cultivation of new aquaculture species;
- deepen knowledge of the potential of the aquaculture sector in the outermost regions;
- ensure a **level playing field** for EU aquaculture vis-à-vis third country producers with regard to imports of products that do not have the same market access, environmental and social sustainability or fish welfare standards as those produced in the EU.

Organic aquaculture

Lastly, Members welcomed the Commission communication on an action plan for the development of organic production and pointed out that organic aquaculture needs to play a key role in the planned growth of the aquaculture sector, given its ample untapped potential for development, in line with the transition to a sustainable food system in Europe, and which should be given assistance through the EMFAF.