EU aquaculture strategy

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EU calls for a coordinated strategic approach to support the growth of the EU aquaculture sector

Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030

Update

This EU Communication calls for a coordinated strategic approach to support the growth of the EU aquaculture sector, and invites EU Member States to review their Multi-annual National Strategic Plans (MNSPs) for aquaculture.

Background

This Communication reviews the EU's aquaculture policy, the Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture adopted in 2013. These guidelines set out for EU Member States and stakeholders the key objectives for aquaculture:

- building resilience and competitiveness
- participating in the green transition
- ensuring social acceptance and consumer information
- increasing knowledge and innovation.

In particular, the strategic guidelines aim to help build an EU aquaculture sector that:

- is competitive and resilient
- ensures the supply of nutritious and healthy food
- reduces the EU's dependency on seafood imports
- creates economic opportunities and jobs
- becomes a global reference for sustainability.

Based on these guidelines, EU Member States have adopted Multi-annual National Strategic Plans (MNSPs) for aquaculture. The implementation of these MNSPs was supported by the exchange of good practices among EU Member States, facilitated by the Commission and funded predominantly through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF).

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The aquaculture strategy is closely linked to the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, which stress the important role of farmed seafood as a source of protein for food and feed with a low-carbon footprint in a sustainable food system. Certain types of aquaculture, such as the cultivation of seaweed and molluscs, have the capacity to absorb carbon and help the EU deliver on its climate goals. The new EU carbon-farming initiative foreseen under the Climate Pact and the regulatory framework for certifying carbon removals to be developed by the Commission can provide incentives to the EU aquaculture sector offering carbon-capture services.

A strategic, long-term approach for the sustainable growth of EU aquaculture contributes to:

- decarbonising the economy
- fighting climate change and mitigating its impact
- reducing pollution
- better preserving ecosystems in line with the objectives of the Biodiversity strategy and the Zero-pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment
- more circular management of resources.

In addition, the Farm to Fork Strategy sets specific targets for aquaculture, in particular:

- reduction in sales of antimicrobials
- significant increase in organic aquaculture.

What is changing?

Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 offer a common vision for EU Member States and stakeholders for a further contribution of aquaculture to the European Green Deal.

Why?

Despite progress made due to the Open method of coordination established in the Common Fisheries Policy Regulation, as well as EU funding, the aquaculture sector is still far from reaching its full potential in terms of growth and meeting the increasing demand for more sustainable seafood.

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What are the major implications for exporting countries?

The EU imports over 70% of the seafood that it consumes. This Communication calls for reducing the EU's dependency on seafood imports. If successful, the strategy implies a more competitive marketplace for AGRINFO partner exporters of seafood.

In the short term, these strategic guidelines set out the major challenges that both European and third country operators will be facing.

Animal and human health

Infectious diseases remain a risk to aquaculture productivity and animal welfare despite EU legislation on aquatic health (e.g. Regulation (EU) 2016/429). The demands of the new Regulations (EU) 2019/4 on medicated feed and 2019/6 on veterinary medicinal products, which entered into application on 28 January 2022, can pose serious challenges to producers. These Regulations aim to help increase the availability of veterinary medicines for aquaculture and provide incentives for innovation, but branch organisations foresee that their application and implementing rules in the form of Delegated Acts could have adverse impacts on the aquaculture sector (Aquaculture Advisory Council 2022).

Combatting fraud

The Commission's proposed new Fisheries Control Regulation extends traceability obligations to all aquaculture products, including processed products and those imported from non-EU countries, allowing identification of the origin of aquaculture products and contributing to combatting fraud. Exporters of aquaculture products, including processed products, to the EU are likely to face a stricter regulatory environment and stricter controls.

Quality

The Commission considers quality schemes and labels such as geographical indications. Opportunities exist through such schemes for exporters with competitive advantages in terms of access to space and water, or who produce aquaculture products in high demand in the EU that cannot be grown competitively in EU Member States.

Environmental footprint

Exporters to the EU should also pay close attention to the environmental footprint of aquaculture and the welfare of fish. EU legislation on animal welfare already includes general requirements on the keeping, transport and slaughter of farmed fish. The Farm to Fork Strategy envisages the evaluation and revision of existing animal-welfare legislation, including on animal transport and slaughter of animals, in 2023. Exporters should anticipate common, validated, species-specific, and auditable fish-welfare indicators throughout the production chain.

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Marketing standards

The Commission is working to review the current marketing standards for fisheries, possibly including specific standards for aquaculture products.

Organic production

Operators continue to adjust to Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling of organic products (applicable from 1 January 2022) which sets out specific requirements for aquaculture, such as maximum stocking-density levels, and restrictions on the use of artificial light and oxygen.

Resources

European Climate Pact

Fisheries Control Regulation, COM/2018/368 final

Council Directive 98/58/EC concerning the protection of animals kept for farming purposes

Council Regulation (EC) No 1099/2009 on the protection of animals at the time of killing

Regulation (EU) 2016/429 on transmissible animal diseases

Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling of organic products

Regulation (EU) 2019/6 on veterinary medicinal products

Regulation (EU) No 1151/2012 on quality schemes for agricultural products and foodstuffs

Regulation (EU) No 1379/2013 on the common organisation of the markets in fishery and aquaculture products

Regulation (EU) No 1380/2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy

Sources

Strategic guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, COM(2013) 229 final

Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030, COM/2021/236 final

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