

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

NAT-VI/002

114th plenary session, 12, 13 and 14 October 2015

OPINION

The future of European aquaculture

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- recognises that the aquaculture sector generates jobs, particularly in structurally weak areas, helping to create greater territorial cohesion and rural development which is in line with the growth targets set out in the Europe 2020 strategy;
- with regard to the administrative system, suggests the use of a "one-stop shop" and establishing a simplified, or "fast-track", licensing system;
- urges the Commission to introduce a labelling system for aquaculture products, which will distinguish European products, instil confidence in consumers, enhance products' quality image and set them apart from competitor products;
- points out that, under current circumstances, it does not make sense to set extractive fishing and aquaculture in opposition to one another, emphasising the need for complementarity;
- recommends promoting the local market and short circuit distribution chains for European aquaculture products, thus helping to cushion the effect of fluctuations on the global markets.

Rapporteur

Jesús Gamallo Aller, Director-General for External Relations and Relations with the European Union,
Region of Galicia (ES/EPP)

Reference document

Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – The future of European aquaculture

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

I. BACKGROUND ANALYSIS

The development of aquaculture

1. points out that the Committee has already issued a number of opinions on aquaculture in previous years and that, for the first time, the 2014-2020 Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has placed aquaculture on an equal footing with extractive fishing, despite the fact that this sector has not yet taken off in the EU;
2. welcomes the synergies offered by the merger between the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries and the Directorate-General for the Environment and believes that this union may make a positive contribution towards the development of European aquaculture;
3. is pleased that the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) includes promoting sustainable and competitive aquaculture as one of its priorities, thereby delivering a real boost to new forms of aquaculture that have real potential for growth and innovation, such as: offshore aquaculture or aquaculture in exposed waters, aquaculture which is not for human consumption, or aquaculture diversification – defined as a sideline activity exploiting the natural resources associated with such facilities, diversifying the economic activity of the sector, and facilitating the promotion of its products;
4. points out that the 2013 Strategic guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture emphasise the strategic nature of aquaculture production in addressing challenges such as food, protecting natural resources and spatial planning;
5. recognises that the aquaculture sector generates jobs, particularly in structurally weak areas, helping to create greater territorial cohesion and rural development which is in line with the growth targets set out in the Europe 2020 strategy;
6. emphasises the vital role of local and regional authorities in the development of European aquaculture, and specifically in implementing the multiannual strategic plans drawn up by the Member States for the period 2014-2020;
7. highlights the fact that the European aquaculture sector is largely dominated by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), 75% of which employ five or fewer employees;
8. welcomes the establishment of the new Aquaculture Advisory Council (AAC), which will allow stakeholders to advise the EU on all matters relating to the development of this sector, and looks forward to working with it in the future;

9. highlights the importance of combining various administrative simplification, spatial planning and competitiveness measures, in order to unlock aquaculture's potential for sustainable development. This development is viewed as complementary to, and not as an alternative to, extractive fishing;
10. warns that, while aquaculture is growing worldwide and already represents around 40% of total fish production, in Europe aquaculture production is falling (11% between 2000 and 2012) and accounts for less than 20% of fish production, despite having 14 000 firms and generating 85 000 jobs directly. Generally, aquaculture soon looks set to overtake fishing – in the same way that agriculture once replaced hunting;
11. regrets that only 24% of the 23kg of fish and seafood consumed on average per person, per year, in Europe comes from aquaculture with more than half being imported from outside the EU. This means that 70% of the total volume of fish and seafood consumed in the EU is imported. Aquaculture is therefore set to become the answer to a growing overall demand for fish and shellfish;
12. expresses its deep concern over the imbalance between European and Asian aquaculture production. Asia accounts for around 88% of global production and, although the majority of Asian fish imports comply with European regulations, they put increasing pressure on European producers in terms of pricing and production volumes. European aquaculture producers are therefore specialising increasingly in high-quality production, with the lower end of the market covered by cheaper Asian imports;
13. emphasises that the EU aquaculture sector is diverse when it comes to farmed species, production methods and geographical locations and thus EU rules should be implemented in a flexible way, especially in the outermost regions on account of their specific situation;

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Simplification of administrative procedures and access to space

14. regrets that the lack of available space that is suitable for this use, the complexity and the timescale involved in obtaining operating licences and permits, together with the costs incurred, are a major obstacle to the development of aquaculture;
15. notes that in Europe, it is generally the responsibility of regional and local authorities to grant licences and support small and medium-sized enterprises operating in their area; It would therefore be advisable to provide public officials with high-quality training, in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the license granting process carried out by public administrations;
16. with regard to the administrative system, suggests the use of a "one-stop shop", which would take on and exercise all responsibilities, allowing relevant documents to be submitted to a single administrative body. This would significantly improve the relationship between the end-user and various levels of the public administration;

17. suggests establishing a simplified or "fast-track" licensing system, whereby the competent administration grants a provisional certificate permitting those operators who meet predefined criteria to commence their activities. These criteria could be based on the applicant's history or the fact that they have put forward a pioneering aquaculture project in terms of innovation or sustainability or on the establishment of reserved aquaculture easement zones where uses that are incompatible with aquaculture are defined in advance;
18. considers it appropriate – as far as the characteristics of the area will allow – to use a "traffic light" system for classifying aquaculture activities into different levels, depending on, amongst other things, environmental impact, production, the status of animal health, etc. This system would have to be user-friendly and easily accessible for microenterprises so that a level playing field is created for both large and small companies;
19. highlights that transparency is needed throughout the aquaculture decision-making process and, therefore, must be the guiding principle for public institutions, civil society and the scientific community;

Competitiveness and quality control

20. highlights the need to improve public communication, by going beyond simply advertising products and instead focusing on the benefits of a sustainable, environmentally integrated sector, as a key element for increasing the competitiveness of aquaculture;
21. stresses the importance of R&D and innovation for tapping into the growth potential offered by aquaculture – as reflected by the European Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform's (EATiP) Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, which sets out priority areas for action divided into eight thematic areas;
22. welcomes the fact that the European research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020, has included the exploitation of living aquatic resources as one of its thematic priorities, and urges both the industry and public authorities to use the results of funded projects to support the sustainable development of aquaculture;
23. urges the Commission to introduce a labelling system for aquaculture products, which will distinguish European products, instil confidence in consumers, enhance products' quality image and set them apart from competitor products. Correct information can only make the sector more competitive;
24. welcomes the fact that continuing and vocational training programmes, designed to meet the needs of the aquaculture market, are being developed in the EU. Such programmes also help to integrate young people into the sector. The Committee calls for the standardisation of formal qualifications, in order to promote greater mobility among aquaculture professionals in the EU;

Sustainability in relation to aquaculture

25. reiterates that sustainability is a prerequisite for the development of European aquaculture;
26. notes that sustainability is the first condition that the CFP imposes on European aquaculture. Moreover, all stakeholders concerned wish to establish a proper definition of "sustainable aquaculture", which addresses environmental, social and economic criteria, and is adaptable to the specific characteristics of each area. The Committee believes that the new Aquaculture Advisory Council must play a key role in drawing up this definition;
27. recognises that the aquaculture sector requires coordinated spatial planning, which will minimise conflicts arising from competition for space between competing uses, increase sustainability, reduce uncertainty and encourage investment. Highlights the work already carried out in this area by the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which aims to protect and restore European marine ecosystems and to ensure the ecological viability of economic activities related to the marine environment;
28. recommends promoting innovative production processes which have a minimal impact on surrounding eco-systems – such as recirculation, multi-trophic aquaculture or aquaponics. These examples demonstrate that using space can be fully compatible with the pursuit of efficiency and the creation of wealth and added value;
29. expresses the need for further research and innovation in order to move towards replacing fishmeal and fish oil as feed for farmed fish. In relation to this, points out that 60% of feed used in aquaculture production is of plant origin and 80% comes from sustainable sources. This enhances the sustainability of a sector which only continues to complement wild fishing more and more as it develops. Whilst it is necessary to carry out research into alternatives to fishmeal and fish oil, at the same time it is important to press ahead with the technological development of these products in order to optimise them and improve yields;
30. highlights the important environmental services that aquaculture performs, particularly in preserving biodiversity;
31. takes note of the negative impact on sustainable aquaculture of the rapid recovery of protected species, and consequently recommends that population management plans for these species should not only be drawn up on the basis of scientific criteria, but should also give consideration to possible conflicts with aquaculture producers. It therefore urges the European Commission, in the course of any future updates to the nature protection directives (Birds and Habitats), to take account of current conflicts involving different uses of maritime, river and land areas;
32. recommends diversifying the cultivation of organisms – drawing particular attention to seaweed production. In addition to its increasing use for animal and human consumption in recent years, seaweed has proved to be very suitable for certain industrial processes and for generating energy. However, despite offering extensive opportunities in terms of environmental sustainability – as it does not require feeding or produce waste – its great potential is not being exploited in the EU;

The market and the supply chain

33. points out that, under current circumstances, it does not make sense to set extractive fishing and aquaculture in opposition to one another. Global demand for aquatic products is currently increasing, while at the same time the EU is taking action to gradually reduce pressure on wild fish stocks. Accordingly, we can only emphasise the need for complementarity;
34. highlights that cooperation between aquaculture and processing could create added value for aquaculture products, if it exploits synergies, promoting both activities in less developed areas;
35. recommends promoting the local market and short circuit distribution chains for European aquaculture products, thus helping to cushion the effect of fluctuations on the global markets;
36. notes that traceability is guaranteed throughout the aquaculture process, which enhances consumer safety and minimises changes in consumer behaviour regarding the consumption of this product;
37. recommends using campaigns to raise the product's profile among consumers, so that they recognise and value the contribution made towards the food supply, food safety and job creation as well as the environmental benefits that aquaculture brings in the long term;
38. welcomes the European Commission's support for sharing best practices and technical expertise, which will contribute towards improving the public image of aquaculture production and help to establish and promote models. With this in mind, the Committee also welcomes the European Commission's "Farmed in the EU" initiative, a campaign which is undoubtedly raising awareness of sustainable aquaculture products in the EU.

Brussels, 13 October 2015

The President
of the European Committee of the Regions

Markku Markkula

The Secretary-General
of the European Committee of the Regions

Jiří Buriánek

III. PROCEDURE

Title	The future of European aquaculture
References	
Legal Basis	Art. 307(4), Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
Procedure	Own-initiative opinion
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	Not applicable
Date of Bureau/President's decision	18 March 2015
Commission responsible	Commission for Natural Resources
Rapporteur	Jesús Gamallo Aller (ES/EPP), Director-General for External Relations and Relations with the European Union, Regional Government of Galicia
Analysis	April 2015
Discussed in commission	19 June 2015
Date adopted in Commission	19 June 2015
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	13 October 2015
Previous Committee opinions	– Opinion on the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: <i>a strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture</i> – Rapporteur: Gamallo Aller Jesús (ES/EPP) – CdR 20/2003 fin¹ – Opinion on the green paper – <i>Reform of the common fisheries policy and a sustainable future for aquaculture</i>– Rapporteur: Mr Ramón Luis Valcárcel Siso (ES/EPP) – CdR 218/2009 fin² – Opinion on <i>Strategic guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture</i> – Rapporteur: Ms Marialuisa Coppola (IT/EPP) – CdR 5292/2013³ – Opinion on <i>State aids to fisheries and aquaculture</i> – Rapporteur: Mr Rhodri Glyn Thomas (UK/EA) – CdR 5293/2013⁴
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	Not applicable

¹ [Official Journal C 256, 24.10.2003 p. 29–35.](#)

² [Official Journal C 141, 29.5.2010, p. 37–44.](#)

³ [Official Journal C 114, 15.4.2014, p. 37–41.](#)

⁴ [Official Journal C 114, 15.4.2014, p. 33–36.](#)