

POLICY BACKGROUND

Policy-relevant issues in Aquaculture & Fisheries

Diversification and Conservation concerning aquaculture



General introduction to the Policy background of Diversification and Conservation concerning aquaculture

One of the main aims of the strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture, COM(2002) 511 was to adopt a more holistic approach to the development of its activities.

The key goal was to create long term employment, in particular in fisheries dependent areas, while simultaneously assuring the availability of healthy, safe and good quality products to consumers. It also aims to ensure that the industry is environmentally sound and observes high animal health and welfare standards.

How far this goal can be achieved depends on just how far the following four objectives can be met. The first relates to the **promotion of market demand**, the second to manage the, sometimes, **competing demands for space** along the coast. The third relates to the **improvement of governance** in the sector, and, last but by no means least, **the increase of the total aquaculture production** volume in the Union by an average of 4% per year.

The last objective is in particular important for the diversification in aquaculture and in its 2002 Strategy, the Commission proposed that the financial intervention in favour of aquaculture be re-directed towards new priorities. And consequently, the FIFG regulation was amended in July 2004, to make it more congruent with the objectives of the aquaculture strategy targeting:

- increases in employment,
- the production of healthy,
- safe and high quality products that comply with market needs,
- and the promotion of more environmentally friendly methods of production.

Through such provisions, it is aimed to encourage

- those forms of aquaculture which are benign to the environment and the natural landscape
- those projects that recover agricultural wastes and use low-quality resources in the production of animal protein, thus contributing to the conservation of wetlands and the preservation of biodiversity.

On the other hand, the EFF will no longer consider the modernisation of existing enterprises a priority for assistance, because it is now preferable to focus on reorienting production towards new species. An increase in aquaculture production is still envisaged, but the Community financial support will concentrate on species diversification and environmentally friendly production for species with good market prospects.

EU policy on introductions of new species¹

One has to distinguish, when referring to “new” species as to whether these are existing species (in Europe) that are new to aquaculture (e.g. cod) or whether they are new to Europe (e.g. African or Asian species). In addition, one has also to consider if they are ‘new’ to a specific area/region in Europe while being native to another.

At the EU level, alien species are identified as one of the key causes of diminished biodiversity, resulting in significant economic and social impacts, which consequently may undermine the attainment of the EU's sustainable development objectives (Gothenburg and Lisbon objectives).

The Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (the Habitats Directive) requires Member States to "ensure that the deliberate introduction into the wild of any species which is not native to their territory is regulated so as not to prejudice natural habitats within their natural range or the wild native fauna and flora and, if they consider it necessary, prohibit such introduction".

In its Biodiversity Action Plan for Fisheries (COM(2001)162, Vol. IV), under Action 9 on "limiting introduction of new species and securing animal health", the European Commission undertook to thoroughly evaluate the potential impact of non-indigenous species in aquaculture and to promote the application of the ICES Code of Practice on the Introductions and Transfers of Marine Organisms, and the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC) Code of Practice and Manual of Procedures for consideration of introductions and transfers of marine and freshwater organisms.

In its strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture the European Commission states that "enlarging the range of farmed species and strains will create new opportunities, and should continue to be actively promoted". However, the Commission warns that the "introduction of new species may also lead to the introduction of diseases, both to farmed and wild stocks" and that the introduction of "foreign species may lead to biodiversity threats if the released or escaped exotics take root in their new environment".

The Commission proposes promoting research on new species and strains (i.e. future intentional introductions), and states:

"The Commission believes that research on species diversification is a top priority, for both fish and molluscs. Selected new species must necessarily respond to customers' preferences, in accordance with new market trends. Efforts should possibly be oriented to species such as seaweed, molluscs and herbivorous fish, which are able to utilise the primary production more efficiently. Another priority is the introduction of effective genetic improvement programmes using selective breeding, as this will lead to considerable gains in productivity. Introduction of new species should be carried out in such a way to avoid the introduction of diseases... As the introduction of new species for farming, in particular when they are not indigenous, may also lead to the introduction of diseases, good and careful management practices including preventative measures at farmers' level are essential, in addition to possible legislative implications."

Concerning the ICES Code of Practice on the Introductions and Transfers of Marine Organisms, the Commission considers that all Member States should adhere to the Code of Practice to prevent accidental introductions. However, there is currently no binding legal obligation to enforce this.

In its Communication (COM(2002)539) to the Council and the European Parliament, the European Commission recognised that "information is lacking to identify, monitor and assess the impact of the introduction of non-indigenous species". The Communication contained the long-term objective of ensuring sustainable use of biodiversity through the protection and conservation of natural habitats and of wild

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fauna and flora in the first instance in the European seas, inter alia, by "preventing the human induced introduction of new non-indigenous species, genetically modified organisms and disease organisms".

The European Commission recently brought forward a Proposal for a Council Regulation concerning use of alien and locally absent species in aquaculture, COM(2006)154 as part of its strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture, COM(2002)511.

This proposal for a Regulation "seeks to introduce an EU framework to ensure adequate protection of the aquatic environment from the risks associated with the use of alien species in aquaculture, building on the existing voluntary ICES and EIFAC rules.

For the purpose of the Regulation, aquaculture is taken to include activities such as bottom cultivation of mussels and both stocking and put-and-take fisheries, which use aquaculture techniques as their basis."

The rationale behind the proposal is that, with the likelihood that the aquaculture industry will continue to use novel species in order to satisfy the needs of the market, it would "be prudent to decouple this economic growth from the potential threats to ecosystems posed by alien species by anticipating and preventing negative biological interaction with indigenous populations, including genetic change, and by restricting the spread of non-target species and other detrimental impacts. This is the main objective of this proposal."

EC research projects on new species within European aquaculture

The summaries (Technical Leaflets) on past and current research projects related to new species in aquaculture are given in the following pages of this section.

- SCALQUAL
- TURPRO

Footnote

1. This section has been abridged from the website of the Marine Workgroup Ireland http://www.mwg.utvinternet.com/iss_ma_impacts_itmo_eu.html