



## Press Release

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Subject: **European aquaculture situation facing Covid-19**

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The Federation of European Aquaculture Producers held on May 29th an online General Meeting with the participation of national aquaculture associations from 17 European countries, both EU and non-EU. The assembly provided the ground for an exchange of views and discussions on the situation of the sector in the different countries in face of the Covid-19 crisis.

The president of the FEAP, Mr Marco Gilmozzi, expressed his concern that **“European aquaculture is facing its biggest challenge for decades and, if the situation is not dealt with correctly, market risks will continue threatening in the aftermath of the sanitary crisis”**.

Primary producers are the weak link in the value chain of aquatic products in Europe. Increasing operational production costs imposed by Covid-19 and the total closure of the important food service sector across Europe and export markets have brought European aquaculture to a critical point. Only retail markets and farm-gate sales are providing relief. The individual situation of the farming companies depends on the species produced, the markets targeted and the countries. **After an almost complete activity standstill in the beginning of March, on the onset of the Covid-19, the businesses have slowly recovered and remain with an average twenty to thirty percent less sales than the same time last year.** Fish farmers have worked hard to keep their workers safe and livestock healthy showing great resilience in their operations and shifting their market aims. Transportation logistics have been a bottleneck for delivery to food markets and for juvenile and live fish movements. Specially in the case of exports to far-away markets, the unavailability of flights with cargo capacity have affected exports almost as much as the situation in the destination markets.

The representatives of the National associations members of FEAP highlighted that in the last three months there has been a shift from initially solving the early operational challenges and stock-in-the-water increases to a search for alternative market developments as the dynamics of consumer shopping and consumption are changing radically. In this situation there is an urgent need for public aid to keep the production and the employment going.

The European Maritime Fisheries Fund (EMFF), planned to run between 2014 and 2020 and with a budget of Euro 6,5 billion, has been underused from its beginning for several causes and more than Euro 1 billion remain today unspent. For this reason, European public administrations set their eyes on it to provide quick and targeted relief for the

fisheries sector (including aquaculture) in front of the Covid-19 crisis. The European Commission had proposed in March and April two successive amendments to the EMFF. The second of which was well targeted and could, in theory, offer effective relief to EU fish farmers. Both amendments were swiftly approved by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe. The FEAP appreciated that. In particular, Regulation (EU) 2020/560 could grant working capital and compensation to aquaculture farmers for the temporary suspension or reduction of production and sales or for additional storage costs occurring between February 1st and December 31st 2020 as a consequence of the COVID-19 outbreak. Unfortunately, not a single Member State of the EU has still today put into practice this regulation.

The FEAP is **extremely concerned that what was envisaged to provide swift aid to the EU aquaculture sector has entered the same doldrums than the conventional EMFF regulation suffered**. Competent authorities responsible to manage the EMFF at national and regional level are proving again that they are unable to handle these funds in an effective way.

This situation creates further concerns in FEAP as the next EMFF (2021-2027) is already looming in the horizon. This next fund, that will probably be called European Maritime Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF), has been designed as a very flexible fund but the little creativity and boldness that competent authorities throughout the EU are showing prove again that they only work effectively with very prescriptive regulations.

The president of the FEAP insisted that the European Commission and the national authorities should start taking care of the potential deep market crisis that will occur once the Covid-19 sanitary crisis is over and the aquatic product markets get flooded with fish arriving from European, non-European and distant producing countries, not only from aquaculture production but also from capture fisheries. Good communication, more promotion and vigilance of fair trade will be required. The current Common Fisheries Policy considers Producer Organisations (POs) as key for the development of a viable and responsible aquaculture industry. In this sense, the FEAP has been recommending its member associations to convert into POs. Several are already operational in countries like Greece, Poland, UK, Italy or Spain. These PO's could articulate solutions to this situation through their Production and Marketing Plans. Furthermore, the PO's could cooperate between them for the sustainability of the European aquaculture sector that provides healthy, nutritious, tasty and locally produced food at an affordable price.

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