



Press Release

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Subject: **The less visible conclusions of FAO's 2020 SOFIA report**

Every second year FAO continues to highlight the significant and growing worldwide role of fisheries and aquaculture in providing food, nutrition and employment. The 2020 edition of its unmatched report *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA)* has just been unveiled and is accurately titled *Sustainability in Action*. It pursues, among other objectives, the Sustainability Development Goal number 14 of the United Nations 2030 Agenda: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

This exceptionally valuable report provides technical insight and factual information on a sector that is crucial for societal success around the world. In it, aquatic products are recognized not only as some of the healthiest foods on the planet but also as some of the less impactful on the natural environment.

SOFIA 2020 informs that worldwide total aquaculture harvest in 2018 reached an all-time record of 114,5 million tonnes. Finfish production dominated (54.3 million tonnes), followed by algae (32.4 million tonnes), molluscs (17.7 million tonnes) and crustaceans (9.4 million tonnes). But these impressive quantities should not mask the fact that the global annual growth rate of aquaculture has greatly declined over the last years. After decades of 6% to 10% interannual growth rates, 2018 has seen an increase of only 2,0% over 2017. Two decades ago Europe already walked that path in advance and, since the turn of the century, aquaculture production in almost all European countries has stagnated.

FAO identifies a number of factors contributing to this worrying slowdown. These include the adoption of broader environmental regulations, reduced availability of water and suitable production locations, increasing outbreaks of aquatic animal diseases and decreasing aquaculture productivity gains. Nevertheless, FAO recognizes countries in which aquaculture production continues to grow, both developing (like Egypt, India, Indonesia, Viet Nam or Bangladesh) and developed (like Norway or Chile). The reasons for these exceptions are region dependant, but a trend is clear: in the twenty-first century aquaculture growth requires political will to promote appropriate policies, strategies, and private and public investment. Certainly, further technical issues have to be addressed on feeds, genetic selection, biosecurity, disease control, digital innovation and business developments. But from the European Union we can showcase that solving these hurdles is clearly not enough. Even the adoption of aquaculture spatial planning or ecologically sound technological innovation are necessary but never sufficient.

European aquaculture producers can warn the rest of the world that the biggest challenge for the continued advancement of this sector is the adoption of appropriate general governance decisions aiming specifically to promote the development of aquaculture amid all other economic activities.

An added problem is that public authorities and decision makers that are responsible for the creation and implementation of such general governance regulations will not read SOFIA 2020. Quite probably they will have never heard of it.

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