

On the ECA special report on the EU aquaculture policy and general EU aquaculture policies

Background

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) released on November 19th, 2023 a special report on the EU aquaculture policy titled 'Stagnating production and unclear results despite increased EU funding'¹. Simultaneously, the European Commission published a reply² to that document.

In its report, the ECA examines whether the European Commission (EC) and the Member States (MS) have effectively promoted the sustainable development of EU aquaculture. It concludes that while the EU's strategic framework for aquaculture has improved in recent years EU aquaculture has seen little growth, and there are no reliable indicators to track the sector's sustainability and the contribution of the increased EU funding to the development of EU aquaculture. ECA recommends supporting MS in addressing the obstacles to the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, improving the targeting of EU funds, and enhancing the monitoring of both EU funding's performance and environmental sustainability.

In the Commission's reply to ECA, released at the same time, the Commission details the work it carries out on aquaculture, including the 2021 Strategic Guidelines, the Open Method for Coordination, the Aquaculture Assistance Mechanism, and its partial monitoring of the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF). However, the EC recognises that under shared management it cannot continuously monitor the effectiveness of the use of EU funds nor, even more broadly, the environmental sustainability of EU aquaculture altogether. The Commission believes that there is a solid basis to allow the EU aquaculture sector to grow and reach its full potential in terms of contributing to the objectives of the European Green Deal. However, it considers that it is still early to evaluate the results of the new strategy. Concerning the funding to support aquaculture, the Commission agrees on the need for sound monitoring. At the same time, it trusts that the checking system of EMFAF has been improved and simplified, based on the experience with EMFF.

The previous version of the Commission's *Strategic guidelines* (from 2013) encouraged MS to set objectives for aquaculture production growth in their plans for aquaculture, expressed in terms of both volume and value. However, in its 2021 *Strategic guidelines*, the Commission does not explicitly recommend that the member states set aquaculture production growth targets in their plans for the 2021-2030 period.

¹ https://www.eca.europa.eu/ECAPublications/SR-2023-25/SR-2023-25_EN.pdf

² https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECAReplies/COM-Replies-SR-2023-25/COM-Replies-SR-2023-25_EN.pdf