

## FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN AQUACULTURE PRODUCERS

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### **The future of EU aquaculture. Javier Ojeda.** Informal Meeting of EU Ministers of Fisheries 24-25 March 2024 Bruges

Good morning. Esteemed Ministers, Honourable Mr Sinkevicius, Honourable Mr Karleskind, dear colleagues and friends.

It is a privilege for me to address such a distinguished gathering in this misty morning in beautiful Bruges to focus on the future of EU aquaculture.

Aquaculture in the EU has seen no production growth in the last 25 years. Neither in finfish, shellfish, algae nor crustaceans farming.

This means that during the span of the professional lives of today's aquaculture farmers these have suffered continuous dissatisfaction, and EU aquaculture undertakings (mainly micro and small enterprises) have undergone a quarter of a century of frustration and insufficient profitability.

At the same time, EU aquaculture farmers have excelled in reducing and controlling their environmental footprint making the most possible efficient use of natural resources, water and space.

These circumstances have occurred regardless of the very high expectations set by FAO for global aquaculture and contrasts especially with solid finfish farming growth in neighbouring countries like Norway, Turkey, or Iceland.

The reasons for the dire situation of aquaculture in the EU have been thoroughly analysed. However, only today do we dare point our finger at the core reason. Let me hint to you that the lengthy administrative procedures and complex spatial planning (generally considered the culprits) are not causes but consequences of a deeper underlying issue.

I am not expecting any of you to openly acknowledge it, but I am convinced that in your internal self you will agree with FEAP that the suffocating EU environmental legal framework is making primary production of food in the EU an impossible mission. And this especially applies to aquaculture, one of the activities with the lowest environmental footprint but that necessarily takes place in public domain spaces.

DG MARE and you, National ministries for fisheries, do your best to mitigate the situation, but this always falls way too short.

We are not requesting lowering the environmental standards of the EU which we are all proud of. What I am saying is that the EU needs to balance environmental protection with food production objectives. The ministries of the environment of your Member States, and the regional (subnational) environmental authorities of your countries, should stop gold-plating EU environmental legislation and avoid unnecessary misuse in the implementation of the precautionary principle.

Today food production in the EU for food autonomy and the levelling of the playing field of aquatic products' international trade can be levers to reverse the situation.

To change the tide the following is needed:

- (1) Sustainable intensification of finfish and shellfish production has to be promoted to make the most efficient use of space, water and natural resources, following the principles set in FAO's Blue Transformation.
- (2) The European Commission should not create mirage expectations on niche production systems like algae, low trophic species, integrated multitrophic systems, and organic aquaculture. These have virtues but will not solve the main block I mentioned before while it enlarges the gap between citizen's expectations and market reality making social acceptance more complex day by day.
- (3) Solid indicators for social, economic and environmental sustainability must be identified and implemented. They will provide answers to the uncomfortable concerns of the European Court of Auditors.
- (4) A market-level playing field is needed in international trade with imports, just like clear labelling for aquatic food (especially in Horeca) to allow consumers to make responsible choices.
- (5) Finally, the EU should create and implement an Aquaculture Common Policy to mainstream aquaculture by introducing shared competence between the EC and the MS on aquaculture. This Aquaculture Common Policy should set compulsory production quantitative objectives for the development of sustainable aquaculture.

As a first step, FEAP is requesting the EC and MS to open a Strategic Dialogue on the future of EU aquaculture, just like you have done for agriculture: a new forum to shape a shared vision for the future of the EU's aqua farming and adapt EU policies with this sector needs in mind. Just like the President of the European Commission has offered to EU land farmers.

Thank you.