Position Paper

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Organic fish farming demands coherence between EU policies

Background

EU policies for organic fish farming. The advancement of organic production in general, and organic fish farming in particular (as a subsector of organic aquaculture), is encouraged by the European Union policies. The Farm to Fork strategy[1] established in 2020, which aims to increase food production in the EU while making food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly, targets 25% of the EU's agricultural land under organic farming by 2030 and a significant increase in organic aquaculture. The EU Biodiversity Strategy[2] of 2020 states that organic farming holds great potential for farmers and consumers. In 2021, the EU Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production[3] identified organic aquaculture as a sector with potential development. Moreover, in 2021 the *EU Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030*[4] defined the promotion of organic aquaculture as a key food production procedure. The organic production and labelling rules are set in Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and the Council[5].

The situation of organic fish farming production in the EU. As identified by EUMOFA[6] and the AAC[7], several significant technical and regulatory barriers exist that inhibit the growth of the organic fish farming sector in the EU and are currently causing its decline. Fish farming in general in the EU is indeed underperforming when compared to its situation in Third countries, but organic fish farming production in the EU is actually falling even before taking off. EUMOFA has estimated that the total organic aquaculture production at the EU 27 level was 74,032 tonnes in 2020, accounting for 6.4% of the total EU aquaculture production. Organic aquaculture production has increased by 60% compared to 2015 due to a growth in organic mussel production that masks the regrettable situation of organic finfish farming. EUMOFA has identified a decrease in organic Atlantic salmon production (12,870 tonnes in 2020 compared to a peak of 16,481 tonnes in 2017), stability of organic rainbow trout production (4,590 tonnes in 2020 compared to 4,700 tonnes in 2015) but in severe decline since 2020, a decrease in organic carp production (estimated at 3,562 tonnes in 2020 but 7,000 tonnes in 2015), and European seabass/Gilthead seabream was the only finfish group on a slightly increasing trend (2,750 tonnes in 2020 and 2,000 tonnes in 2015) but showing a worrying decline from 2022 onwards.

[1] European Commission Communication on the Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system (COM(2020) 381 final) Link

[2] European Commission Communication on the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (COM(2020) 380 final) Link

[3] European Commission Communication on an Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production (COM(2021) 141 final) Link

[4] European Commission Communication on the EU Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030 (COM(2021) 236 final) Link

[5] Regulation (EU) 2018/848 of the European Parliament and of the Council on organic production and labelling of organic products and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 834/2007 Link

[6] EUMOFA report on Organic Aquaculture in the EU, May 2022 Link

[7] AAC recommendation on Organic Aquaculture, July 2023 Link