

Enabling adaptation: a Climate Agenda for European fish farming

Overview

Climate change is one of the defining challenges of our era, and its impacts are being felt across all sectors, including aquaculture. In Europe, fish farming is increasingly affected by rising water temperatures, shifting precipitation patterns, more frequent extreme weather events, and changing marine and freshwater conditions. These pressures are intensifying, putting the resilience and sustainability of the sector to the test.

In response, fish farmers are already taking steps to adapt, adjusting farming practices, implementing new technologies, and investing in more resilient systems. However, their ability to respond effectively remains constrained by persistent shortcomings in the legal and regulatory framework. These longstanding issues, which have long hindered innovation and flexibility, are now becoming critical obstacles to climate adaptation.

Unlocking European fish farming's full adaptive potential requires urgent action to modernise and align the legal framework with today's climate realities. Without it, the sector cannot face the challenges ahead with the speed and confidence that are now essential.

Ongoing adaptation measures

European fish farming is a forward-looking and innovative sector that is already taking concrete steps to address the impacts of climate change. Adaptation measures are being implemented across the sector, some tailored to specific sites or species, others with broader applicability. These measures range from simple adjustments to highly complex interventions, reflecting the diversity of environments and production systems in European fish farming.

Below is a list of tangible and practical climate change adaptation measures currently being adopted by undertakings in the European fish farming sector. It is important to note that these examples are not universally applicable to all fish farming operations; rather, they illustrate how specific ventures have addressed their particular challenges:

Farm management and operational adaptation

- Adjustment of fish management practices in sea farms to better cope with stormier weather by reducing the time fish spend in pens in the sea, stocking larger fish, or at lower densities. Examples occur in Atlantic salmon, seabass, and seabream farms.