

## FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN AQUACULTURE PRODUCERS

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## Press Release

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### **Sustainable aquaculture in action: production, science and policy working together in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea**

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Over 130 persons gathered in Athens, Greece, and online for the FEAP–GFCM Technical Consultation on Sustainable Aquaculture Practices, highlighting the importance of structured producer engagement in regional aquaculture governance.

The two-day event, jointly organized by the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with financial support from the European Union, brought together producers, national authorities, experts from the GFCM Technical Advisory Groups (TAG) and Aquaculture Demonstration Centres, researchers and sector associations from across the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. The active participation of national authorities and the Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization further strengthened the practical focus of the discussions.

#### **A strategic pillar of regional food security**

Aquaculture continues to consolidate its role in Mediterranean and Black Sea aquatic food systems. According to The State of Mediterranean and Black Sea Fisheries 2025, total aquaculture production in 2023 reached 2.97 million tonnes, generating approximately USD 9.3 billion. Marine and brackish water aquaculture accounted for 940 000 tonnes, representing more than 45 percent of total aquatic food production in the region.

With projections indicating that fisheries and aquaculture production will need to increase by 14 to 29 percent by 2050 to meet future demand, sustainable aquaculture development is increasingly recognized as a central component of food security, economic resilience and FAO's Blue Transformation vision.

#### **Regulatory clarity as a condition for sustainable investment**

During the consultation, participants examined governance frameworks and responsible investment conditions needed to ensure balanced growth. Discussions underscored the importance of aligning environmental, social and governance principles with commercial viability and long-term planning.

Licensing complexity and administrative fragmentation were identified as structural challenges in several countries. Participants highlighted the need for clearer procedures, improved interinstitutional coordination and predictable timelines. The digitalization of administrative processes and the establishment of transparent spatial planning frameworks were presented as practical solutions to reduce bottlenecks and enhance investor confidence.

*"Sustainable growth depends not only on innovation, but on regulatory clarity and predictable frameworks,"* noted Philippos Papageorgiou, TAG leader on Governance and Responsible Investment.

### **Science-based spatial planning and measurable environmental performance**

Marine spatial planning and allocated zones for aquaculture were considered as key tools for balancing environmental protection with sustainable production. Participants emphasized that monitoring frameworks must be science-based, proportionate and harmonized, enabling operators to demonstrate compliance while avoiding unnecessary duplication.

The consultation also explored restorative and resource-efficient aquaculture systems, including integrated multitrophic aquaculture, recirculating aquaculture systems and bivalve production. These models were discussed in the context of ecosystem services, nutrient management and climate adaptation. Participants also underscored the importance of measurable indicators and economic feasibility when considering scaling-up opportunities.

### **Health management and climate adaptation as core operational priorities**

Aquatic animal health and welfare were central themes throughout the two-day consultation. Experts and producers exchanged experiences on pathogen management, vaccination strategies, zoning approaches and antimicrobial resistance.

Rising sea temperatures, extreme weather events and shifting disease patterns were recognized as increasing risks to farm-level stability. Participants underlined the urgency of strengthened biosecurity protocols, early-warning systems and regional coordination mechanisms to mitigate transboundary threats.

*"Climate change is already shaping operational decisions. Adaptation is no longer optional; it is integral to farm management,"* observed Alessio Bonaldo, TAG leader on Innovation and Technology, Professor at Bologna University.

Climate-smart aquaculture practices, improved monitoring tools and enhanced data sharing were identified as essential components of resilience.

### **Efficiency gains across the value chain to reduce losses and strengthen competitiveness**

Improving competitiveness through greater value chain efficiency was another key topic of discussion. Participants reviewed pre-harvest losses, processing inefficiencies and market-related constraints affecting producers across the region.

Building on FAO methodologies, upcoming pilot surveys will assess loss points along the aquaculture chain, with the objective of translating findings into targeted technical recommendations. Reducing food loss was framed not only as a sustainability measure but also as an economic opportunity to enhance profitability and resource efficiency.

### **Digital transformation and artificial intelligence as emerging growth drivers**

Innovation and digital transformation featured prominently in the discussions, including a dedicated exchange on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in aquaculture operations.

Participants explored measurable value creation through precision feeding, biomass estimation, water quality monitoring, predictive maintenance and climate forecasting. At the beginning of the session, approximately one-third of participants indicated they were already using artificial intelligence tools in their operations; by the end, nearly all expressed interest in wider implementation.

Successful digital uptake, however, will require targeted training, accessible investment instruments and practical demonstration environments, particularly for small- and medium-sized enterprises.

### **From consultation to policy guidance**

The consolidated outputs of the technical consultation will be submitted to the GFCM Committee on Aquaculture and, subsequently, the annual session of the GFCM, for further consideration. *“By reinforcing direct interactions between the Technical Advisory Groups and producers, the discussions strengthened a producer-driven approach to sustainable aquaculture development in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea,”* stated Houssam Hamza, GFCM Aquaculture Officer.

Javier Ojeda, Secretary General of FEAP also stressed that *“Sustainable growth of aquaculture depends not only on innovation, but on regulatory clarity and predictable frameworks. FEAP welcomes the opportunity to work with the GFCM and national authorities to streamline regulatory frameworks and create investment conditions that reward responsible aquaculture undertakings.”*

Through continued cooperation among producers, national administrations and regional institutions, the sector is advancing towards a more resilient, efficient and sustainable future, in line with the objectives of the GFCM 2030 Strategy and FAO’s Blue Transformation vision.

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### **About the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers**

*The Federation of European Aquaculture Producers is an organisation that represents the European fish farming profession and is based in Brussels. FEAP is composed of 25 national fish farming associations from 23 countries, both EU and non-EU. The combined yearly production of FEAP members surpasses 2,5 million tonnes of nutritious, safe, delicious, and environmentally sustainable fish.*

### **About the GFCM**

*The General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is a regional fisheries management organization operating under the framework of FAO, whose competence extends over all marine waters of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Its main objective is to ensure the conservation and the sustainable use of living marine resources, as well as the sustainable development of aquaculture.*

*GFCM Members include 24 contracting parties (Albania, Algeria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, European Union, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Ukraine, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Türkiye) and six cooperating non-contracting parties (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Jordan, Moldova, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine).*

### **About the cooperation between FEAP and GFCM**

*FEAP actively supports the **GFCM 2030 Strategy for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture** by promoting and implementing its key components within the European aquaculture sector. FEAP helps disseminate and apply the GFCM’s guidelines to strengthen sustainability and resilience in aquaculture. It also co-organises capacity-building events and experience-exchange initiatives with GFCM members and stakeholders, including programmes to empower women’s leadership in sustainable aquaculture, thereby contributing directly to the Strategy’s objectives for sustainable growth, stakeholder participation, and knowledge sharing across the Mediterranean and Black Sea region. <https://feap.info/feap-activities-supporting-the-gfcm-2030-strategy/>*

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