FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN
AQUACULTURE PRODUCERS

Statement

On the European Commission's Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture

27 October 2026

Introduction

The Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP) welcomes the European Commission's Communication on the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture[1], adopted on 20 October 2026. The Vision states that by 2040 EU aquaculture will be "a strategic and fully integrated pillar of the EU's sustainable food system", expanding EU production capacity and reducing the EU's trade deficit in aquatic products. It also acknowledges that aquaculture production is stagnating and that EU production covers only 38% of EU consumption.

FEAP considers that the Vision sets the right direction for EU aquaculture and that it has heard several long-standing requests from fish farmers. However, the Vision remains a statement of intent. It sets no quantitative growth target or implementation pathway, and it defers its decisive instruments to 2027. Its value for European fish farmers will depend on what the Commission proposes next and on how Member States apply it.

What FEAP welcomes

1. A legislative proposal for aquaculture by the end of 2027. The Commission will propose a clear, simplified and coherent regulatory and administrative framework across the EU that provides certainty for investment and new entrants, with flexible and adaptive licensing (phased development, adaptive capacity adjustments and simplified procedures for low-impact systems), without lowering environmental standards. This responds to FEAP's call to replace non-binding tools (Strategic Guidelines, national strategic plans, open method of coordination), which have not reversed 25 years of stagnation, with binding governance.

2. Aquaculture as a matter of food security and strategic autonomy. The Vision links aquaculture growth to Europe's food and nutritional security, recalls that over 60% of EU aquatic food consumption is imported, and supports alternative feed ingredients and hatchery capacity to reduce dependency on imported inputs. It also recognises that larger enterprises drive efficiency, innovation and production capacity.

3. Food production as a priority use of space. The Vision names food production as a strategic priority use of maritime space, "particularly as land-based food production faces increasing constraints", and calls for fully integrating aquaculture into maritime spatial planning by 2040, while also considering economies of scale.

[1] Communication from the Commission, Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture, COM(2026) 701 final, Strasbourg, 20 October 2026.

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4. Inland aquaculture is recognised. Freshwater and transitional-water farms are to be supported through integrated spatial and water resource planning, coherent with River Basin Management Plans and, where relevant, Flood Risk Management Plans and Natura 2000 objectives. The European Ocean Pact overlooked inland farms; now they have a place in the EU's long-term vision. Rewarding the ecosystem services of nature-positive aquaculture is particularly relevant for the fishponds that maintain around 250,000 hectares of EU wetlands.

5. Better consumer information and a fairer market. By 2029, the Commission will apply digital traceability to all products, including processed products and imports, and will consider extending mandatory consumer information to prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products. Today, canned or marinated fish, ready meals, and caviar do not have to tell consumers where and how the fish was produced, so consumers cannot distinguish EU-farmed fish from imports. The 2027 campaign on EU-produced aquatic food will also help.

6. Climate adaptation, skills and generational renewal. The Vision encourages aquaculture-specific measures in national climate adaptation plans, as farms face growing losses from harmful algal blooms, jellyfish and parasites. It calls for more specialised training in aquatic animal health and welfare, and the Blue Generational Renewal Strategy (2027) will consider support for access to a first aquaculture business.

Key concerns

1. There is no quantitative target for growth. The Vision promises to expand EU production capacity but sets neither EU aquaculture production target for 2040, nor milestones to reduce the import dependency. no national contributions, no milestones and no performance indicators. Environmental authorities, which hold the key to licensing, will keep pursuing only their own quantitative targets unless food production is given equal weight. The binding EU finfish production target for 2040 that FEAP asked for in March 2026 is missing.

2. The diagnosis stops at procedures. The Vision recognises that aquaculture growth depends on a predictable framework for licensing and access to space, but does not analyse why licensing a new farm still takes five to eight years. Lengthy procedures are a symptom. The root cause is an excessively burdensome EU legal framework, environmental legislation in particular, often compounded by gold-plating and a disproportionate application of the precautionary principle, which creates a spatial squeeze. FEAP also disagrees that the sector needs to "adapt and transform": EU aquaculture is already among the world's most environmentally sustainable and does not need significant transformation; it needs room to grow.

3. Finfish farming receives little attention. The Vision's growth examples focus on low-trophic species: molluscs and seaweed combined with offshore wind, bivalves and algae in marine protected areas, and more low-trophic production as a path for the energy transition. The word finfish does not appear in the text, yet farmed finfish such as seabass, seabream, rainbow trout and salmon are essential to replace imports. For fed species, the origin of feed raw materials matters more than the species' trophic level, and FAO's sustainable intensification ("more with less") is the right path.

4. Fish welfare rules must remain workable. The Commission will further develop the EU framework for the welfare of farmed aquatic animals across all stages of production. FEAP supports science-based welfare improvements, but further rules must be species-specific,

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proportionate, built on established good practices and compatible with farm viability: no prohibition where no solution is available. Welfare cannot be decoupled from viability.

5. Funding is insufficient and not earmarked. The proposed minimum reserved allocation of EUR 2 billion under the national and regional partnership plans must cover all core functions of the Common Fisheries Policy, including control and data collection, with no dedicated allocation for aquaculture. Support for productive investment and POs collective initiatives remains necessary, even though funding alone cannot unlock growth without regulatory change.

6. Upholding a level playing field: Despite clear calls from EU co-legislators and the sector, reinforced by the findings of the CFP evaluation, the Vision fails to tackle the competitive disadvantages arising from unequal production standards for EU and imported products and the impact of EU trade policy on European producers. Instead, it merely proposes considering the extension of mandatory consumer information to prepared and preserved fishery and aquaculture products.

7. Accountability and delivery: An effective long-term vision must be backed by an accountability framework. The experience of the Strategic Guidelines offers a clear lesson: commitments without measurable targets, clear timetables and effective follow-up do not guarantee progress. Yet, this Vison risk remaining another EU policy of intentions. Accountability must extend to both the Commission and Member States.

6. Important gaps remain. Extending mandatory consumer information is only "considered", and it does not reach out-of-home consumption, where a large share of fish is eaten. The Vision is silent on predators, notably cormorants, which cause severe losses, particularly on inland farms. And aquaculture still lacks a policy of its own, a "legal orphanhood" that has contributed to 25 years of stagnation.

FEAP position

FEAP considers the Vision 2040 a positive starting point, not a result. The 2027 legislative proposal will be one of the missing elements that will determine whether it succeeds or fails. FEAP calls on the Commission to ensure that this proposal is binding on Member States, with minimum harmonised rules and deadlines for authorisations; gives food production the same weight as environmental protection, including a binding EU finfish production target for 2040 with national contributions, milestones and indicators; addresses root causes, informed by on-site reality checks in Member States; applies equally to marine, brackish and freshwater aquaculture, with science-based, species-specific and proportionate rules; and is backed by dedicated funding for productive investment in the next Multiannual Financial Framework. In the longer term, these elements should form the basis of a Common Aquaculture Policy.

The Vision invites Member States and regions to translate it into local realities, and that is where it will be judged, farm by farm and file by file. FEAP's members will measure it by one simple indicator: how long it takes to license a new farm. Today, that is still five to eight years.

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The Federation reaffirms its commitment to working with the EU institutions and Member States so that by 2040 Europe talks about what its aquaculture has achieved, not about its potential.

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.

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