

Position paper

On the DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 10th SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE for COFI 34

27 January 2021

Background

The 34th Session of FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI 34)¹ will take place online on 1-5 February 2021. FEAP has an Observer Status with COFI and with its Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (SCA). Due to the limitations of virtual meetings, for some agenda items of the 34th Session the exchange of opinions will take place via a Written Correspondence Procedure and will be presented in a Chair's summary at the beginning of each agenda item. For this reason, the contributions from COFI Members (government delegations) and Observers have been requested to be received in writing.

The most relevant items for aquaculture in the COFI 34 relate to the approval of the report on the *Decisions and recommendations of the 10th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture*² that took place in Trondheim, Norway, on 23–27 August 2019 (Item 5). In this sense, the 34th Session of COFI is expected to:

- a) Endorse the report of the 10th SCA³;
- b) Provide guidance with regard to the work of FAO in the field of aquaculture, and in particular the preparation of the Global Conference on Aquaculture Millennium+20 and the Global Integrated Sustainable Aquaculture Programme;
- c) Take note of the accomplishments of the implementation of the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2016–2020 in aquaculture and provide guidance on the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2021–2025⁴;
- d) Welcome the publication of the report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and take note of the development of a draft Global Plan of Action for Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture⁵.

¹ Committee on Fisheries 34th Session, 1–5 February 2021 <http://www.fao.org/about/meetings/cofi/en/>

² Decisions and recommendations of the 10th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture <http://www.fao.org/3/ne706en/ne706en.pdf>

³ Report of the Tenth Session of the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, Trondheim, Norway, 23–27 August 2019 <http://www.fao.org/3/ca7417t/ca7417t.pdf>

⁴ Implementation of the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) 2016–2020 in aquaculture and the proposal of FAO Action Plan on AMR (2021–2025) <http://www.fao.org/3/ne476en/ne476en.pdf>

⁵ Seventeenth Regular Session of the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, Rome, 18–22 February 2019 <http://www.fao.org/3/mz618en/mz618en.pdf>

This Position paper expresses the FEAP's view on the decisions that are to be adopted by the 34th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries. It provides an outlook on the report of the 10th Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, and also on the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance and on the report on the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

The FEAP position

On the Fisheries Division's efforts in implementing the recommendations of the past sessions of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture

In its report the SCA highlights several specific areas, including the ecosystem approach to aquaculture, spatial planning for aquaculture, agroecology, adaptation to climate change and the development of Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture and called on the FAO to further develop and expand related tools.

→ FEAP brings to the attention of COFI 34 that the European Commission is about to conclude its review of the *Strategic Guidelines for the Sustainable Development of EU Aquaculture*⁶ that date back to 2013. These have proven very accurate and useful in flagging the bottlenecks faced by aquaculture in the European Union where growth has come to a standstill since the turn of the century. The new European Union guidelines can be useful for FAO's own Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture because the issues that the former face should be seen as leading indicators for the challenges that will be faced by other COFI Members in the near future. The new Strategic Guidelines for the Sustainable Development of EU Aquaculture will be published by the European Commission in spring 2021.

On aquaculture's contribution to ending hunger, securing food supplies and promoting good health and dietary practices

FEAP fully agrees with the call of the SCA to raise awareness of the health benefits of fish and enhance consumer acceptance of aquaculture products.

→ This Federation highlights that the stagnation of aquaculture production growth in the European Union is related to insufficient social acceptance of this activity. This unsatisfactory social recognition has as a direct consequence the almost impossible licensing of new farms or the enlargement of existing ones and the increasing amount of red tape imposed to any request for authorisations or permits.

→ FEAP expresses to COFI the importance to communicate to society the fact that to face the current trend of increasing global population and limited global natural resources the sustainable intensification of food production is the responsible way forward. In the case of aquaculture, extensive aquaculture is appropriate for specific locations, but aquaculture will only be able to unlock its potential as a food source through its sustainable intensification.

⁶ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions COM(2013) 229 final: Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0229&from=EN>

→ FEAP also believes that aquaculture social acceptance can be improved by means of communicating the ecosystem services that it can provide, including on climate change mitigation.

On aquaculture innovations, their upscaling and technology transfer to increase efficiency, combat environmental degradation and adapt to climate change

FEAP strongly supports the request for more technical support on aquaculture innovation and that aquaculture innovation is necessary for its sustainable development.

→ However, beyond the list of innovation areas referred to in the report, FEAP highlights the need to encourage innovation in offshore aquaculture systems, including engineering, zootechnical and management aspects.

→ FEAP also stresses again the essential role of farmers associations in aquaculture. These organisations are useful for many different facets of aquaculture, but mostly for supporting innovation.

→ FEAP finally points to the relevance for aquaculture for innovation to engage in improving fish welfare practices and its management through the use of operational indicators.

On the prevention and management of aquatic animal disease risks in aquaculture through a progressive management pathway

FEAP welcomes the formation of an FAO Technical Working Group to develop further the Progressive Management Pathway for Improving Aquaculture Biosecurity (PMP/AB) and associated tools and mechanisms⁷.

→ Furthermore, FEAP expresses its interest to engage its Fish Health and Welfare Committee and contribute to the Technical Working Group in reducing disease burden, improving health at farm and national levels and minimizing global spread of diseases.

On the State of the World's Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and possible follow-up

FEAP welcomes the draft objectives, principles and potential strategic priorities of the Global Plan of Action for Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture and encourages its implementation.

→ However, FEAP recommends for the case of aquaculture to expand the genetic banking beyond fish species and into fish pathogens (parasites, bacteria and viruses). This resource will be useful for the development of veterinary treatments such as vaccines, contributing to improve aquaculture biosecurity, to reduce disease burden, to improve fish health at farm and national levels.

⁷ Such as: governance, centres for collaboration, assessment tools, surveillance checklists, biosecurity action plans, risk analyses, microbiome studies and microbial management protocols, aquaculture health economics and emergency preparedness tools, and guidance on public-private partnership

Procedural comments

This FEAP Position paper is delivered to COFI following its Written Correspondence Procedure (WCP). It will be submitted in written format to FAO-COFI@fao.org by Wednesday, 27 January 2021.

About the FEAP

The Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP) represents 22 national associations from 21 countries across Europe. Our organisation works for the sustainability of the European fish farming profession, representing both marine and freshwater finfish, with a consolidated annual production of 2,574,000 t.