



The EU gets serious about sustainable aquaculture and INAPRO gives its contribution

INAPRO participates to the discussion on the development of sustainable aquaculture launched by the European Commission and promotes aquaponics as an answer to the challenge of sustainable food production.

The European Union is showing its support to the aquaculture sector. According to Karmenu Vella, EU Commissioner for Fisheries, a political action is needed to boost the production of aquaculture products in Europe. Despite the fact that consumption of seafood in the EU is continuously increasing, putting pressure on already overexploited fish stocks, the growth of the European aquaculture sector has remained stable. The latest figures released by the European Commission show that 65% of the fish consumed in the EU is imported while only the 5% of the global aquaculture production come from Europe¹.

The European Commission is well aware of the market, bureaucratic and spatial barriers that slow down the spread of fish farming in the EU. Moreover, as EU citizens are more and more concerned with food quality and protection of the environment, it is important to support the sustainable development of this crucial sector.

Recently, the European Commission published a brief² to evaluate the environmental impact of aquaculture and inquired on how it could be promoted in a sustainable way. The brief presents the state of the art and analyses some of the latest development in aquaculture research aiming at decreasing the feed-conversion ratio, developing the use of alternative fish feed and reducing the use of antibiotics in fish farms. It is evident that aquaculture could help resolve many issues related to food security but clear rules are needed or its growth could prove to be counterproductive by increasing the pressure on small fish stocks (used as feed in fish farms) and by creating negative impacts on the ecosystems.

INAPRO is following closely the work of the European Union on this topic and was invited by the European Commission to participate to the conference “Aquaculture in Europe: a model for the future” which took place at the end of May in the framework of EXPO Milano. The conference was attended by the representatives of the aquaculture sector, researchers, NGOs, policymakers and general public. According to the outcome of the discussion, the EU aquaculture sector can become more sustainable with the implementation of some targeted improvements related to fish feed, use of antibiotics and information to consumers in order to switch their preferences to different fish species, in particular to herbivorous or omnivorous fish. Furthermore, it was acknowledged that technical innovations and green technologies such as aquaponics could overcome some of the environmental implications of traditional aquaculture and respond to the challenge of sustainable food production.

Furthermore, the European Commission is working on a feasibility study to assess the legal, economic and social implication of creating an EU Ecolabel for fisheries and aquaculture products. The EU Ecolabel is a

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019/vella/announcements/aquaculture-europe-model-future-expo-2015-milan-italy_en

² http://ec.europa.eu/environment/integration/research/newsalert/pdf/sustainable_aquaculture_FB11_en.pdf



voluntary label scheme aimed at helping consumers in identifying products and services that have a reduced impact on the environment. In order to feed the feasibility study and to receive contributions by a wider audience, the Commission launched a public consultation on the same topic. An EU Ecolabel would support the market of sustainable seafood and would widespread the idea that fish farmed in the EU are healthy and produced in a sustainable way. Thanks to the collaboration of Mueritzfischer, INAPRO responded to the consultation highlighting the importance of including aquaponics products as eligible for certification based on environmental standards.

Following the launch of the public consultation, the Committee of Fisheries of the European Parliament organised a public hearing, attended by INAPRO, in order to discuss the issue of the EU Ecolabel with the sector and other interested parties. The hearing represented a good occasion to reflect upon the minimum standards that should be applied and upon the role that public authorities should play.

The European Commission and the Parliament seem to recognise the importance of supporting the sustainable development of the European aquaculture sector. As several barriers that slow down the spread of fish farms depend on national legislation, it would be important to involve Member States into the discussion, in order to open the market and support the development of a sector that could create growth and jobs and strengthen the EU food security at the same time.