

**PROFET Workshop
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The Sustainable Development of Aquaculture

**Speech by Alessandro Piccioli
Principal administrator, Unit “Aquaculture”
European Commission, Directorate general Fisheries**

I am very pleased to be with you today, because in the Aquaculture unit of the European Commission, where I work, we are aware that research is an essential need for the aquaculture sector, and that it is very important to strengthen the links between the industry and the world of aquaculture research in Europe. To this extent, this series of PROFET regional workshops is having a success going beyond the expectations, which gives new ideas on the most cost-effective way of spreading information.

I have been requested to speak about the Commission strategy on aquaculture, its links with research and its recent developments.

Until recently, the Community policy for aquaculture was expressed primarily through its fisheries structural instrument, the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance. But the FIFG, as it is usually called, has essentially just provided capital grants for companies' physical investments. What was still missing was a clear political orientation on the whole aquaculture sector.

So, in September 2002 the European Commission presented a communication to the Council and the Parliament on “A strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture”. This document does not only refer to European Union financial aid, it encompasses the whole sector, its problems, and the possible solutions... not necessarily at European level.

The fundamental aim of the strategy is the maintenance of competitiveness, productivity and durability of the aquaculture sector. The strategy aims to create the conditions that will enable the aquaculture producers to offer a healthy product in the quantities requested by the market, while being environmentally non-degrading.

An important part of it is devoted to the identification of research needs for the aquaculture sector. Research on aquaculture should contribute to the overall objective of increasing seafood production in a sustainable way. To this scope, there is also a need to co-ordinate and integrate national aquaculture research efforts.

The analysis of the main problems for the aquaculture sector carried out in the Commission strategy allows to recognise that aquaculture would benefit from an additional, important effort of research and technological development, in particular along the following lines:

- ? On the important issue of animal disease control, develop the scientific basis for improved disease diagnosis and treatment, including of parasites, to promote mortality prevention, control strategies and consumer safety.
- ? On the equally essential issue of environmental impact, understand the interactions between aquaculture, fisheries and environment, together with developing methods to assess the capacity of natural ecosystems to support aquaculture, and develop new equipment and management tools to reduce environment pollution, including impacts on the genetic diversity of wild populations. Also, find alternative protein sources for fish feed and determine the origin of harmful algal blooms, and potential preventative measures.
- ? On technological development, it is recognised the importance of assessing the influence of husbandry, nutrition and environment on quality, health and welfare of farmed species. In addition, develop and/or assess the impact of innovative methods and production systems, including of new species, to support aquaculture diversification and further improve the technologies of recirculation systems and offshore cages.
- ? On genetics, develop the scientific basis for functional genomics, to identify suitable source strains for disease control and stress resistance, and develop effective genetic improvement programmes using selective breeding.

In their reaction to the Commission strategy, both the Council and the European Parliament asked for additional research efforts and priorities.

The Council acknowledged that “more research in aquaculture should be undertaken and appropriate financial support be allocated” and asked in particular for research into new species, including non carnivorous species.

The European Parliament, I quote: “having regard to the substantial research needs of the aquaculture sector in many areas and the inadequacy of the funds allocated for this purpose” called on the Commission “to step up research in all areas of aquaculture without exception”. It gave also clear indications on a number of research needs, some of them overlapping the needs already identified by the Commission, with in addition research on the conservation of genetic pools of wild species used in aquaculture, on the development of vaccines, on alternative, environment-friendly substances for disease treatment, and on the impact of transgenic and non-indigenous species.

The cost of R&D activities is a major issue, as the financial difficulties of many segments of the aquaculture sector preclude most private enterprises to invest sufficient resources in research.

Community support to research in aquaculture is changing with the adoption of the sixth Framework Programme. New issues are brought to the fore: quality and safety, environmental issues, policy driven research.

The structure of the new Programme introduces a certain dispersion of aquaculture research between different priorities.

Horizontal EU research programmes in the food quality and safety domain will consider relevant consumer health and product quality aspects, while the other research needs in support of EU wide aquaculture aspects, like aquaculture impacts and other environmental interactions, as well as fish and shellfish health aspects, will be addressed by research funds in support of Community policy development.

However the Sixth Community research framework programme cannot be the exclusive source of support to the costs of aquaculture research. In addition to the national research programmes, the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance, the structural instrument of the Common Fisheries Policy, will be allowed to finance research in the enterprises in order to expand the availability of funds.

My colleague Mario Lopes dos Santos will extensively speak of the sixth Framework Programme in the next speech, so I will focus now on the FIGF and how it is going to be modified.

The FIGF can already intervene in the financing of pilot and demonstration projects. These are not real research, strictly speaking, but developments of previous research work. However, also these kinds of measures are important for the progress of the industry. But until today they have been scarcely, if at all, used by the Member States.

In addition, the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance is quoted by the Strategy for having an important role to play to fulfil its objectives. So, it needs to be amended to achieve this goal. And the Commission submitted to the Council in November 2003 a proposal in this sense.

The first new element, and certainly the most interesting for the participants to this workshop, is the possibility of granting financial support for small scale applied research carried out by aquaculture enterprises. This was a key point of the Strategy. All the European Institutions (Council, European Parliament, Committee of the Regions, Economic and Social Committee) have supported the possibility of financing research through FIGF. Small-scale, applied-research initiatives, not exceeding 150 000 EUR in total cost and three years in duration, carried out by an economic operator, a scientific or technical body or other competent body, shall be eligible as pilot projects, provided that they contribute to the objectives of sustainable development of the aquaculture industry in the Community.

But the Commission proposal obviously includes other modifications that I will quickly announce now, as they are important for the farmers that are here today. The proposed amendments of the FIGF include:

- ? An increased financial contribution for extensive fish farming.
- ? The financing of the adhesion to the Eco-Management and Audit System scheme by aquaculture enterprises.
- ? A clear distinction between fishing vessels and aquaculture service vessels.

- ? An aid for shellfish farmers forced to suspend their activities for more than 6 consecutive months due to contamination by toxic algae.
- ? Clear priorities for the aquaculture measures in the FIFG programmes. The suggested priority segments are: the techniques that substantially reduce environmental impacts; the development of the farming of new species; the improvement of traditional aquaculture activities such as mollusc farming; the modernisation of existing enterprises; and horizontal measures like promotion campaigns, quality labels, collective aquaculture facilities.
- ? Finally, the reduction of the Community aid for the construction of non innovative intensive fish-farms. We consider that these are no longer high-risk investment, so we prefer to allocate the funds to more innovative measures.

Discussion is now ongoing both at the Council and at the European Parliament level. The Parliament will give its opinion on this proposal by the end of March, and we hope that the Council will be able to approve it in May. After this, the modification will immediately enter in force.

Thank you for your attention.