New impetus for the strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture

2009/2107(INI) - 08/04/2009 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE: to give a new impetus for the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European Aquaculture.

BACKGROUND: modern aquaculture represents a major innovation in the production of fish and aquatic food and has been the fastest growing food production sector with an average worldwide growth rate of 6-8% a year.

Aquaculture is an important economic activity in certain coastal and continental areas of the EU. The EU-27 aquaculture industry produced about 1.3 million tonnes of fish, shellfish and crustaceans in 2006, representing a turnover of around EUR 3 billion and generating approximately 65 000 jobs. Current EU consumption demand accounts for about 12 million tonnes.

The EU strategy for sustainable aquacultureadopted in 2002 has set out policy directions to promote the growth of aquaculture. Seven years on, significant progress has been made in ensuring the environmental sustainability, safety and quality of EU aquaculture production.

Against the background of fast-changing technologies and persisting economic and environmental challenges, it is time to take stock of the strengths and weaknesses of the EU aquaculture sector.

CONTENT: this Communication aims at increasing awareness among policy makers and public bodies, about the importance of aquaculture in the European Union. This Strategy also aims at providing EU leadership and guidance to both stakeholders and administrations to ensure consistency and clarity in designing the policies needed for the sustainable development of European aquaculture.

This Communication aims to identify and address the causes of this stagnation as well as examining the root causes of the stagnation in EU aquaculture production and looks at ways to improve the sector's competitiveness, sustainability and governance:

1) Promoting a sector (including equipment and technology providers):

- **through competitiveness and diversity**: this should be supported by the most advanced research and technology, covering the whole supply chain and meeting consumer demands in a sustainable manner. The EU has been a key contributor to research and technological development in aquaculture (EUR 98 million under the 6th Research Framework Programme, among which EUR 32 million for SMEs. It is essential to: (i) allocate a sufficient EU budget to aquaculture projects to further develop the knowledge-base for sustainable and competitive aquaculture practices; (ii) promote optimisation and development of key research infrastructures and reinforce networks and integration into broader scientific networks to address global challenges such as adaptation to climate change in the context of the new Maritime Policy and its strategic research agenda; (iii) invite Member States to recognise the importance of extensive and traditional forms of aquaculture and to consider possibilities of developing production in existing sites and facilities;
- **through a better development of space in coastal aquaculture, as well as freshwater fish-farming**: the Commission: (i) will continue its initiatives to promote the development of maritime

spatial planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management, as identified in the framework of the new EU Maritime Policy; (ii) invites all Member States to develop marine spatial planning systems, in which they fully recognise the strategic importance of aquaculture;

- **through the integration of specific needs in the EU's market policy for fisheries**: the EU aquaculture industry should be able to answer to consumer demands, be adaptable to changing market requirements and be capable of interacting on an equal footing with the other actors of the marketing chain. The Commission will review the market policy of fisheries and aquaculture products in 2009. The Commission will consider establishing a basis for promoting aquaculture development in third countries and to increase business opportunities for EU aquaculture firms, in the framework of the external dimension of the Common Fisheries Policy.

2) Establishing conditions for sustainable growth of aquaculture: the Community shall ensure that the EU aquaculture industry develops in a way which is compatible with a high level of protection of the natural environment. On the same lines, aquatic food products that are manufactured in or imported to the EU shall comply with high protection standards of consumer health and safety. The Community should also pursue its objectives for a high level of protection of health and welfare in farmed aquatic animals. The Commission will continue to emphasise the importance of environmentally sustainable development of aquaculture in its policies and actions. It will ensure that Member States provide an appropriate level of protection of shellfish waters under the first river basin management plans established under the water framework directive. The Commission will ensure consumer health protection and recognise the health benefit of aquatic food. It will continue to address the need to ensure that aquatic food products are safe for the consumer, both such food produced in the Community and food imported from third countries. To guarantee a high level of consumer protection, competent authorities have to take preventive measures and impose requirements to ensure food quality and safety, as well as to establish surveillance and market prohibitions where necessary. Lastly, it will maintain the legislative tools in accordance with new knowledge on food safety in order to address the food safety risks in the most appropriate way.

3) Improving the sector's image and governance: Aquaculture's success will depend to a large extend on there being a business-friendly environment for the sector at national and/or local level. Better implementation of EU legislation by Members States should ensure a level-playing field among economic operators on decisions affecting the development of aquaculture.

Therefore, the Commission proposes to provide Member States and regional authorities with guidance to ensure that targeted measures at local, national and EU level help the sector make full use of its assets. It also proposes to reduce the administrative burden, ensure proper stakeholder participation and appropriate information to the public and adequate monitoring of the aquaculture sector.