

Framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy. Marine Strategy Framework Directive

2005/0211(COD) - 18/05/2016 - Follow-up document

The Commission presents a staff working document on the application of the [Water Framework Directive](#) (WFD) and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) in relation to aquaculture. It recalls that it issued a communication in 2013 on strategic guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture, with the aim of helping Member States and stakeholders overcome the challenges facing the sector. In that communication, the Commission announced that it would prepare a guidance document addressing the requirements of the WFD and the MSFD in relation to aquaculture. This document is intended to **assist Member States and industry in the implementation of these EU laws** and facilitate the development of sustainable aquaculture.

It should be noted that the WFD and the MSFD do not contain explicit obligations for aquaculture. The aquaculture industry has to comply with the requirements of the national legislation that implements those Directives in each Member State.

The MSFD and aquaculture: to recall, the MSFD aims to achieve **good environmental status** in marine waters by 2020. To help achieve such status, eleven descriptors of the state of the environment have been defined and a detailed set of criteria for assessing good environmental status, in relation to the eleven descriptors have also been developed to help interpretation.

The role of the MSFD is becoming increasingly important in ensuring that aquaculture activities provide long-term environmental sustainability. At the same time, the [Blue Growth](#) communication envisages the expansion of aquaculture activities. The **main potential environmental impacts of aquaculture relevant to the MSFD** come from the introduction of non-indigenous species, nutrients, organic matter, contaminants including pesticides and litter, the disturbance to wildlife, habitat loss and the possibility of escape of farmed fish. These may have implications for many MSFD descriptors, such as biodiversity.

The paper goes on to note that assessments of whether good environmental status has been achieved under MSFD are typically expected to be for relatively large sea areas. This contrasts with the **local scale of aquaculture facilities**. Individual aquaculture facilities may, therefore, have a relatively small impact within an MSFD assessment area. However, multiple facilities combined with the impacts from other activities in the area could mean that there is, overall, a significant problem in achieving good environmental status for a given descriptor. Thus, while impacts of aquaculture are generally assessed as **part of the marine licensing process** or under the WFD in coastal areas on an individual facility basis, it is important to consider them within the **overall context of cumulative effects from all activities**. In effect, aquaculture may need to reduce impacts in order to reach good environmental status under MSFD.

There are two other ways that aquaculture may be relevant in the implementation of the MSFD:

- the MSFD is beneficial for aquaculture production. A reduction in contaminants, nutrient enrichment and litter in the marine environment will lead to improved water quality and reduce contamination in the fish produced;
- sustainable aquaculture contributes to delivering good environmental status under MSFD. Greater production from aquaculture results in reduced pressure on wild fish stocks. The natural filtration

feeding of shellfish also leads to improvements in water clarity, as demonstrated by mussel farms in the Baltic.

The document offers **practical guidance to facilitate the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive** in the context of the development of sustainable aquaculture. More specifically, it provides:

- suggestions and guidelines on good regulatory practice to national authorities about the requirements of the Directives in relation to aquaculture;
- good practice guidelines and suggestions to industry and aquaculture producers on what is expected of them and what they can expect from the implementation of the Directives;
- information about the sustainability of EU aquaculture production and its compliance with relevant EU environmental legislation.