Aquaculture: protection of the aquatic environment from the risks associated with the use of alien and locally absent species

2006/0056(CNS) - 04/04/2006 - Legislative proposal

PURPOSE : to establish a framework governing aquaculture practices in relation to alien and locally absent species to assess and minimise the possible impact of these on the aquatic environment and in this manner contribute to the sustainable development of the sector.

PROPOSED ACT : Council Regulation.

CONTENT : aquaculture has benefited economically from the introduction of alien species and translocation of locally absent species in the past (for example rainbow trout, Pacific oyster and salmon) and the policy objective for the future is to maximise benefits associated with introductions and translocations while at the same time avoiding alterations to ecosystems, preventing negative biological interaction, including genetic change, with indigenous populations and restricting the spread of non-target species and detrimental impacts on natural habitats.

Invasive alien species have been identified as one of the key causes of loss of biodiversity.

The proposed measures would regulate the introduction of such species through the setting up of a permit system. The proposal would not only enhance the protection of ecosystems but would also contribute to the continued development of the aquaculture industry.

The new framework would to ensure adequate protection of the aquatic environment from the risks associated with the use of non native species in aquaculture. This framework should include procedures for the analysis of the potential risks, the taking of measures based on the prevention and precautionary principles and the adoption of contingency plans where necessary. These procedures should build on experience gained through the existing voluntary frameworks, and notably the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) Code of Practice on the Introductions and Transfers of Marine Organisms and the European Inland Fisheries Advisory Commission (EIFAC) Code of Practice and

Manual of Procedures for consideration of introduction and transfer of marine and freshwater organisms.

The core of the present proposal is the establishment at national level of a system of permits for all new species which are introduced for aquaculture. Under the proposed measures, all projects to introduce a non-native species would have to be submitted for approval to a national advisory committee, which would determine whether the proposed introduction was ‘routine’, or not. In the case of non-routine introductions, an environmental risk assessment (ERA) would have to be carried out. Only movements which are assessed as being low risk could then be granted a permit. If the risk was considered to be medium or high, the advisory committee would enter into dialogue with the applicant to see whether adequate mitigation procedures or technologies which could reduce the risk to an adequately low level were available.

In the case of non-routine movements, the proposal provides for quarantine procedures, and in certain cases, the national authorities may also require a pilot release to be implemented prior to full-scale commercial introduction. The proposed regulation also sets out a number of requirements concerning contingency plans, monitoring procedures, and the keeping of national registers.

The scope of the current proposal is limited to movements of fish stocks which fall under the Common Fisheries Policy. Ornamental fish are therefore not concerned by these measures.

The new measures should not lead to undue delays as strict time limits are set out in the proposal. Member States will decide who pays, but it is envisaged that industry will normally bear the cost. Aquaculture operators could form associations to share the costs. As the permit can cover a five-year period, costs should not hinder the future development of aquaculture.

As regards the budgetary impact, the proposed Regulation may have some implications in terms of staff time to make applications for prospective movements of alien species and in terms of the resources needed for consulting STECF and the Advisory Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture, but this is routine work for these committees.