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**COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT**

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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO  
THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

**Building a sustainable future for aquaculture**

**A new impetus for the Strategy for the Sustainable Development of European  
Aquaculture**

**SUMMARY OF THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

{COM(2009) 162 final}  
{SEC(2009) 453}

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2002, the European Commission presented a Communication on a Strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture<sup>1</sup>, which was the first to put the aquaculture industry at the forefront at European level. In 2007, DG MARE (formerly DG FISH) took stock of progress made so far. Based on this evaluation, and in view of the fact that one of the main objectives set in 2002 in terms of jobs and production growth had not been achieved, the Commission launched a broad consultation and debate with all stakeholders on the opportunities and challenges facing European aquaculture.

During this consultation and assessment period, a number of issues were identified and these are developed in this document. The 2002 objectives of providing safe aquatic food from aquaculture, while guaranteeing animal health and welfare, and of ensuring that aquaculture is regulated have generally been achieved. However, the general problem identified is the overall stagnation of EU aquaculture in terms of production since the beginning of the millennium, against continued growth in this industry at global level. The EU aquaculture sector benefits from numerous assets and is a leader in technological innovation and research, but it also faces a number of problems. The main factors referred to include the overall economic outlook of EU aquaculture, notably competition with imports, the structure and industrial features of the EU aquaculture business, combined with the challenges of EU aquaculture vis-à-vis environmental protection requirements, the need to overcome space limitation and competition for access to water, and the challenges of ensuring high levels of animal health and welfare. This consultation raised the importance of industry needs-oriented research within this new area of animal domestication, but it also highlighted additional problems, such as the lack of sufficient awareness of aquaculture and the attendant impact on its image, the need for better governance through communication and involvement of stakeholders, and also the need for a level playing field and a reduction in the administrative burden.

To address the issues raised during the consultation, three broad options are considered in this document.

The first option identified was the status-quo scenario, i.e. taking no specific initiative and keeping within the confines of the strategy developed in 2002. This option would also mean taking a “business as usual” approach when developing the numerous policy areas that may have an impact on aquaculture, and continuing with an objective set in 2002 in terms of job creation that is known not to be being achieved.

The second option was to consider reiterating the type of initiative taken in 2002 and proposing a renewed strategy for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture. This would mean developing a Communication on political guidance, defining strategic objectives and identifying proposals for possible further action within the various policy domains of interest. Under this option, several possibilities were further envisaged, namely assessing the value of keeping or reviewing certain strategic objectives defined in 2002, and identifying action for all stakeholders or only action that would fall under the responsibility of the public authorities. The possibility of accompanying this political Communication with possible proposals for specific “aquaculture-oriented” amendments to the Community financial

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<sup>1</sup> COM(2002) 511.

support instrument (European Fisheries Fund – EFF), to act as a possible lever to reinforce some dimensions of the strategy, was looked at during this assessment exercise. This sub-option was not retained for proportionality and timing considerations, and because of other assessments anticipated in the near term (ex post evaluation of the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance to begin in 2009)<sup>2</sup>.

The last option envisaged was to fundamentally change the approach by setting the basis for a comprehensive “Common EU Aquaculture Policy”, by way of a multi-faceted legislative framework somewhere between the Common Fisheries Policy (which would cover fisheries-related issues only) and the Common Agriculture Policy, which would also mean developing production targets at EU level. This latter option was discarded rather rapidly as it would be at variance with the principle of subsidiarity in a number of aspects.

The actual development of an industry cannot simply be dictated by public powers, but the public authorities do have a significant role to play in establishing the conditions and the framework in which an industry can – or cannot – develop. This analysis concluded that these challenges should be addressed from the point of view of the role of the public authorities in the EU, including at national and regional levels, since they are still responsible for a number of factors which greatly influence the development of aquaculture (e.g. licensing and spatial planning). Given the numerous EU policies that have an influence on aquaculture development, a coordinated approach under a common vision was deemed appropriate. Above all, though, this assessment highlighted the value of a new impetus for the EU aquaculture – through a political Communication from the Commission to update the 2002 strategy and adapt it to new circumstances, refocus some of its strategic objectives (with more emphasis on competitiveness and improved governance) and provide EU leadership in support of this industry.

The aim is therefore to provide a new impetus for the strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture by addressing the role of the public authorities in establishing an appropriate framework for the sustainable development of aquaculture in Europe and helping to remove a number of bottlenecks to allow this industry to develop its full potential. It will however only deliver in full if it is further endorsed by the Member States and also translates into concrete action at regional and local level.

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<sup>2</sup> However, this is without prejudice to any future decision to review financial support for this EU business in the current financial crisis and in the light of the debate at the European Summit in December 2008.