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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations
Subject: Draft Council Conclusions on the EU's new aquaculture strategy

Delegations will find attached revised draft Council conclusions on the abovementioned subject, with a view to discussion at the Working Party on Fisheries Policy on 22 June 2022.

Changes to the text of the first draft are marked in **bold underline** and **~~bold strikethrough~~**.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON THE EU'S NEW AQUACULTURE STRATEGY

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

- A. having regard to the Commission communication of 12 May 2021 entitled “Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030” (COM(2021)0236),
- B. having regard to the Commission communication of 25 March 2021 entitled “An action plan for the development of organic production” (COM(2021)141),
- C. having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 July 2021 on the action plan for the development of organic production,
- D. having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 entitled “The European Green Deal” (COM(2019)0640),
- E. having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled “A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system” (COM(2020)0381),
- F. having regard to the Council conclusions of 19 October 2020 on the Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system,
- G. having regard to the Commission communication of 20 May 2020 entitled “EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives” (COM(2020)0380),
- H. having regard to the Council conclusions of 23 October 2020 on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 – Bringing nature back into our lives,

- 1) **WELCOMES** the European Commission's document "Strategic guidelines for a more sustainable and competitive EU Aquaculture for the period 2021 to 2030" (hereinafter “Aquaculture guidelines”) and **JOINS** the shared vision for the further development of aquaculture in the EU.
- 2) **SUPPORTS** the objective of building a sustainable, resilient and competitive marine and freshwater aquaculture sector; and **UNDERLINES that in order to achieve this objective, it needs to be given the appropriate high priority.** This is essential to ensure the provision of nutritious, healthy and safe food and reduce the high EU's dependence on imports of fishery and aquaculture products. At the same time, this creates economic opportunities and jobs and represents a great example for the global transition to sustainable food systems.

- 3) **POINTS OUT** that the implementation of the Aquaculture guidelines will require an intensive cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, **SUPPORTS** the Commission's envisaged actions in the areas of coordination, technical support and guidance, and **RECALLS** the need to always take into account the specificities of each type of aquaculture system, both marine and freshwater.
- 4) **SUPPORTS AND EMPHASIZES** the need to bring science into practice via applied research and innovation, both at national and international level, in all parts of the aquaculture sector.
- 5) **TAKES INTO ACCOUNT** that access to space, especially for shellfish and marine fish farming, and good quality water must be provided if the growth, resilience and competitiveness of the aquaculture sector is to be ensured. **AGREES** with the Commission's call to review and streamline the regulatory and administrative framework, including sharing of best practices on administrative procedures as envisaged in the annex to the Aquaculture guidelines. **CONSIDERS that the potential of marine aquaculture in offshore windfarms should be explored further and that best practices should be shared among Member States.**
- 6) **NOTES that access to water and the possibility, in accordance with applicable law, to dispose of the used water are fundamental requirements for any economically sustainable aquaculture activity. HIGHLIGHTS at the same time that a major part of the aquaculture sector faces the challenge that even the best available techniques cannot entirely avoid the emission of certain amounts of nutrients into the water, such as nitrogen or phosphorous.**
- 7) **CALLS ON the Commission to reassess the EU's environmental legislation, including the Water Framework Directive and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, to ensure that it is not an obstacle for operators to obtain a permit for new aquaculture activities or the extension thereof, in particular as regards additional input of nutrients. To that effect INVITES the Commission to present a proposal, if necessary, to improve coherence between the objective of a growing sustainable aquaculture sector in the EU, on the one hand, and the EU environmental law, on the other hand.**

- 8) **POINTS OUT** that biogenic substances originating from the aquaculture sector can be used, if other legislative conditions are met, as fertilizers or for biogas production. **However, additional research and its innovative implementation are required.**
- 9) **NOTES** with concern that in recent years the growing populations of protected predator species such as cormorants and otters have become a considerable challenge for aquaculture operators. **UNDERLINES** the fact that in many regions the damages are of such extent that the businesses are not economically viable anymore, and that a mere compensation for predator losses is not economically sustainable. **STRESSES** that this issue is yet another hindrance for growth of the aquaculture sector, making it less sustainable and economically viable and destroying livelihoods dependent on aquaculture activities in many regions. **URGES** the Commission to timely identify effective and efficient EU-wide management measures to prevent or reduce the damage caused by fish and feed eating birds and other protected predators that have a negative impact on aquaculture.
- 10) **STRESSES** that while increasing the performance of aquaculture with respect to the environment and animal welfare and setting ambitious targets, it is also necessary to ensure the economic and social stability and development of aquaculture businesses, and to ensure the safety of marketed products.
- 11) **SUPPORTS** the development of new freshwater and marine aquaculture methods, in particular those with low environmental impact, such as integrated multi-trophic aquaculture, recirculating aquaculture systems, algaculture and aquaponics.
- 12) **SUPPORTS** the strengthening of the environmental ~~and~~, socio-economic and historical role of aquaculture, which provides one of the most efficient sources of animal protein, including its contribution to climate change mitigation.
- 13) **STRESSES** that further steps in increasing the environmental performance of EU aquaculture include the growth of organic aquaculture, as envisaged in the Farm to Fork Strategy and the Action Plan on Organic Production. **HIGHLIGHTS**, however, that a detailed analysis of the current situation and an assessment of the barriers hindering the development of organic aquaculture in individual Member States is needed to take the necessary measures to achieve that objective. **Furthermore, INVITES the Commission to**

consider proposing an amendment of Regulation (EU) 2018/848 on organic production and labelling of organic products, which currently only allows the certification of shellfish and pond farming under very strict conditions, and does not allow it at all for recirculation and aquaponic systems as organic.

- 14) **POINTS OUT** that some aquaculture systems achieve higher environmental performance (e.g. aquaculture in ponds, wetlands and brackish waters); **as well as certain marine aquaculture production systems**). However, there is **currently no possibility at EU level scheme** to label or certify their sustainable products, and, **in particular**, no conditions are set to favour these types of aquaculture, even if their contribution to the **environmentenvironmental** protection is substantial. In this regard, **PROPOSESINVITES the Commission to establishpropose the establishment of** a transparent EU system for recognising and rewarding producers for aquaculture management that enables additional ecosystem services. It is essential to motivate producers to achieve a higher environmental and socio-economic performance of aquaculture. It is fundamental to ensure a long-term support scheme for these activities.
- 15) **SUPPORTS** the development of climate-change adaptation strategies for the sector at national level, based on the best scientific advice.
- 16) **POINTS OUT** that it is essential to make use of existing data when setting and monitoring environmental quality and fish welfare indicators. It is necessary to avoid an excessive increase in the administrative burden of data collection.
- 17) **SUPPORTS** the Commission's plans to promote EU aquaculture, which will contribute to informed consumer choice about sustainable European aquaculture products, and **UNDERLINES** that Member States play an important role in ensuring the broad dissemination of the EU-wide campaign on EU aquaculture. **RECOMMENDS** increasing consumer awareness of all the benefits of marine and freshwater aquaculture, especially as regards environmental, social and climate benefits.

- 18) **CALLS** for streamlining and setting specific conditions for data collection in the aquaculture sector, **in particular by synchronizing the EU Data Collection Framework and the EU Statistical Law**, taking into account different aquaculture systems. **WELCOMES** the simplification of administrative processes for the transmission and sharing of these data.
- 19) **IS AWARE** of the dangers of infectious diseases, which represent a very serious constraint on aquaculture production. **WELCOMES**, therefore, the development of best practices for disease management, **in line with the strategy to strengthen EU and Member States actions against antimicrobial resistance (AMR – One Health Approach)**, as well as good husbandry practices, in which animal welfare should play an essential role. **SUPPORTS** the maintenance and streamlining of disease surveillance and reporting in EU Member States. **UNDERLINES** the importance of research on existing and new pathogens and the intensification of breeding research on disease-resistant and more resilient farm fish species.
- ~~20) INVITES the Commission to identify effective and efficient EU-wide measures to reduce the damage caused by protected predators and pests that have a negative impact on aquaculture, making it less sustainable and competitive.~~
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