

Briefing: Freshwater aquaculture in the Data Collection Framework (DCF)

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The new Data Collection Framework Regulation must include the mandatory requirement to collect data on all aquaculture production.

During the discussions on a common position in the Council for the new Data Collection Framework Regulation (DCF), a group of eleven Member States (many of them land-locked, but also including Germany and Poland), have objected to the mandatory collection of data related to aquaculture (Art. 5.2). They based this on the argument that: i) up until now, data on freshwater aquaculture were not required to be collected and thus requiring their collection would increase the administrative burden; ii) the possibility that particular businesses might be identifiable due to the low numbers of competitors in some Member States, posing a potential risk to their privacy.

The European Parliament Fisheries Committee similarly deleted the requirement to collect data on freshwater aquaculture in its vote on the DCF, including only marine and diadromous aquaculture in the requirements¹.

The following arguments demonstrate that the mandatory collection of **ALL** aquaculture related data, especially those relating to environmental impact, remains essential for any future data collection, and must be enshrined in the new DCF.

With the latest reform of the CFP's basic regulation and the EMFF (and the preceding EFF), aquaculture was strongly promoted both politically and financially by the EU. Various articles and paragraphs foresee the promotion of sustainable aquaculture activities, such as the wording in EU Art. 2.5(e), Art. 34 and Art. 35 (CFP) and Art. 6.2 (EMFF). This clear preference of the European Commission and the co-legislators can be best exemplified by the Commission's press releases after the political agreement on the EMFF in 2014: "The fund will also support European Aquaculture so that it can fully develop its potential"², "European aquaculture will have more investment to promote green growth, innovation and competitiveness" and "The EMFF will seek to promote new forms of aquaculture with high potential for innovation and growth potential"³.

The European Commission has continued this policy by issuing strategic guidelines⁴, and with a promotion campaign for European aquaculture products, named "Farmed in the EU". The strategic guidelines clearly promote aquaculture products as an environmentally sustainable food source: "European aquaculture offers good quality products, respecting strict environmental sustainability, animal health and consumer protection standards." But such claims can only be upheld if supported by relevant data.

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2015/0133%28COD%29&l=en>

² See http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/cf/mare/itemdetail

³ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-14-311_en.htm

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp/aquaculture/official_documents/com_2013_229_en.pdf

In the ongoing discussion for a new DCF it is the intention of the European Parliament to handle freshwater aquaculture data differently from data on marine and diadromous aquaculture. Even worse, the Council has no intention to collect systematic and comparable data for all aquaculture production.

In its report⁵, the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) clearly agrees that “the future DCF should cover all aquaculture (i.e. including freshwater)”. With regard to the concerns raised by a group of Member States on the (new) administrative burden for the collection of freshwater aquaculture, STECF suggested a solution that has not yet been taken into account - “to limit the data collection to ‘commercial’ production or set a limit of the total production” and to “look at application of thresholds with a view to excluding very small units which make no significant contribution to national production overall”. Such provisions can be implemented in the upcoming negotiations between the Parliament and the Council to account for the concerns raised by some Member States. Regarding the confidentiality of data related to the potential identification of enterprises, the proposal already contains sufficient provisions (Recital 24 and Art. 2) and safeguards (Art. 16 and 17).

Looking at the current level of production and the growth projected for freshwater aquaculture in the EU, it becomes clear that this sector must be treated equally compared to other aquaculture sectors with regard to data collection. With a current production of the main freshwater species such as trout (246,000t) and carp (67,000t)⁶, an expected growth rate of >40% to about 480,000t, further plans to expand the production on catfish and sturgeon, and the introduction of new species, the impact of this currently small sector on the environment needs to be monitored.

Some aquaculture activities can be significantly devastating to the environment. Art. 7 of the Water Framework Directive (WFD), Art. 5 of the Birds Directive and Art. 6 of the Habitats Directive clearly state that the degradation of the environment, including its biodiversity and water quality, shall be prohibited or avoided. This can only be guaranteed if the necessary underlying data are collected. Aquaculture and aquaculture products have been clearly defined in the CFP without distinction (EU 1380/2013, Art. 4.25 and 4.34) including through subsidies in the EMFF. Therefore, there is no possibility to exclude freshwater aquaculture in the DCF or to give it a lower priority by making related data collection non-mandatory, especially as to ensure that EU tax payer’s money will not be invested in environmentally destructive activities.

In summary, we ask you to include ALL aquaculture production in the new DCF regulation under article 5.2 as mandatory.

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⁵ Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee for Fisheries (STECF) – Review of DCF National programme amendments for 2015 (the 2013 Annual Report for Bulgaria) & development of the revised DCF Multiannual Programme (STECF-15-01). 2015.

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⁶ European Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Platform 2012. The Future of European Aquaculture. Our Vision: A Strategic Agenda for Research and Innovation.