

Towards Sustainable Food Systems

The role of aquatic foods

The International and EU commitments, namely the **2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Green Deal** objective to provide “healthy and affordable food”, including the Farm to Fork Strategy, have set the scene for an in-depth reflection on today’s food systems. The necessity to move towards sustainable consumption and production practices was also at the core of the Food Systems Summit in September 2021 where 150 countries committed to food systems transformation. Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have exacerbated food insecurity, while ongoing negotiations for a Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework underline the urgent need to mainstream biodiversity in food systems. Such developments create a **momentum for strong actions** to be taken towards sustainable food systems.

1 Acknowledging the key role of aquatic foods to build Sustainable Food Systems

In that context, aquatic foods have a considerable role to play. It can contribute to several **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** such as SDG 2 “Zero hunger”, SDG 3 “Good health and well-being”, SDG 12 “Responsible consumption and production”, SDG 13 “Climate action” and SDG 14 “Life below water” as well as to the objectives of the **EU Green Deal**.

Indeed, aquatic foods are an **important source of proteins**, providing key micronutrients to about 3.3 billion people in 2017 (The World Bank) ; and this proportion is expected to increase as the world will need 50% more food by 2030 due to a rising population (FAO). They constitute **essential components of a healthy diet**. Additionally, aquatic products have a **lower carbon footprint** than any other animal production industry. Therefore, the fisheries and aquaculture sectors represent real assets to **tackle the climate and biodiversity crisis** as well as to **provide healthy food** to a growing worldwide population. However, the 2022 Report on the State of the World Fisheries and Aquaculture outlines a decrease to 64.6% of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels – an alarming figure highlighting the urgency to further increase actions towards effective fisheries management.

"Aquatic foods can contribute to several **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDG 2, 3, 12, 13 & 14) as well as to the objectives of the **EU Green Deal**".



"**Urgent targeted action** is needed to ensure that the full potential of aquatic foods to achieve **SDGs** and the **EU Green Deal** is revealed "

The **2021 Declaration on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI)** acknowledges the fisheries and aquaculture sectors' contribution to **tackle poverty, hunger and malnutrition** as well as to prepare and **respond to climate change**. Furthermore, it is specified in the Declaration that "**urgent targeted action** is needed to ensure aquatic foods and products continue to provide inclusive, effective and sustainable pathways to reduce poverty, secure livelihoods and underpin food security and nutrition, as **vital to achieving the goals set in Agenda 2030**". Therefore, aquatic foods considerations need to be **mainstreamed in any relevant policy** if current food production and consumption patterns are to be effectively transformed.

2 Improving the sustainable management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors to reveal the full potential of aquatic foods

Aquatic foods have the potential to contribute greatly to make our food systems more sustainable; yet, for this contribution to be fully realised, **the fisheries and aquaculture sectors must be sustainably managed**. While in some regions of the world, efforts towards sustainability generated successful results, some are still lagging behind. Additionally to creating competition distortion, it has real and tangible impacts on marine and inland ecosystems and dependent communities' livelihood. **EBCD** would like to reiterate that: **(1) Food systems transformation starts with the inclusion of fisheries and aquaculture in all relevant policies**, also taking into account ocean-land interactions and their effects on biodiversity, aquatic food production and human health; **(2) Participation of all stakeholders in the policymaking**, including small-scale actors and women, is essential; **(3) An ecosystem-based approach to fisheries with reliable up-to-date scientific data and advice** that is able to adapt to climate-driven changes in the ocean is an absolute necessity **(4) Decarbonization of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors** will further decrease the climate footprint of aquatic food systems, facilitating a smooth transition to climate-neutral diets.

While EBCD recognises progress made by ongoing processes at both international and EU levels, it is undeniable that **greater actions** need to be taken to improve the sustainable management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. EBCD strongly encourages **more funding to be allocated to the sustainable management of these sectors** to enable aquatic foods to fully contribute to sustainable food systems and to food security worldwide.



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3 Raising awareness on the role of aquatic foods for Sustainable Food Systems

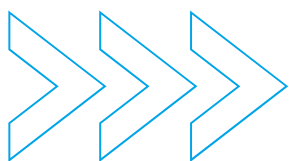


" Several **international initiatives** to raise awareness on the potential of aquatic food exist. It is only through **increasing political attention**, will progress on aquatic food transformation be advanced.

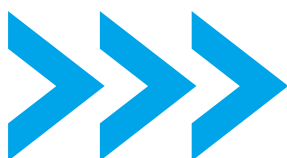
At the international level, some initiatives supporting the recognition of sustainable aquatic foods already exist, such as the **Global Action Network on Sustainable Food** from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition or the **Blue Foods Coalition**. The formation and development of such initiatives send a **strong message** that the role of aquatic food systems needs to be urgently leveraged in international policy fora. Only through **increasing political attention**, will progress on aquatic food transformation be advanced. The recent conclusion of **WTO negotiations** is a first positive sign on the priority of aquatic foods in driving the transition toward sustainable food systems. However, **more needs to be done** – the initiative for a sustainable EU food system must recognize sustainably produced aquatic foods as a solution to tackle the adverse effects of climate change, current food security uncertainties and biodiversity loss. Within this framework, it is also crucial to focus on the links between this initiative and other actions taken by the Commission, including the recently renewed Joint Communication on the **EU's International Ocean Governance agenda**, which underscores the role of sustainable and effectively managed fisheries in ensuring ocean sustainability worldwide. Against this background, the ongoing negotiations for a **Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ)** and the **Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework** will be of paramount importance to ensure the external dimension of food systems transformation.

Call for actions !

EBCD calls on the **European Commission** in the framework of the initiative for a **Sustainable EU food system**:



To acknowledge **the important role aquatic foods** can play toward a sustainable food system, food security and to achieve the international and EU objectives to tackle climate change and malnutrition.



To take measures **to improve the sustainable management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors** for the potential of aquatic foods to be fully realised. To that end, **allocate greater funding resources** to improve the sustainable management of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.