

SUMMARY REPORT

CONFERENCE ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE TO FOOD SECURITY

14 November 2024

The **conference on the Contribution of Fisheries and Aquaculture to Food Security** was organised on **14 November 2024** by the **European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD)** in partnership with the **European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** and sponsored by the **Xunta de Galicia**. The conference highlighted the **critical role of fisheries and aquaculture in global and European food security**, addressing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and geopolitical disruptions. Aquatic foods were framed as essential to sustainable food systems, offering high nutritional value with a lower environmental impact than terrestrial animal-based foods. As global demand for food rises, aquatic foods can play a pivotal role in combating malnutrition, ensuring livelihoods, and addressing climate and biodiversity crises. The conference aimed at addressing the issue of aquatic foods and food security in the framework of the upcoming **European Ocean Pact** announced by the European Commission. For more information consult the agenda and the full report [here](#).

KEY OUTCOMES

Food Security and Nutrition

Aquatic foods are **vital for addressing global food insecurity and malnutrition**. They provide **high-quality proteins, omega-3 fatty acids, and essential micronutrients like iron and zinc**. Compared to other animal protein sources, fisheries and aquaculture have a smaller carbon footprint, making them a sustainable choice in addressing the rising global food demand.

The **global food system remains vulnerable** due to pandemics, climate change, and conflicts. The challenge lies in **balancing environmental conservation with the need to increase food production**, particularly for regions like sub-Saharan Africa and Small Island Developing States.



Environmental sustainability Challenges

Fisheries and aquaculture face environmental sustainability challenges, including:

- **Declining stocks and overfishing:** Approximately 38% of global fish stocks are unsustainable. When fisheries are scientifically assessed and managed, they tend to become sustainable, whereas unmanaged stocks tend to become unsustainable. Effective management and science-based policies are necessary to reverse this trend.
- **Environmental impact:** While aquatic foods generally have a lower carbon footprint, there is room for improvement in fisheries and aquaculture practices.

Economic and Social Dimensions

The fisheries and aquaculture sectors support millions of livelihoods globally, especially in coastal and rural areas. Key socio-economic issues for the EU include:

- **Workforce challenges:** The sector faces an aging workforce, declining employment, and difficulty attracting younger generations due to challenging working conditions and low profitability.
- **Regulatory complexity:** Bureaucratic hurdles and outdated policies hinder innovation and growth in both fisheries and aquaculture.
- **Dependency to imports:** The EU imports over 70% of its aquatic food, creating a reliance on external sources and raising concerns about sustainability standards in third-country imports.
- **Marine space competition:** Offshore wind farms, marine protected areas, and other activities are reducing fishing grounds, leading to conflicts between stakeholders.



Aquaculture's Untapped Potential

Aquaculture is increasingly recognised as a key component of sustainable food systems. However, its development is hindered by:

- **Regulatory barriers:** Complex licensing processes and inconsistent policies deter investment. Nonetheless, in order to boost the sector the EU put in place the Strategic Guidelines for Sustainable and Competitive Aquaculture and the EU Algae Strategy.
- **Production stagnation:** While global aquaculture has grown significantly, the EU lags behind, contributing only a small fraction of global output.
- **Technological gaps:** Insufficient funding for innovation in intensive aquaculture systems limits the sector's efficiency and environmental performance.

Despite these challenges, **aquaculture offers opportunities for diversification, climate resilience, and sustainable growth**, particularly through practices like multi-trophic systems and algae farming.



Climate Change and Resilience

The sector is both impacted by and contributes to climate change. Key points include:

- **Decarbonisation:** Transitioning to low-carbon practices, including energy-efficient vessels and sustainable aquaculture feeds, is crucial. The Roadmap of the Energy Transition Partnership expected by the end of 2025 will be key to address these challenges.
- **Resilience Building:** Climate change necessitates adaptive measures, such as diversifying species, enhancing ecosystem-based management (EBM), and fostering community resilience.
- **Blue foods' role in climate action:** As a lower-carbon footprint compared to other animal protein, blue foods can contribute to achieve EU and international climate goals. In addition, species like seaweed and bivalves can mitigate climate impacts while improving water quality.



SUMMARY OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED DURING THE CONFERENCE

For fisheries and aquaculture to **fully unleash their potential to produce aquatic foods** that would contribute to food security, sustainable food systems and to reach our global and European biodiversity and climate objectives, the following recommendations should be taken into account. This would especially be relevant in the framework of the upcoming European Ocean Pact. These recommendations emanate from the discussions occurring during the conference.

- 1 Promote sustainable management and practices:**
 - Expand ecosystem-based management (EBM) to balance conservation with production.
 - Further develop aquaculture systems that minimise environmental impact while increasing yields.
- 2 Adapt policies and regulations:**
 - Simplify licensing and align policies to encourage investment and innovation.
 - Update the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) to better address social, economic, and environmental needs as well as empowering innovation.
 - Integrate the sectors into broader food system policies to tackle global malnutrition, hunger, and climate challenges effectively.
- 3 Strengthen resilience and adaptation to climate change:**
 - Work towards the energy transition of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors
 - Invest in technologies and practices that improve the resilience of fisheries and aquaculture to climate impacts.
 - Foster connectivity and collaboration across sectors to address vulnerabilities.
- 4 Ensure a level playing field:**
 - Provide targeted investments and capacity-building for small-scale producers.
 - Ensure fair competition by aligning import standards with EU sustainability benchmarks.
- 5 Acknowledge and raise awareness on the role of aquatic foods** regarding food security, sustainable food systems and to reach global and European biodiversity and climate objectives.
- 6 Promote stakeholders engagement** including the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in climate and biodiversity forums.