

## EBCD & EESC PARTNERSHIP EVENT

The Contribution of Fisheries and Aquaculture to Food Security – Stocktake +1  
29/01/2026

### In a nutshell:

On Thursday 29 January, the European Bureau for Conservation and Development (EBCD), in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and with the support of the Xunta de Galicia, organised the [Stocktake+1 Conference on the Contribution of Fisheries and Aquaculture to Food Security](#).

The event built on the first edition held in November 2024, which brought together policymakers, scientists, industry representatives, and civil society to highlight the strategic role of Europe's blue food sectors in sustainable and resilient food systems. The Stocktake+1 Conference provided an opportunity to review progress achieved over the past year at both EU and international levels and to identify priorities for further action.

As global challenges intensify - geopolitical tensions, climate change and rising energy costs - ensuring Europe's capacity to deliver affordable and sustainable food has become a key policy priority. In this context, fisheries and aquaculture products, often referred to as "Blue Foods", offer a unique contribution thanks to their high nutritional value, low environmental footprint and strong socio-economic importance across Europe's coastal and rural regions.

Discussions focused on recent international developments, including the UN Ocean Conference, the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake +4 and the UN Climate COP30, where aquatic foods have gained increasing recognition. At EU level, attention centred on ongoing and upcoming initiatives, such as the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy, the implementation of the Ocean Pact, the future Ocean Act and the Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040. Participants underlined the need to translate political recognition into concrete, coherent policy action.

### Agenda:

**Moderator:** Ilias Grampas (Deputy Director at EBCD)

#### **14.00 – 14.30 | Welcoming remarks:**

- Despina Symons – EBCD Director
- Javier Garat – EESC
- Marta Villaverde Acuña – Regional Minister of the Sea, Xunta de Galicia

#### **14.30 – 15.00 | Keynote addresses:**

- Manuel Barange ([Presentation](#)) – FAO Assistant Director General and Director Fisheries and Aquaculture Division (NFI)
- MEP Paulo Do Nascimento Cabral – Member of the Committee on Fisheries of the European Parliament
- Yiannos Kyriacou – Fisheries Counsellor – Permanent Representation of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU

#### **15.00 – 16.15 | International & EU context:**

- Shakuntala Thilsted ([Presentation](#)) – UN Food System Summit Stocktake + 4, Senior Nutrition Expert, CGIAR & Chair, UN Food Systems Coordination Hub’s Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)
- Jón Erlingur Jónasson ([Presentation](#)) – Aquatic Blue Food Coalition Chair, Special Envoy for the Ocean at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland
- Anita Utheim Iversen ([Presentation](#)) – Head of Global Action Network – Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition Specialist Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Trade Industry and Fisheries

- Ocean Pact and the Upcoming Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040 what does it mean for blue foods?

Dovile Vaigauskaite – Head of Unit CFP and Structural Support at DG MARE, Policy Development and Coordination.

### **Q&A**

#### **16.15 – 16.40 | Coffee break**

#### **16.40.17.00 | Scientific perspectives:**

- Nutritious, health and climate component of aquatic products  
Jörn Schmidt ([Presentation](#)) – WorldFish Director for Sustainable Aquatic Food Systems.

### **Q&A**

#### **17.00- 17.50 | Stakeholders’ perspectives:**

- Call for Action Plan on Blue Foods  
Szilvia Mihalfy – Senior Policy and Project Manager at FEAP & EU Seafood Alliance representative.
- Decarbonisation of the fishing fleet  
Jules Danto ([Presentation](#)) – Policy Officer at EAPO & coordinator of the ETP Large Scale Sector
- WWF perspective on aquatic food systems  
Laure Guillevic ([Presentation](#)) – Ocean Policy Officer at WWF European Policy Office.
- Youth representatives perspectives  
Clémentine Etienne Brunon ([Presentation](#))– Youth Policy Specialist, FAO Office of Youth and Women  
Ilaria Bellomo ([Presentation](#)) – Vice-President & Cofounder of NOWA (Network Of Women in Aquaculture)

### **Q&A**

#### **17.50-18.00 | Concluding remarks:**

Ilias Grampas – Deputy Director at EBCD

### **Reception**

## Six take-home messages:

### **1. Blue foods are strategic assets for Europe's food security, resilience, and sustainability**

- Fisheries and aquaculture provide **highly nutritious, affordable, and low-carbon food**, with strong socio-economic importance for coastal and rural regions.
- In a context of geopolitical tensions, climate change, and rising energy costs, strengthening Europe's capacity to produce blue foods is a **strategic policy priority**, not a niche sectoral issue.
- Political recognition at EU and international level must now translate into **concrete, coherent action**.

### **2. Environmental protection and food production must be mutually reinforcing**

- Healthy marine and freshwater ecosystems are a **precondition** for long-term food security, economic stability, and climate resilience.
- Framing sustainability and production as opposing goals is counterproductive; policy must instead support **nature-positive food systems**.
- Failure to protect ecosystems carries high environmental, social, and economic costs for Europe.

### **3. Decarbonisation of fisheries is both achievable and a major opportunity**

- The EU fishing fleet has already delivered **significant emissions reductions**, demonstrating the sector's capacity to contribute to climate goals.
- Fisheries already produce **low-carbon animal protein** compared to other sources and can further improve their climate performance.
- Success depends on **predictable regulation, aligned EU funding, innovation support, and fleet renewal**, while avoiding regulatory bottlenecks that slow transition.

### **4. Policy coherence, governance, and enforcement are the real delivery gaps**

- Strong frameworks already exist, but impact depends on **implementation, enforcement, and alignment across policies**.
- Effective governance requires:
  - Full application of fisheries and environmental rules
  - Robust traceability and control, particularly for imports
  - Fair competition and accountability along global value chains
- Credibility of EU ambition depends on closing the gap between **commitments and practice**.

### **5. Europe must balance global responsibility with internal resilience**

- The EU's high reliance on seafood imports exposes vulnerabilities and sustainability risks.
- Strengthening domestic production must go hand-in-hand with:
  - Responsible international partnerships
  - Preventing illegal and unsustainable products from entering EU markets
  - Avoiding the displacement of environmental and social pressures to developing countries
- A globally responsible blue food strategy is essential for long-term food security.

### **6. Inclusive blue food systems require co-decision, not consultation**

- Youth, women, and coastal communities are **central actors**, not peripheral stakeholders, in the future of fisheries and aquaculture.
- Generational renewal, skills development, and social inclusion are critical to sector resilience.
- Meaningful participation means moving from consultation to **shared decision-making**, empowering youth and women to shape policy, innovation, and governance.

## [Summary of the discussions](#)

### [Welcoming remarks](#)

#### [Despina Symons – Director of EBCD](#)

Despina opened the conference by warmly welcoming participants onsite and online, expressing appreciation for the strong level of interest, including over one hundred virtual attendees. She extended special thanks to the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), represented by Javier Garat, and to the regional authorities of Galicia for their support and continued commitment to food security and blue foods. She stressed that their engagement sends a strong signal about the growing importance of aquatic food systems in current European policy debates.

Reflecting on the origins of the conference, Despina recalled that the first edition was held a year earlier in the same building. At that time, discussions focused on the essential contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to food security, and on strengthening recognition of their role in European and international policy frameworks. Participants highlighted the importance of food systems not only for nutrition, but also for public health, climate action, and biodiversity protection. Building on those discussions, organisers decided to establish the conference as a recurring annual event to take stock of progress and ensure that aquatic food systems remain high on the policy agenda in a rapidly evolving landscape.

She noted that this year's edition is particularly timely given several key EU initiatives currently underway, including the implementation of the European Ocean Pact, the forthcoming Ocean Act, and the 2040 Strategic Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture. In this context, and together with partners representing the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, including Europêche, EAPO, Seafood Europe, and FEAP, EBCD is calling on the European Commission to integrate a Blue Food Action Plan into the 2040 Strategic Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture. She described this proposal as a central element of the day's discussions.

Despina also reviewed important developments at the international level over the past year. These include the UN Ocean Conference, the UN Food Systems Summit Stocktake, UNFCCC COP30, and the entry into force of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement. She welcomed the increasing recognition within these global processes of the role of aquatic foods and blue food systems, while underlining that further efforts are needed to translate political recognition into concrete action.

In this regard, she highlighted EBCD's active engagement in major global initiatives, including the Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition, and the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition. These platforms aim to promote the integration of aquatic foods into global food systems discussions and to strengthen their visibility on the international stage.

Concluding her remarks, Despina emphasised that cooperation, dialogue, and policy coherence are essential to achieving shared objectives in food security and sustainable ocean governance. She wished participants a fruitful and forward-looking discussion before handing the floor to her colleague, Ilias Grampas, Deputy Director of EBCD, to moderate the event.

## **Javier Garat – European Economic Social Committee (EESC)**

Javier Garat underlined the strong commitment of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) to advancing sustainable food systems, noting that EESC has established an ad-hoc group dedicated to this priority. He referred in particular to the recent EESC Opinion on civil society recommendations for the European Ocean Pact, which emphasise the strategic importance of food autonomy for Europe.

Highlighting point 3.1.3 of the opinion, Mr. Garat stressed that Europe must reinforce its strategic autonomy in food production. This means strengthening the EU's capacity to produce its own resources, reducing dependence on external suppliers, and protecting internal infrastructures. He argued that coherent and forward-looking policies are required to guarantee food sovereignty and ensure resilience in an increasingly uncertain global context.

Turning to point 3.1.4, he called for the adoption of a Blue Food Action Plan before 2026, describing it as a key priority. Such a plan, he explained, is essential to fully integrate blue foods into EU food and consumption policies and strategies, and to ensure that aquatic food systems receive the recognition they deserve within broader food system discussions.

Referring to point 3.1.13, Mr. Garat acknowledged that the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy has contributed to improved fish stock management. However, he noted that approximately 70% of seafood consumed in the EU is imported, representing a significant challenge to Europe's food autonomy. He argued that this gap must be addressed by facilitating, rather than hindering, the sustainable production of seafood within the EU, while at the same time safeguarding the long-term health of fish populations.

Although the EESC includes only a small representation from the fisheries sector, he emphasised that the Committee nonetheless attaches great importance to it. Concluding his remarks, Mr. Garat reaffirmed that stakeholders can count on the EESC to continue advancing these crucial discussions, particularly regarding the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to strengthening Europe's food sovereignty.

## **Marta Villaverde Acuña – Regional Minister of the Sea, Xunta de Galicia**

Marta Villaverde Acuña recalled that a similar event held one year ago had been highly successful, offering a valuable space for collective reflection on Europe's priorities for the blue food system. She emphasised that aquatic food systems represent a real and viable option for advancing sustainable growth, even though recent geopolitical tensions and climate-related challenges have made it increasingly difficult to ensure access to safe and sustainable food. These pressures affect each Member State individually and also impact the EU's broader food sovereignty, placing the Union in a complex scenario where security and resilience are at risk and where political responsibility and action are urgently needed.

She argued that strategic decision-making is essential, and that betting on the blue economy must be one of those strategic choices. The blue economy, she noted, is a vital pillar for both the present and the future. It promotes the sustainable use of marine resources as the foundation for economic development and social wellbeing, ensuring that benefits are derived from the sea without compromising its health. Moreover, it supports better social organisation and contributes to gender equality. Thanks to its extensive coastline and long tradition of responsible and sustainable maritime activity, Galicia is uniquely positioned to lead this transformation, in line with the ambitions of SDG 14 – Life Below Water – making it essential, and that betting on the blue economy must be one of those strategic choices. The blue economy, she noted, is a vital pillar

for both the present and the future. It promotes the sustainable use of marine resources as the foundation for economic development and social well-being, ensuring that benefits are derived from the sea without compromising its health. Moreover, it supports better social organisation and contributes to gender equality.

She stressed that anticipating the future requires listening to the voices of coastal regions, which is why this gathering is so important; to ensure that regional perspectives are heard, recognised and fully considered in EU decision-making. These regions play an essential role in the transition toward a sustainable and nutritious food system, and their contribution must be valued—particularly the importance of the sea as a foundational element of such a system.

At the heart of the blue economy, she underlined, lies Galicia’s artisanal fishing sector. This sector has a low environmental impact because it maintains traditional practices that respect natural cycles, safeguard socio-cultural heritage and sustain coastal communities. Artisanal fisheries are centred on blue foods, which Ms. Villaverde Acuña described as a cornerstone of their sustainability model and a major opportunity for building a healthier and fairer food system, for two main reasons:

1. their production reduces pressure on marine ecosystems while providing protein and key macronutrients with a lower environmental footprint; and
2. they ensure food security for millions of people by delivering essential nutrients indispensable to human health.

Despite this, blue foods remain marginalised in global food and climate debates and receive less than 1% of global development finance. For this reason, she insisted, the sector must be heard and recognised. As long as society lacks a genuine understanding of the value of the sea and its contributions, the food security of millions will continue to depend on the capacity of coastal regions to maintain sustainable fisheries and aquaculture that supply nutrient-rich, environmentally positive food.

She reminded the audience that decisions about the sea are not only environmental or economic; they are deeply social decisions that have direct implications for public health. Therefore, she urged EU policymakers to recognise the essential role of maritime regions and to acknowledge the true protagonists of this model - artisanal fishers. The sector faces major challenges, but if Europe wants a solid and healthy food system, it must seize the full potential of the ocean.

Ms. Villaverde Acuña concluded by affirming that investing in the blue economy is the best strategic choice for ensuring a healthier ocean, a more equitable society and sustainable long-term economic development.

### [Keynote addresses](#)

[Manuel Barange](#) (Click here to see the [presentation](#)) – FAO Assistant Director General and Director Fisheries and Aquaculture Division (NFI)

Dr. Manuel Barange opened his keynote by thanking EBCD the EESC, and the Xunta de Galicia for organising the event. He began by reflecting on the importance of dialogue and attentive listening in shaping collective understanding and policy responses.

Presenting global production trends, Dr. Barange highlighted that aquatic food production has grown steadily over recent decades. Globally, total aquatic animal production has increased significantly, driven primarily by aquaculture, which has expanded at an average annual rate of around 5% between 2000 and 2023. Capture fisheries, by contrast, have remained broadly stable. Overall aquatic food production has grown at approximately 2.4% per year during this period—considerably faster than land-based animal production, which has grown at around 1–1.5% annually.

However, he stressed that the European Union region presents a markedly different trajectory. In the EU-27, total aquatic animal production has declined by an average of 2.3% per year, with aquaculture decreasing by 0.7% annually for the same period 2000–2023. This contrasts sharply with global growth trends. While global aquatic food production has increased from under 20 million tonnes in the 1950s to nearly 170 million tonnes today—providing an average of approximately 21 kilograms per capita per year—European production has steadily decreased.

Dr. Barange underscored the efficiency and sustainability credentials of aquatic foods. Fisheries require no feed inputs, and aquaculture demonstrates strong feed-to-protein conversion efficiency compared to terrestrial livestock. In addition, greenhouse gas emissions associated with fisheries and aquaculture are generally lower than those of other animal protein sectors. Aquatic foods are also rich in bioavailable micronutrients and play a crucial role in healthy diets.

Turning to EU consumption patterns, he illustrated the widening gap between domestic production and apparent consumption. Since 1990, EU production of aquatic foods has declined from approximately eight million tonnes to just under four million tonnes, while consumption has remained relatively stable. This divergence has been met through increasing imports. The EU now accounts for approximately 34% of global aquatic animal imports by value and runs a seafood trade deficit of around USD 22 billion per year—growing at nearly 5% annually since 2000. The consequences of these trends are that whereas in 1990 the EU produced roughly 70% of its own aquatic food consumption, by 2023 this figure had dropped to 47%, indicating a significant loss of self-sufficiency.

Looking ahead, Dr. Barange referenced the joint FAO–OECD Agricultural Outlook, which projects trends to 2034. Globally, per capita aquatic food consumption is expected to reach approximately 21.8 kilograms per year, representing continued but modest growth. In contrast, Europe is projected to see a decline in per capita consumption—around 0.8% across the continent and more than 2% within the EU specifically. He identified Europe and Africa as the only regions expected to experience declining per capita consumption—Africa due to population growth outpacing production, and Europe due to falling production levels and changing dietary habits.

To further value the contributions of capture fisheries to food and nutrition security, Dr. Barange then explored the implications of replacing capture fisheries production with terrestrial animal protein. Citing scientific modelling, he explained that replacing the roughly 90 million tonnes of global capture fisheries production with a combination of beef, pork, and poultry—based on current consumption patterns—would require approximately five million square kilometres of additional land, equivalent to about 75% of the Amazon rainforest. In the European context, replacing the EU’s 3.5 million tonnes of capture fisheries production would require approximately 190,000 square kilometres of land—roughly 53% of Germany’s territory. These figures illustrate the significant land-use implications of reducing fisheries production without viable aquatic alternatives.

Dr. Barange welcomed the ambitions of the European Ocean Pact and connected its priorities with FAO's "Blue Transformation" agenda. He highlighted FAO's work in supporting fisheries stock assessments, ecosystem-based management, implementation of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, reduction of food loss and waste, sustainable port development through the Blue Ports initiative, and the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries. He also referenced FAO's climate work, ecosystem approach to fisheries, the Nansen Programme for ocean science, and the Port State Measures Agreement to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

While recognising that aquaculture is mentioned in the Ocean Pact, Dr. Barange suggested that its development could receive stronger prioritisation within European ocean policy, given its central role in global food security and sustainable protein supply.

In concluding, he cautioned against viewing the ocean solely as an ecosystem to be protected in isolation. The ocean, he argued, is not merely an "aquarium" but a vital source of food, livelihoods, economic development, and sustainable solutions for a growing global population.

#### **MEP Paulo Do Nascimento Cabral – Member of the Committee on Fisheries of the European Parliament**

MEP Paulo do Nascimento Cabral, Member of the European Parliament and member of its Committee on Fisheries, thanked the organisers — including EBCD and the European Economic and Social Committee — as well as the Regional Minister of the Sea of the Xunta de Galicia for hosting the event. He welcomed the opportunity to contribute to a debate that, he noted, aligns closely with his own parliamentary work.

MEP do Nascimento Cabral began by echoing concerns raised in previous presentations: the European Union is reducing its production of aquatic foods while increasing its reliance on imports. He cited data indicating that the EU depends on external sources for roughly 70% of the fish products it consumes. In the context of growing discussions around strategic autonomy, he argued that this level of dependency is deeply concerning — particularly given the nutritional importance of aquatic protein and its role in food security.

Referring to recent Eurobarometer findings, he observed that for the first time price has become the primary factor influencing consumer purchasing decisions for seafood. This, he argued, underscores the need to address structural imbalances within the EU market. European producers are subject to ambitious social, environmental, and economic standards — including quotas, sustainability targets, and regulatory requirements — while imported products are not always required to meet equivalent production standards. This creates what he described as unfair competition.

In aquaculture, MEP do Nascimento Cabral highlighted stagnation in EU production, attributing it to administrative burdens, environmental constraints, and lengthy licensing procedures. Meanwhile, the EU continues to import aquaculture products from third countries that may not meet the same standards imposed on European producers. Similarly, EU fishers operate under strict catch limits and sustainability measures, while imports may enter the EU market without equivalent scrutiny regarding methods of production.

To address this imbalance, MEP do Nascimento Cabral has proposed drafting a report within the Fisheries Committee focused on social, economic, and environmental standards for aquatic food products. The objective, he explained, is to safeguard fair competition and ensure equivalent

standards for imported products. He called for stronger controls on the origin of imports and more robust verification of production methods in exporting countries.

He also stressed the importance of mandatory and transparent labelling. While existing provisions under the Common Organisation of the Markets (CMO) framework require certain information, he argued that implementation is inconsistent. He proposed including clearer nutritional information — such as omega-3 content — to enable consumers to make informed choices, particularly when imported and EU-produced products appear identical on supermarket shelves despite differences in production standards and quality.

MEP do Nascimento Cabral further raised concerns about restrictions on fleet modernisation. He argued that EU fishers face limitations on vessel renewal and engine upgrades that may compromise safety, hygiene, and product quality, while competitors outside the EU are not subject to comparable constraints. In outermost regions such as the Azores, which he represents, EU fleets share waters with third-country fleets operating under different rules, creating additional competitive pressures.

Turning to environmental targets, MEP do Nascimento Cabral acknowledged the importance of marine conservation objectives, including the EU's commitment to protect 30% of marine areas by 2030. He referenced the Azores' designation of approximately 300,000 square kilometres as marine protected areas. However, he emphasised the need to consider the social and economic dimensions of sustainability alongside environmental goals. Fishers affected by spatial restrictions must be fairly compensated, and policymakers must assess cumulative impacts on production capacity.

He also expressed concern about proposed reductions in fisheries funding under the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). For Portugal, he noted, allocations could fall to approximately €20 million per year — a figure he considers insufficient for a country with a significant fisheries sector, including mainland Portugal and the autonomous regions of the Azores and Madeira. In his view, reducing support sends a negative signal to the sector at a time when greater investment is needed.

MEP do Nascimento Cabral argued that food security must be recognised as an integral component of European security and defence policy. As debates intensify around strategic autonomy and geopolitical resilience, he stressed that ensuring stable and sustainable food supplies — including aquatic foods — should be treated as a strategic priority.

He welcomed the European Ocean Pact and the forthcoming Ocean Act, as well as discussions around a Blue Food Action Plan, but insisted that these initiatives must deliver concrete tools to reverse declining EU production trends. He also called for reforms to Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements to ensure greater transparency, stronger enforcement of equivalent standards, and tangible benefits for small-scale fishers and local communities in partner countries.

In conclusion, MEP do Nascimento Cabral advocated for a transparent, competitive, and sustainable European seafood sector built on the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. Only by balancing these dimensions, he argued, can the EU protect its fishers, coastal communities, consumers, and marine ecosystems while strengthening its food sovereignty and long-term resilience.

## Yiannos Kyriacou – Fisheries Counsellor – Permanent Representation of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU

Yiannos Kyriacou thanked the organisers for the invitation and addressed participants, including Members of the European Parliament and regional representatives, expressing his appreciation for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion on blue foods and food security at such a pivotal moment for EU policymaking.

He emphasised that fisheries and aquaculture are not simply additional sources of protein, but among the highest-value proteins available, particularly due to their nutritional benefits. He highlighted the importance of omega-3 fatty acids, noting that many of these essential nutrients can only be naturally obtained from aquatic products. In this regard, he argued that blue foods must be viewed not only through the lens of food security, but also as central to EU health and nutrition policy.

Referring to recent data presented during the conference, Mr. Kyriacou described the stagnation and decline of EU aquaculture and fisheries production as concerning. He recalled that the EU had once been a global leader in aquaculture innovation, raising the question of how the sector could now be experiencing stagnation despite technological advances. While awareness campaigns such as Farm to Fork and EU aquaculture promotion initiatives have recognised the value of aquatic foods, production trends remain far less encouraging.

He stressed that Europe's fisheries and aquaculture sectors are heavily affected by geopolitical tensions, climate change, supply chain disruptions, and an uneven international playing field. These factors raise broader concerns about EU resilience, strategic autonomy, and food security.

Presenting the overarching vision of the Cypriot Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Kyriacou highlighted the theme of “an autonomous Union open to the world.” This, he explained, reflects a commitment to strengthening resilience and self-reliance while maintaining global engagement. Within this framework, fisheries and aquaculture intersect naturally with core priorities such as sustainability, competitiveness, innovation, food security, and social cohesion.

He urged participants to move beyond viewing fisheries and aquaculture solely as sectoral policies. Instead, they should be recognised as strategic contributors to Europe's competitiveness, food security, public health, and autonomy. The sector supports coastal communities, contributes to environmental stewardship, and reinforces the EU's role as a responsible global actor.

Focusing on competitiveness, Mr. Kyriacou argued that autonomy cannot be achieved without a competitive and sustainable production base. This requires adherence to scientific advice and the principles of the Common Fisheries Policy, but also simpler and more effective regulatory frameworks. He underscored the need for predictable and robust financial instruments to stimulate investment, innovation, fleet modernisation, energy transition, and generational renewal within the sector.

At the international level, he called for stronger EU engagement to promote a level playing field, defend historical fishing rights and quota shares, and ensure stable access to third-country waters through Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements. Fair competition and clear rules, he noted, are essential for maintaining the viability of EU fishers and aquaculture producers.

In conclusion, Mr. Kyriacou stated that the key question is no longer whether blue foods matter, but how to fully embed them within Europe's future food security framework. He reaffirmed the readiness of the Cypriot Presidency to engage constructively in this debate, calling for continued dialogue, shared responsibility, and a clear, stable, and predictable policy environment for the sector.

### [International & EU context](#)

**Dr. Shakuntala Thilsted** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – UN Food System Summit Stocktake + 4, Senior Nutrition Expert, CGIAR & Chair, UN Food Systems Coordination Hub's Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC)

Dr. Shakuntala Thilsted opened her presentation by thanking the organizers and highlighting her focus on food and nutrition security, particularly in the context of aquatic food systems. She framed her remarks within her role as Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee to the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, emphasizing the importance of integrating aquatic foods into global food systems discussions — a perspective that was largely absent from the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit. Thilsted noted that her work, along with a small group of colleagues, successfully advocated for recognizing aquatic foods alongside land-based foods, albeit modestly. She stressed the significance of centering women, youth, and indigenous communities, who possess critical knowledge on diverse aquatic food production and consumption.

Dr. Thilsted highlighted that aquatic foods extend beyond just fish from the sea, encompassing animals, plants, and microorganisms consumed worldwide, with consumption patterns influenced by seasonality. She stressed that aquatic foods provide more than protein, including essential vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids, citing personal experiences with the importance of cod liver oil in school feeding programs in Trinidad and Tobago. She argued for a dietary perspective that integrates nutrition, sustainability, and lifestyle, referencing the Mediterranean diet's inclusion of small fish species like sardines alongside plant-based components and physical activity.

She reviewed examples of progressive dietary guidelines, including Denmark's 2021 official guidelines, which incorporated climate and sustainability considerations alongside nutrition, emphasizing sustainably sourced aquatic foods. Thilsted also referenced the 2025 EAT-Lancet Commission report, which highlighted justice, equity, and sustainable sourcing in recommendations for food intake. She drew attention to a 2024 nationwide study in Japan demonstrating that consuming small whole fish can prolong life expectancy and improve nutrient intake due to the consumption of all fish parts, which also include bioactive compounds.

Dr. Thilsted noted emerging challenges, including food safety concerns from heavy metals, antibiotics, and microplastics, as well as food loss and waste, which now account for approximately 40% of global food production. She emphasized that reducing loss is especially critical for aquatic foods which are perishable and highlighted innovations in the circular economy, such as using whole small fish to produce nutrient-rich powders that can be stored at room temperature for extended periods—benefiting women and children in resource-limited settings.

Concluding her remarks, Dr. Thilsted called for greater recognition of aquatic food diversity in European research and innovation, including seaweed production and analysis of bioactive compounds. She encouraged leveraging European technological advancements to improve nutrition and health globally while promoting sustainable and equitable use of aquatic foods. She closed by expressing optimism about ongoing research and innovations that can be shared worldwide to transform food systems and improve food and nutrition security.

**Jón Erlingur Jónasson** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – Aquatic Blue Food Coalition Chair, Special Envoy for the Ocean at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Iceland

Jón Erlingur Jónasson opened his presentation by acknowledging the organizers and noting that the session represented a “Stocktake+1,” emphasizing that the global food system is not yet where it needs to be. He framed his discussion around the duality of food systems— “blue” aquatic foods and “green” land-based foods—underscoring the persistent challenges of hunger, with one in ten people globally still food insecure, and the significant contribution of food systems to climate change, responsible for 30% of greenhouse gas emissions.

Mr. Jónasson highlighted the overexploitation, land degradation, water scarcity, pollution, biodiversity loss, and carbon footprint associated with terrestrial food systems, contrasting this with the untapped potential of aquatic foods. He provided an overview of global consumption patterns, noting that aquatic foods—comprising fish, shellfish, aquatic plants, and algae—contribute at least 20% of animal protein intake for certain populations. He emphasized the remarkable diversity of aquatic foods, with approximately 2,500 species or species groups harvested or cultivated worldwide.

He underscored the socioeconomic importance of small-scale and inland fisheries, which provide two-thirds of fish for direct human consumption and account for 90% of the 800 million blue food system jobs globally. Blue foods support 3 billion people and their livelihoods and with 20% of their animal protein requirements and deliver essential micronutrients to one in five individuals, generating roughly \$472 billion annually.

Mr. Jónasson addressed the vulnerability of aquatic food systems to climate change, noting threats such as ocean acidification, heatwaves, hurricanes, droughts, sea-level rise, and changes in species distribution. Despite these challenges, he highlighted that blue foods are climate-smart: depleted fisheries can recover under sustainable management, and aquaculture offers significant potential for climate adaptation through species selection, feed optimization, and resilient farm design. He noted that aquaculture could sustainably meet per capita demand for aquatic foods in nearly all coastal countries, even under severe climate scenarios.

Comparing carbon footprints, Mr. Jónasson demonstrated that fisheries and aquaculture generally produce emissions comparable to chicken and six times lower than beef, emphasizing the environmental advantages of blue foods. He acknowledged that although progress has been made since the 2021 UN Food Systems Summit, more work is needed to elevate aquatic foods on global policy agendas, spanning food security, climate adaptation, biodiversity, and nutrition.

Mr. Jónasson outlined the formation and activities of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, established post-2021 Summit to advance collaboration across governments, civil society, academia, intergovernmental organizations, and the private sector. The coalition pursues three primary goals: raising the profile of aquatic foods, mobilizing support, and driving knowledge exchange and place-based action. Examples of their work include advocacy at global fora such as the UN Ocean Conference, technical assistance to countries like Sierra Leone and Mexico on policy and

climate strategy integration, and the production of guidelines to incorporate aquatic foods into national climate and food system planning.

He concluded by emphasizing the coalition's strategic role in influencing high-level policy and planning, rather than on-the-ground interventions, and highlighted upcoming initiatives, including workshops in the Caribbean, engagements with FAO and the Committee on World Food Security, and preparations for COP 31. Mr. Jónasson closed with a call for increased recognition of blue foods in climate and food policy, noting that only 1% of Official Development Assistance currently supports SDG14 (life below water), and stressed the coalition's commitment to driving transformative change in global aquatic food systems.

**Anita Utheim Iversen** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – Head of Global Action Network – Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition  
Specialist Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Trade Industry and Fisheries

Anita Utheim Iversen opened her presentation by introducing the Global Action Network and highlighting its mission to advance sustainable aquatic food systems for food security and nutrition. She traced the network's origins to several key global initiatives, including the 2014 High-Level Panel of Experts report under the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS), which recognized the central role of fish in securing food and nutrition, and the ICN2 Rome Declaration on Nutrition, which committed world leaders to eradicating hunger and promoting sustainable food systems. The launch of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and the designation of 2016–2025 as the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition provided further impetus for establishing networks to support cross-sectoral collaboration. In response, the Global Action Network was officially launched at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference, with a renewed commitment at the 2022 UN Ocean Conference to continue activities until 2030, bridging the Decade of Action on Nutrition with the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

Ms. Utheim Iversen emphasized that the network's core focus is highlighting the role of aquatic food systems in achieving food security, moving beyond mere production volume to address access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets dietary needs and preferences. She stressed the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration, connecting governments, researchers, private sector actors, and NGOs to ensure knowledge-driven solutions for sustainable aquatic food systems.

The network employs multiple tools to facilitate knowledge sharing, including annual meetings, hybrid events, task forces, and working groups addressing themes such as bridging the decades, integrating green and blue food systems, small-scale fisheries, food composition data, and aquatic food consumption. A new regional group in Africa is also being established to strengthen local data and engagement.

Ms. Utheim Iversen highlighted the network's global presence across conferences and events on oceans, fisheries, agriculture, food security, nutrition, and climate. She noted the network's commitment to inclusivity, ensuring hybrid participation and leveraging digital tools to expand reach. Since 2018, the network's web page has attracted over 60,000 visitors, with 7,500 unique visitors in 2025 alone from 170 nations. The network also distributes quarterly newsletters and provides an interactive "gain and share" tool to connect users with knowledge on food security challenges and solutions.

A distinctive feature of the network is the use of the "Budstikke," a symbolic wooden tool inspired by traditional Norwegian message-sharing practices, to disseminate key messages and calls to

action among scientists, policymakers, and stakeholders. Ms. Utheim Iversen noted that the Budstikke was featured at multiple international events in 2025, including ocean, nutrition, fisheries, and climate conferences, with summaries and key messages available through the network's platform.

Concluding her remarks, Ms. Utheim Iversen highlighted the network's extensive engagement, with several thousand participants from 131 countries involved in activities, events, and newsletters, and extended an open invitation for further participation. She reinforced the network's overarching goal of using knowledge and collaboration to ensure sustainable, nutritious, and accessible aquatic food systems worldwide.

#### **Dovile Vaigauskaite – Head of Unit CFP and Structural Support at DG MARE, Policy Development and Coordination.**

Dovile Vaigauskaite opened her presentation by acknowledging the importance of aquatic foods and the shared recognition of the sector's challenges, including declining wild fish captures, stagnating aquaculture production, an aging workforce, and outdated vessels. She stressed that these challenges have developed over time and that the sector is now at a critical juncture requiring targeted strategies.

Ms. Vaigauskaite highlighted two key European Commission initiatives aimed at addressing these issues. The first is the European Ocean Pact, adopted in June 2025 and announced by President Ursula von der Leyen at the UN Ocean Conference. The Ocean Pact consolidates all EU ocean-related policies under one coherent framework, aligning environmental protection, economic growth, and food security, particularly in the context of sustainable aquatic foods.

The second initiative is the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) evaluation, scheduled for publication in late April or early May 2026, which will assess the CFP's effectiveness over the past 11 years (2013–2024). The evaluation will examine the policy through the three pillars of sustainability—environmental, economic, and social objectives—and provide evidence-based insights to inform the Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040.

Ms. Vaigauskaite outlined the four pillars of the 2040 vision:

1. Demand – Understanding evolving consumer preferences, increasing demand for blue foods, and enhancing traceability and labelling to enable informed choices.
2. Supply – Ensuring sustainable sourcing, modernizing fleets and aquaculture farms, and aligning economic performance with environmental limits.
3. Labor – Addressing workforce challenges, including generational renewal, reskilling, upskilling, and diversification of livelihoods to sustain coastal and island communities.
4. Tools and Infrastructure – Optimizing vessels, aquaculture farms, processing plants, and access to finance and innovation to enhance working conditions and sector profitability.

Ms. Vaigauskaite also emphasized the need to consider overarching mega-trends such as climate change, demographic shifts, geopolitical developments, and evolving consumption patterns when shaping future policies. She encouraged stakeholder engagement in the Vision 2040 process through upcoming consultations, including the Ocean Days on March 4th and the European Maritime Days in Cyprus in May 2026.

Finally, she highlighted the alignment of the CFP evaluation, Vision 2040, and the EU Multi-Annual Financial Framework, noting that this timing offers a strategic opportunity to develop actionable, evidence-based solutions for the sector. Ms. Vaigauskaite concluded by inviting all stakeholders to contribute their expertise and perspectives to ensure the successful implementation of sustainable and resilient aquatic food systems across the EU.

#### **Discussions – moderated by Ilias Grampas (EBCD)**

##### **Question 1: Yobana Bermúdez – Conxemar**

Ms. Bermúdez opened by expressing appreciation for the presentations and emphasized her organization's strong support for the European fleet, fair competition, and high-quality EU aquatic foods. However, she noted a gap in the discussions: the processing and trading industry was largely absent from the blue food strategy discussions. She stressed that the industry relies on 70% of imports, which are a significant source of added value—estimated at €30 billion—and are essential for social sustainability in rural coastal communities. She asked how the industry is accounted for in the strategy, noting that while the primary sector is often highlighted, the processing sector is equally vital and must be considered in planning for sustainable and inclusive aquatic food systems.

##### **Response: Yiannos Kyriacou – Fisheries Counsellor – Permanent Representation of the Republic of Cyprus to the EU**

Yiannos Kyriacou clarified that the processing sector is indeed part of the entire food chain, from catch to consumer, aligning with the farm-to-fork approach. He explained that current strategic efforts focus on gradually increasing EU production to reduce dependency on imports, but this does not imply stopping imports entirely. Imports remain necessary to meet domestic demand, while the goal is to safeguard historic catches and maintain sustainable fisheries, including both coastal and large-scale sectors, to support the processing industry.

##### **Additional comment: Yobana Bermúdez – Conxemar**

She emphasized that not all imports are equal: raw materials imported into the EU contribute to added value, social sustainability, and local rural economies, citing Galicia as an example where over 80% of fishing sector income derives from processing.

##### **Additional comment: Janne Posti – Conxemar**

Mr. Posti echoed Bermúdez's points, noting that EU fisheries, aquaculture, and processing/trading are interlinked and must coexist to ensure sectoral viability. He highlighted real pressures on the industry, including rising raw material costs, declining fish consumption, regulatory complexities such as the digital catch certification system, and external shocks like COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. He stressed that EU processors would prefer to use more domestically caught seafood, but underutilization of EU quotas (only 66% annually used) increases reliance on imports. He emphasized that imports are often from well-managed, environmentally sustainable fisheries in high-income countries, and reminded that globally, 78% of seafood landings meet environmental sustainability standards. Mr. Posti concluded that EU trade and fisheries policies must recognize the role of processing and trading in ensuring food security, as imports are critical for stable supply.

##### **Response: Javier Garat – European Economic Social Committee (EESC)**

Javier Garat stressed that all segments of the seafood value chain — producers, importers, exporters, wild and farmed — are interdependent, and that collaboration is essential for providing healthy and sustainable protein. He underlined the need for fair and enforceable rules to ensure a level playing field and eliminate illegal practices across the market

**Question 2: Szilvia Mihalfy – Project Manager at FEAP**

Ms. Mihalfy acknowledged the positive contributions of the sector but raised a question about strategic dialogue. She referred to last year’s European Commission Vision for Agriculture and Food, which was based on a sectoral strategic dialogue, and asked whether a similar structured dialogue is planned for fisheries and aquaculture beyond public consultations. She noted that while some meetings with small-scale fisheries have occurred, more direct engagement with multiple Directorate-Generals—including those covering aquaculture, trade, and the environment—would be valuable, given that many issues relate to EU legislation beyond the remit of a single DG.

**Response: Dovile Vaigauskaite – Head of Unit CFP and Structural Support at DG MARE, Policy Development and Coordination.**

Ms. Vaigauskaite responded that, while no formal “strategic dialogue” is planned under the current vision, ongoing stakeholder engagement occurs continuously through daily interactions. She noted that input from public consultations and the CFP evaluation has been considered, and three dedicated events on the vision are planned, including one on aquaculture during the Ocean Days event. She acknowledged that her unit does not directly manage aquaculture, as it is a shared EU competence with distinct challenges. Nevertheless, she committed to forwarding suggestions for more structured dialogues with relevant colleagues to ensure the sector’s concerns are addressed.

### **Scientific perspectives**

**Jörn Schmidt** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – WorldFish Director for Sustainable Aquatic Food Systems

Jörn Schmidt opened his presentation by providing a scientific perspective on aquatic blue foods, emphasizing their nutritional, health, and climate relevance. Highlighting his dual role as Director for Sustainable Aquatic Food Systems and Acting Director for Aquatic Food Biosciences at WorldFish in Penang, Malaysia, Dr. Schmidt underscored the global interconnectedness of aquatic food systems and Europe’s position within them, noting the EU’s influence through trade, distant-water fleets, and international agreements. Drawing on his experience as former Chair of the Science Committee of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea, he framed aquatic blue foods as strategic assets for Europe’s food security and as drivers of global sustainability.

Dr. Schmidt stressed that while Europe currently imports much of its aquatic food, increasing domestic production can strengthen nutritional resilience and address global hidden hunger. He highlighted the exceptional nutritional value of aquatic foods, including their highly bioavailable proteins, essential micronutrients, vitamins, and minerals, which are often deficient globally. He also connected nutrition to public health, describing regular fish consumption as associated with lower cardiovascular risk, improved cognitive development, mental health benefits, and reduced micronutrient deficiencies, particularly for pregnant and lactating women and young children.

Climate benefits were a central theme, with Dr. Schmidt noting that responsibly produced aquatic foods have lower greenhouse gas emissions, minimal land-use change, and low freshwater use compared to terrestrial animal protein. He emphasized the potential of low-trophic aquaculture—such as bivalves and seaweed—and integrated multi-trophic aquaculture to further reduce environmental impacts while enhancing productivity. Dr. Schmidt underscored that Europe has the regulatory frameworks, innovation capacity, and governance systems to lead globally in sustainable aquatic food production, though investment and focus are needed to regain leadership.

Dr. Schmidt also highlighted resilience, both environmental and socio-economic, as a critical benefit of aquatic blue foods. Production, processing, and distribution support coastal and rural livelihoods, diversify incomes, and enhance food system stability, often responding differently than land-based agriculture to climate shocks. He noted that integrated systems, particularly in dryland or climate-sensitive areas, can increase resilience for local and global food security.

Addressing trade-offs, Dr. Schmidt cautioned that expansion without safeguards could cause habitat damage, pollution, and social inequities. Europe, he argued, can demonstrate how responsible growth, climate-smart aquaculture, nutrition-sensitive production, and ecosystem-based fisheries management can coexist. He also highlighted Europe's capacity to influence global production standards and the importance of integrating aquatic foods into nutrition and health policies. Aligning low-emission production, decarbonized value chains, innovation, monitoring, and ecosystem-based management with broader policies—including the EU Ocean Pact, Farm to Fork Strategy, and Nature Restoration Law—can solidify Europe's leadership in aquatic blue foods while shaping global sustainability pathways.

Concluding his presentation, Dr. Schmidt reinforced the message that aquatic blue foods are essential for nutrition, climate action, and resilience, providing Europe with an opportunity to lead both domestically and internationally in sustainable aquatic food systems.

### **Stakeholders' perspectives**

#### **Szilvia Mihalfy – Senior Policy and Project Manager at FEAP & EU Seafood Alliance representative**

Szilvia Mihalfy opened by thanking the organizers and Jörn Schmidt for his insightful presentation, noting the importance of aligning policy and regulation in practice—a key challenge for the blue food sector. Speaking on behalf of the EU Seafood Alliance, she highlighted that the Alliance brings together the main European organizations representing the blue food value chain: the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP), representing aquaculture; Européche, representing the fisheries sector, the European Association of Fish Producer Organizations (EAPO); and Seafood Europe, formerly known as the E.U. Fish Processors and Traders Association (AIPCE-CEP) representing seafood processors and traders. Collectively, these organizations cover the production, processing, and trade of aquatic foods across Europe, providing daily supplies to European consumers.

Ms. Mihalfy illustrated her points with images of the people behind blue food production—fishers, aquaculture farmers, processors, researchers, and students—showcasing the skills, innovation, and commitment underpinning the sector. She emphasized that current geopolitical tensions, climate instability, rising costs, and supply chain disruptions highlight the strategic

importance of Europe's capacity to produce food sustainably within its borders. Blue foods sit at the intersection of multiple EU priorities, including food security, climate action, public health, competitiveness, and strategic autonomy, yet remain underrepresented in EU policy documents.

She underlined the sector's contribution to food security and nutrition through high-quality protein and essential micronutrients, its lower carbon footprint compared with many land-based proteins, and its support for coastal, rural, and island communities by creating jobs and economic activity. Blue foods are increasingly recognized in health and nutrition policies as a means to promote balanced diets and prevent diet-related diseases, linking the sector directly to public health.

Despite this potential, Europe remains heavily dependent on seafood imports, while domestic production is stagnating in some areas—not due to a lack of knowledge, innovation, or commitment, but because of complex policy and regulatory frameworks. A recent study for the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee confirmed that aquaculture holds significant potential to strengthen food security and resilience, provided barriers to regulatory approval, access to space, and investment are addressed.

Ms. Mihalffy stressed that sustainability is not optional; it is integral to the sector's future. Well-managed fisheries and responsible aquaculture can contribute to environmental objectives, including low-carbon protein production, efficient resource use, and ecosystem services delivery. However, sustainability frameworks must be practical, science-based, and proportionate; overly complex regulations risk reducing domestic production and increasing imports from regions with lower standards. She emphasized that aquatic foods should be central to the EU's efforts to decarbonize food systems.

Innovation across the sector is already underway, including advances in feed, selective breeding, digital monitoring, AI, animal health, and farming systems in aquaculture, as well as selectivity, fuel efficiency, and data collection in fisheries. Yet innovation alone is insufficient; practical regulatory frameworks, access to funding, and mechanisms to scale research results are essential. Generational renewal is also critical, with a growing gap between the skills needed for modern sustainable food systems and the attractiveness of the sector for young professionals. Long licensing procedures, administrative burdens, and uncertainty over access to resources hinder new entrants, making training and recognition of the sector as modern and innovative vital.

Ms. Mihalffy highlighted the importance of a Blue Food Action Plan aligned with the EU Vision for Fisheries and Aquaculture 2040 and the Ocean Pact. From the EU Seafood Alliance perspective, the plan should focus on enabling delivery in practice, recognizing blue food production as a legitimate strategic objective alongside environmental protection. She called for streamlined regulations, simplified planning and licensing procedures, support for innovation uptake, investment in skills and generational renewal, improved public understanding through labelling and education, and targeted support for SMEs and startups. The goal is to create a framework where sustainability, competitiveness, public health, and food security reinforce each other.

Concluding, Ms. Mihalffy emphasized that blue foods can make a stronger contribution to Europe's food security, climate objectives, public health, and economic resilience. The knowledge, commitment, and potential exist; what is now required is coherent policy, political clarity, and a framework that enables fishers and aquaculture producers to deliver sustainably, innovate confidently, and attract the next generation. The EU Seafood Alliance stands ready to engage constructively in building this forward-looking vision for blue foods in Europe.

**Jules Danto** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – Policy Officer at EAPO & coordinator of the ETP Large Scale Sector

Jules Danto opened by thanking the organizers and acknowledging Szilvia Mihalfy's presentation on the blue food action plan, noting EAPO's support as a member of the EU Food Alliance. He outlined his presentation on the decarbonization of the EU fishing fleet in the context of fisheries' contribution to food security. Representing 30 producer organizations across 12 EU member states, Mr. Danto emphasized that EAPO members include both small- and large-scale vessels, and that the organization plays an active role in the Commission's Energy Transition Partnership (ETP), particularly coordinating large-scale fisheries.

Mr. Danto described the structure of the ETP, which comprises ten working groups covering fisheries, aquaculture, shipbuilding, ports, research, and NGOs. These groups have engaged stakeholders through workshops and open dialogues, culminating in sector-specific and joint recommendations recently published, with a high-level conference scheduled to discuss next steps and the EU roadmap for fisheries and aquaculture energy transition by the end of the year.

Focusing on fisheries, Mr. Danto highlighted that emissions are primarily from fuel use, as opposed to feed or land inputs, and that the EU fleet contributes less than 0.01% of global emissions. He presented data showing a 52% reduction in GHG emissions between 1990 and 2021, with GHG intensity (kg CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per kg of landings) decreasing by over 25% between 2005 and 2022, according to a recent EC-commissioned report. Despite these achievements, Mr. Danto stressed that the sector should continue to advance toward carbon-neutral production, noting the significant potential of fisheries to produce low-carbon protein compared to other animal-based proteins.

Mr. Danto argued that the energy transition presents a strategic opportunity to improve the sector's climate performance while supporting food security. A decarbonized fisheries sector can provide low-carbon, sustainable, and highly nutritious blue foods, contributing to both European and global food systems. Achieving this requires forward-looking policies that incentivize innovation, fleet renewal, and modernization while avoiding regulatory bottlenecks that impede progress.

He also emphasized the global perspective, noting the need to sustainably increase protein production to meet a growing population projected to exceed 10 billion by the mid-2080s. He highlighted the importance of addressing underexploited stocks in regions such as the Atlantic while avoiding overexploitation in developing countries, calling on the EU to support fishers in achieving the energy transition. Mr. Danto concluded by reaffirming EAPO's commitment to advancing a sustainable, low-carbon, and globally responsible fisheries sector.

**Laure Guillevic** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – Ocean Policy Officer at WWF European Policy Office

Laure Guillevic opened by thanking the organizers and participants and highlighted WWF's role in representing 27 national offices across Europe, as well as two regional offices in the Baltic and Mediterranean. She explained that her presentation would cover both a global and European perspective on aquatic food systems, concluding with actionable recommendations.

From a global standpoint, Ms. Guillevic emphasized the critical role oceans play in climate regulation and food production, while also highlighting the risks posed by ecosystem degradation. She pointed to scientific assessments, including the crossing of planetary

boundaries such as ocean acidification, and a 56% decline in marine biodiversity since 1970, underlining the urgent need for action. She stressed that marine food production both relies on and impacts ecosystem services, and that these pressures are projected to increase between 2040 and 2060.

Turning to the European context, Ms. Guillevic outlined the strong dependence of the EU economy on healthy ecosystems, citing that 36% of EU gross value added relies on nature and that failing to implement marine environmental regulations could cost society over €11.6 billion. She also noted that 75% of European bank loans are linked to at least one ecosystem service, highlighting the economic stakes of ocean health.

Ms. Guillevic discussed the EU's heavy reliance on seafood imports, with a self-sufficiency rate of just 37% in 2023. She stressed the need for better traceability of imported seafood, referencing WWF's 2021 analysis showing that one in six fish consumed in the EU is at risk of being untraceable without traceability requirement for prepared and preserved products, which should be implemented as of 2029 with the entry into force of the Fisheries Control Regulation. She also highlighted low verification rates by EU member states for catch documentation, underscoring risks to sustainability and accountability.

Concluding her remarks, Ms. Guillevic presented clear calls to action:

- Ensure full implementation and enforcement of the Common Fisheries Policy and Fisheries Control Regulation to minimize fisheries' impact on marine ecosystems.
- Strengthen traceability and control of seafood imports to prevent illegal or unsustainable products from entering EU markets and create a level playing field for European producers.
- Promote accountability in international fisheries agreements, including Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements, and ensure due diligence across value chains by businesses.

Ms. Guillevic closed by emphasizing that, while aquatic food systems face significant challenges, effective action—both within Europe and globally—can protect marine ecosystems, support sustainable food production, and advance responsible, resilient blue food systems.

**Clémentine Etienne-Brunon** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – Youth Policy Specialist, FAO Office of Youth and Women

Clémentine Etienne-Brunon joined the session remotely from Rome, thanking the organizers for the opportunity to present FAO's work on youth engagement in agriculture and fisheries, with a focus on young women. She highlighted FAO's mandate to empower youth through inclusive mechanisms that enable active contributions to agri-food system transformation at local, regional, and global levels.

Ms. Brunon introduced the Global Youth Action Initiative (the “World Food Forum”), FAO's main youth-led platform, which operates year-round and integrates several interlinked programs:

- Youth Assembly – Structured, youth-led platform for meaningful youth engagement in policy and governance.
- Youth Entrepreneurship and Innovation Program – Supports young innovators with capacity building, visibility, and funding.

- Youth Education Program – Provides learning opportunities from early education through lifelong learning.
- Youth Culture Program – Empowers youth to safeguard and revitalize tangible and intangible food heritage.
- Young Women’s Empowerment Program – Strengthens leadership, voice, and agency of young women in agri-food systems.
- Local Youth Action Program – Connects global initiatives to local contexts through WFF national youth chapters.

Ms. Etienne-Brunon emphasized that the Youth Assembly is fully youth-led, with priorities, consultations, and agendas determined by an annually rotating Youth Policy Board. FAO provides technical guidance to ensure alignment with intergovernmental processes.

A key outcome of this work is the Global Youth Constituency on Fisheries and Agriculture, launched during the 36th FAO Committee on Fisheries session in July 2024. This constituency provides a structured platform for youth-led organizations to engage in advocacy, policy, and knowledge-sharing, contributing to inclusive, equitable, and sustainable aquatic food systems.

The constituency has already participated in major international processes, including the UN Ocean Conference and the FAO World Food Forum flagship event, and is currently developing an official Youth Manifesto outlining its values, vision, priorities, and key goals.

Ms. Etienne-Brunon concluded by introducing Ilaria Bellomo, Vice President and co-founder of the Network of Women in Aquaculture, who is actively involved in the constituency’s steering committee, before passing to her to share young women’s perspectives on fisheries and aquaculture.

**Ilaria Bellomo** ([Click here to see the Presentation](#)) – Vice-President & Cofounder of NOWA (Network Of Women in Aquaculture)

Ilaria Bellomo began by thanking Clementine Etienne Brunon for the introduction. She introduced NOWA, the Network of Women in Aquaculture, explaining that it was first created in October 2023 and formally founded as a nonprofit association in October 2024. NOWA is a social entrepreneurship initiative focused on promoting gender equality and inclusivity across the global aquaculture sector. The network provides a platform for women to connect, share experiences, and contribute to a more diverse and sustainable aquaculture community. She emphasized NOWA’s involvement in the FAO World Food Forum Global Youth Action initiative and its role on the FAO steering committee of the global youth constituency on fisheries and aquaculture.

Ms. Bellomo highlighted that NOWA emerged from a training session organized by FAO-GFCM and FEAP for women experts in aquaculture from Mediterranean and Black Sea countries. This experience underscored the importance of creating a network for young women to exchange experiences and strengthen confidence and self-determination in both work and life. She explained that NOWA aims to foster a sense of community while addressing challenges faced by women in aquaculture, including limited networking opportunities, workforce gaps, barriers to entry, lack of recognition, and limited opportunities to have their voices heard.

She then addressed the critical role women play in food security, pointing out that while production and nutrition are often the focus, the dedication and care women bring to every

aspect of fisheries and aquaculture is essential to the resilience of communities and the quality and safety of food. Ms. Bellomo noted that women's work is often underrecognized, yet their commitment to sustainability and long-term food security is strong. She cited a NOWA survey showing that one of the main reasons young women enter aquaculture is the desire to contribute to sustainable food systems.

Ms. Bellomo concluded by describing NOWA's initiatives to empower young women to speak up confidently and develop their skills. She mentioned plans for a mentorship program and emphasized that the impact of these efforts depends on organizations that listen to and support women. She expressed gratitude to the FAO and the meeting organizers for providing a platform for women to be visible and recognized for their central contributions to food security. She encouraged attendees to follow NOWA via the provided QR code and highlighted that NOWA would participate in the Seafood Expo in Barcelona.

### **Discussions – moderated by Ilias Grampas (EBCD)**

#### **Question 3: Robin Sahoda – Aquatic Animals Project Officer, Your Group for Animals**

Ms. Sahoda thanked the speakers and EBCD for organizing the event and highlighted the importance of strengthening the scientific evidence base for fish welfare, particularly in aquaculture systems expected to expand in the coming decades. She asked how the industry envisions the role of future research on fish welfare and how improved knowledge and welfare indicators could be integrated into the Vision 2040, in a way that supports high welfare standards while maintaining a competitive and resilient aquaculture sector.

#### **Response: Szilvia Mihalffy – Senior Policy and Project Manager at FEAP & EU Seafood Alliance representative**

Szilvia Mihalffy acknowledged the importance of the question and emphasized that the upcoming Ocean Research and Innovation Strategy is crucial for the sector. She identified fish health and welfare—especially in the context of climate change—as an area needing further research. The industry is currently contributing to studies focused on fish health and welfare and is co-organizing a workshop with FAO GSCM in Athens in two weeks, where health and welfare will be a dedicated session. This workshop will involve the new EU Reference Center for Fish Welfare and FEAP members to discuss challenges and potential solutions. She noted that while research has recently focused on low-impact aquaculture, there is a need to expand knowledge across all production methods to support sustainable practices. The overarching message was that a better understanding of fish welfare is essential for ensuring sustainable aquaculture that can feed both European consumers and the global population.

### **Concluding remarks**

#### **Ilias Grampas – Deputy Director of EBCD**

Closing the event, Ilias Grampas thanked the EESC for hosting the event and acknowledging the support of Xunta de Galicia in organizing it. He emphasized that the day's discussion confirmed a clear and powerful message; blue foods are not a niche topic, but central to Europe's food security, climate and socio-economic resilience, and competitiveness agenda.

He noted that while significant progress is being made at the international, EU, national, and regional levels, fragmentation remains a risk. Science, policy, industry, and civil society are often aligned on objectives but may diverge on timing or implementation.

Mr. Grampas highlighted three key takeaways from the event. First, the importance of continuing to raise awareness both in Brussels and in international fora, as progress can only be achieved through cooperation and dialogue. Second, that competitiveness and sustainability — environmental, social, and economic — can, and should reinforce each other, rather than be treated as opposing goals. Third, people matter; fishers, aquaculture producers, women, and youth are not marginal stakeholders, but central actors in the transition toward sustainable blue food systems.

Moving on, he reinforced EBCD's commitment to acting as a connector — linking Brussels and regions, international developments and EU policies, as well as ambition and practical action on the ground. Mr. Grampas concluded by underlining that the challenge is no longer about defining the value of blue foods, which is now clear, but ensuring they are fully embedded in Europe's strategic food vision. Finally, he noted that the discussion does not end here, but will continue to evolve, eyeing the next Stocktake event in the following year.