



## Press Release

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For immediate release

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### **Better design, better targeting needed for sustainable development of aquaculture at EU and Member State level – say EU Auditors**

A report published today by the European Court of Auditors (ECA) reveals that measures to support aquaculture in the period up to 2013 were not well designed and implemented at EU and Member State level, and that the European Fisheries Fund (EFF), as the funding instrument of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), failed to deliver value for money and effective support for the sustainable development of aquaculture.

Kevin Cardiff, the ECA Member responsible for the report, has commented that:

*“We found that the main objectives for growth of the aquaculture sector have not been met, and the sector has stagnated for many years. While the financial crisis undoubtedly contributed to this stagnation, the overall framework to support the sector was not well designed, and the actual measures taken were weak. The projects we audited in the Member States were often poorly selected and, with some exceptions, did not deliver expected results or value for money, and contributed little to growth and employment. We hope that our observations and recommendations will be used as lessons learned for the implementation of the new EMFF measures for aquaculture starting this year. In that context, we note that the Commission has already indicated that it will act on various recommendations.”*

EU auditors found that, for the period up to 2013, there was an inadequate framework at EU and Member State level to translate the EU’s objectives for the sustainable development of aquaculture into reality and the measures actually taken did not provide sufficient results. The CFP and EFF did not provide a sufficiently clear framework for the development of aquaculture. At the level of the Member States, measures to support the sustainable development of aquaculture were not well designed and implemented. The Member States’ national strategic plans and operational programmes did not provide a sufficiently clear basis for the support of aquaculture, and the Member States lacked a coherent strategy for the sector. The targeting of EFF funding on aquaculture projects was often poor, and the auditors found that these projects usually failed to achieve the planned results or give good value for money.

*The purpose of this press release is to give the main messages of the special report adopted by the European Court of Auditors. The full report is on [www.eca.europa.eu](http://www.eca.europa.eu)*

## ECA Press

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**Notes to editors:**

European Court of Auditors (ECA) special reports are published throughout the year, presenting the results of selected audits of specific EU budgetary areas or management topics.

Each year the EU produces about 1,3 million tonnes of fish from aquaculture, and the sector has a turnover of 4 billion euro. One of the aims of the CFP in the period up to 2013 was to encourage the sustainable development of aquaculture. Consequently, by May 2013, the EFF provided over 400 million euro to fund measures for productive investments in aquaculture, as well as environmental and health measures.

This special report (No 10/2014) entitled “The effectiveness of European Fisheries Fund support for aquaculture” considered whether measures to support aquaculture had been well designed and implemented at EU and Member State level, and whether the EFF delivered value for money and supported the sustainable development of aquaculture. The audit focused on projects funded between 2007 and 2011. It was performed at the relevant Commission departments and in six Member States (Spain, France, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Romania) accounting for over 50 % of aquaculture production and related EFF budgetary support in the EU.

EU auditors found that overall, effective support was not provided, as the framework to develop aquaculture at both EU and Member State level was weak, and the measures actually taken did not deliver sufficient results.

At EU level, the CFP and EFF did not provide a suitable framework to develop the sector. There was a lack of guidance from the Commission services on key environmental issues such as the water framework directive and the environmental impact assessment directive. There was insufficient comparability between data on aquaculture from different EU sources, which makes the results of aquaculture measures difficult to assess. The EFF monitoring committees did not play a significant role in monitoring aquaculture, management information was deficient, and the results of relevant publicly-funded research projects were not fully exploited.

At Member State level, national strategic plans and operational programmes did not provide a sufficiently clear basis for the support of aquaculture, and there was no coherent strategy for the sector. The lack of appropriate spatial planning, coupled with complicated licensing procedures, acted as a brake on sustainable development. The aquaculture projects which received funding from the EFF were often poorly selected and, with some exceptions, did not deliver the expected results or value for money. There were also significant inaccuracies and methodological weaknesses in the data contained in some annual implementation reports.

The report recognises efforts made by the Commission to encourage the development of aquaculture. The new common fisheries policy and its funding arm, which start this year, represent a significant improvement. The report makes a number of recommendations for the implementation of the new policy.

**EU auditors recommend that the Commission**, in its implementation of measures to support aquaculture under the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund:

- (a) consider, when approving Member States’ operational programmes, whether objectives for the sustainable development of aquaculture are realistic and appropriate, and whether support is targeted at measures which are likely to address those objectives;
- (b) establish guidelines for the consideration of relevant environmental factors when determining public funding;
- (c) ensure, where relevant, that Member States’ operational programmes are only approved if appropriate national strategies for the development of the aquaculture sector are prepared;
- (d) encourage Member States to implement relevant spatial planning and to simplify the licensing and administrative procedures to support the development of the aquaculture sector;
- (e) improve the comparability of the statistical data on aquaculture compiled from its different sources, in order to enhance its accuracy and completeness.

**EU auditors also recommend that the Member States**, in their implementation of measures to support aquaculture under the new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund:

- (a) prepare and apply coherent national strategies for the development of the aquaculture sector;
- (b) implement relevant spatial planning, and simplify the licencing and administrative procedures to support the development of the aquaculture sector;
- (c) ensure that public funding is prioritised towards projects which best contribute to the sustainable development of aquaculture and provide value for money;
- (d) monitor project results more closely by setting and applying relevant indicators.