

**JOINT DECLARATION OF AUSTRIA, CROATIA, CZECH REPUBLIC, GERMANY,
HUNGARY, POLAND, ROMANIA, SLOVAKIA, SLOVENIA AND SPAIN
on the future development of freshwater aquaculture in the EU after 2020**

In the view of current discussion on the future prospects of freshwater aquaculture in the post-2020 period, our countries hereby express position on the above mentioned issue.

The consumption of fish in EU has been constantly increasing, while there is a constant pressure on the living aquatic biological resources due to the impact of fishing activities. Aquaculture has proved to be a viable alternative to commercial fishing. However, the internal production of aquatic food struggles to satisfy the growing demand of EU consumers and to provide an adequate supply of quality fish products throughout the year. Consequently, this supply gap has to be covered by imports of capture fish and aquaculture products from third countries in which production conditions do not always reach the high standards of the EU production (low environmental footprint, high sanitary requirements, animal welfare, workers conditions, etc.). All imports should fulfil similar production conditions as foreseen for EU production. As ensuring food security should be one of the main ambitions of the EU, we believe it is of utmost importance to provide the appropriate conditions for further development of the sector in the EU.

We acknowledge that the political and financial support provided during the previous and current programming periods contributed substantially to positive trends defining the freshwater aquaculture as we know it these days. Nevertheless, we are convinced that the challenges related to sustainable development of the sector still need to be addressed as they require a long-term solution. Therefore we regard the continuation of the structural funding support to be a cornerstone for delivering of positive, socioeconomic and environmental impacts on our communities.

Although freshwater aquaculture contributes to over 20 % of aquaculture in the EU, there is still a considerable potential for sustainable growth of production and improvement of food security. Not to be forgotten are the environmental aspects including environmental sustainability, biodiversity, water management, shaping of the landscape, protection and retention. However, we substantially need to improve the awareness about the benefits of freshwater aquaculture and its role in social, economic and environmental development of rural communities. These communities feature the same socioeconomic characteristics as the coastal ones providing employment and social stability. Unfortunately, most of these benefits are still relatively unknown outside a narrow group of professionals and academics. This leads to a profound lack of recognition among the decision makers. For instance decision makers dealing with the environmental policy shall have more access and include into their policy more data from aquaculture. Those data could be gathered within one framework. Marketing strategy to improve the awareness about wide benefits of aquaculture should be developed at the level of the Commission e.g. for five years. This strategy should be evaluated every year.

Aquaculture in natural environment is an important part of our history, culture and everyday life of rural communities. Therefore it is necessary to support further research of the sector and its benefits and to ensure the results, country specifics and the similarities with other sectors (agriculture) are taken into the account when formulating the regulatory and financing framework of EU policies.

At the same time, Member States need to be granted a greater flexibility to address their national needs and long-term objectives as set out in the Multiannual National Strategic Plans. These include a sustainable growth of production, the introduction of the latest technologies and innovations, farmers' collective actions, increase of processing capacities, promotion of environment friendly practices, diversification of the products supply, collection of reliable data and promotion of health benefits for consumers. The Member States should divert from costs eligibility to results-oriented responsibility. The number of Union Priorities should be reduced in order to achieve a clear structure of the regulation. Therefore we support further simplification of the regulation and decrease of administrative and financial burden for managing authorities, control bodies and beneficiaries.

In the light of preparation of new programming period, we have focused our support on following common priorities:

- a) **Innovations** (including the increase of intensity of public aid, co-financing EU rate at least 90 %, and the possibility of supporting innovations in the field of fish processing).
- b) **Productive investments and support, New aquaculture farmers and Recirculating aquaculture systems** (including simplification of future legislation with less fragmented support, requirements for new aquaculture farmers entering the sector should be the responsibility of each Member State, a general intensity of public aid up to 70 % or up to 90 % in the case of new aquaculture farmers).
- c) **Increasing the potential of aquaculture sites** (including extended eligibility to the SMEs and wider eligible activities suitable also for the land-locked countries).
- d) **Aquaculture providing environmental services** (including possibility of area-based normative support to compensate ecosystem services of the fish ponds, simplification of management approach is also needed).
- e) **Promotional campaigns** (with an emphasis on “added value” of EMFF support and aquaculture itself, which offers sustainable way of producing healthy food).
- f) **Processing, distribution and marketing** (including grant financing support for large businesses as well).
- g) **Data collection** (according to the needs of individual Member States, with possibility to choose suitable type of projects).
- h) **Control and Enforcement** (according to the needs of individual Member States, with one co-financing rate and appropriate eligible expenditure meeting the needs of freshwater aquaculture).
- i) **Producer's organizations (PO) that can carry out collective actions for aquaculture farmers in production and marketing** (according to the needs of individual Member States, with revised PO rules more suitable for aquaculture businesses which can increase absorption capacity of these measures).

In view of the above mentioned, Member States express their common position on vital and irreplaceable role of the freshwater aquaculture sector. Therefore, we are convinced it is necessary to continue providing the adequate political and financial support to freshwater communities on the EU level in the post-2020 period while offering the Member States the possibility to decide the way to achieve objectives of the Common Fisheries Policy and the Operational Programmes.