

Brussels, November 23, 2007

## **EP Hearing on Aquaculture, October 2007 - report**

EBCD organised a Hearing in the European Parliament in early October, on behalf of the European Parliament's Intergroup for Sustainable Development, on the constraints and the opportunities for the development of European aquaculture (– Intergroups are multi-stakeholders' *fora*, recognised by the EP, aiming at informing Members of the EP on different topical issues. They are chaired by MEPs).

It was attended by more than 100 aquaculture stakeholders, including the Minister of Fisheries of Portugal, European parliamentarians, the European Commission, representatives of Member States and other stakeholders.

Prior to the Hearing a high level European Aquaculture Technology Working Lunch was held. It included four presentations on key areas of European Technology advances:

- vaccines and welfare;
- sustainability of fish feed manufacture;
- recirculation technology for fish farming;
- advances in aquaculture operation technology

*(all these presentations are available at our website [www.ebcd.org](http://www.ebcd.org))*

The Hearing itself was chaired by Struan Stevenson, MEP, chairman of the Intergroup. In his opening speech he stressed the important socio-economic role of aquaculture in different regions of Europe, the opportunities (i.e. new technology) and challenges of the development of aquaculture (challenges to meet the market opportunities in global level but also the consumers' demands for safe, healthy and high quality products and the environmental constraints). He pleaded for a consensus involving all parties to the debate to meet new challenges while maintaining the competitiveness and productivity of the sector.

### **WORKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Other MEPs added that public authorities and the EU should back the industry's efforts to meet all the above challenges, by creating a single and coherent legal framework, by reducing existing administrative burdens required for licensing (which involves of a plethora of services and Ministries) and by introducing spatial planning. They also thought that research should be encouraged and funds should be made available under the new European Fisheries Fund, especially to remote EU regions depending on aquaculture.

The sector deplored the fact that the political will of the 2002 Commission strategy was not accompanied by national policies or strategies for the opportunities for development to become a reality. This development needed guidance, foresight, confidence and investment.

The *perceived* constraints – water resources, insufficient environmental carrying capacity, limitations of fish meal and oil, health management and the market – were not really the main constraints to development. The *real* constraints were bureaucracy, the planning and licensing of farms and complexity involved; the use or misuse of environmental legislation; the priority given to other development and the lack of capital investment.

On the interaction of aquaculture with the environment it was mentioned that molluscs needed healthy waters and were directly affected by the deterioration in the quality of the waters. The challenge was how to decouple the production increase from the environmental impact with profitable growth.

Finally it was suggested that aquaculture products should be properly labelled so as to inform the consumer of the efforts done by the producers to deliver quality products.

The Commission described the EU regulatory framework, the objectives of the 2002 strategy, the opportunities for support of the research and to the sector through the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme and the EFF and announced that the Commission would come up with a Communication in the end of 2008 after having widely consulted all stakeholders (including namely this group).

The Portuguese Minister, speaking on behalf of the EU Presidency, promised to support the continued development of EU aquaculture as a complement to wild fisheries. The Commission's task should be to balance the options being proposed at Member States level. Specific suggestions included looking at how to simplify legislation and seeking

to position coastal development within the scope of Natura 2000. Support should be given through the EFF.

Elsbeth Attwooll MEP, Vice-Chair of the EP Fisheries Committee, closed the meeting with an excellent summary of the various issues raised during the presentations and questions. The key conclusions emerged were:

- In the period 2000-2007 aquaculture production in Europe has stagnated, and we had also lost our enabling environment for investment and development
- The perceived constraints listed by the sector may actually be real for many Member States, but Member States should tackle also – and mainly – the real constraints (bureaucracy, planning, licensing etc.)
- We needed to look at providing (in the short term) an overview and simplification of the legislation with an objective of better implementation at the Member State level
- We also needed a stable environment, with clear limits based on clear science, and transparency in governance at all levels.

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This event gave the opportunity to MEPs, but also to public administrations, to listen to the sector's views on how the development of EU aquaculture should be achieved and to start thinking how they could contribute to this and how competencies in different levels could be shared.

EP will have many occasions to held debates on aquaculture. The EP Intergroup on sustainable Development / EBCD will try to remain involved and report to the group on any future development.

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