

Socio-economic aspects, challenges and opportunities of artisanal aquaculture in the EU

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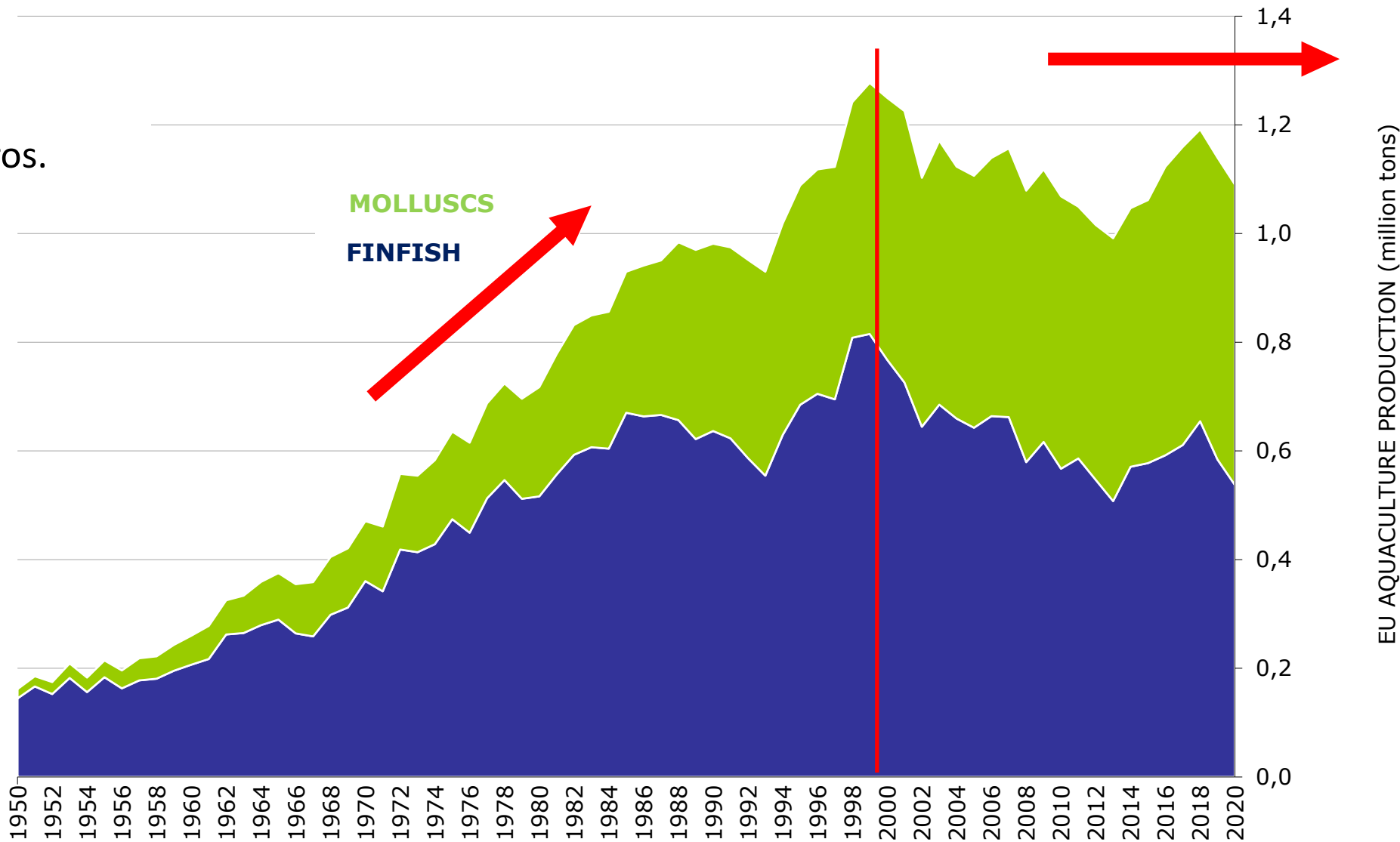
Aquaculture in the EU

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- EU aquaculture accounts for about 20% of finfish and shellfish supply to the EU market.
- It directly employs 70,000 to 80,000 persons.
- The sector consists of approx. 15,000 undertakings, located in coastal and rural areas.
- EU aquaculture production is very diverse in terms of species (more than 25 relevant species) and methods of production (in both marine and fresh waters).
 - 49% of aquaculture production are shellfish
 - 30% of aquaculture production is marine fish
 - 20% of aquaculture production is freshwater fish
 - 1% of other species (crustaceans, amphibians, algae, etc)

Aquaculture in the EU

2021
1,094,000 t.
3.37 billion Euros.



Artisanal aquaculture in the EU

What is artisanal aquaculture in the EU?

- Not clearly defined:
 - Small scale aquaculture?
 - Could be delimited as aquaculture carried out by micro enterprises: fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet below €2 million (STECF).
- Of the 15,000 EU aquaculture undertakings, more than 80% are micro-enterprises.
- Low tech, low capital investment, but highly specialized.
- Aquaculture microenterprises are concentrated in:
 - Shellfish (marine)
 - Finfish farming in freshwater and marine lagoons



Why is artisanal aquaculture important for the EU

- It provides economy in areas with little other employment options.
- It is deeply rooted in local social and natural environment.
- It implements traditional knowledge in an efficient way.
- It is seamlessly adapted to the local conditions.
- In many cases it provides valuable ecosystem services.
- It preserves essential unique cultural, ethnologic and gastronomic legacies.



What is the situation of artisanal aquaculture in the EU?

Challenges of artisanal aquaculture in the EU

- EU artisanal aquaculture (AA) struggles to 'survive', and no improvement is foreseen.
- It suffers because of the continuous raising of administrative barriers and obstacles.
- AA farmers are small players in a tight value chain dominated by large processors and retailers.
- Complexities of keeping up with their daily work and at the same time participating in producer organisations or professional associations.
- Difficulties to learn and implement new research results.



The political and legal context is not right

- Complicated (legal) access to space/water.
 - Complexity of administrative procedures.
 - Pollution of waters by other activities.
 - Unfair situation with imports from developing Third countries.
 - Uneven social acceptance, specially from weekend neighbours.
 - Unsatisfactory information provided to consumers.
- Overly restrictive implementation at national/regional level of the EU environmental legal laws.*

Note that insufficient research, or innovation, are not in this list of challenges.

This does not mean that artisanal aquaculture undertakings cannot become more efficient through research and innovation, though. But research does not hold the key to unlock the potential of EU artisanal aquaculture.

Challenges of artisanal aquaculture in the EU

- Even though the largest part of the legal framework that EU AA farmers have to comply with is decided in Brussels, hardly any of them have the time, nor resources, to travel to Belgium to meetings or to attend conferences like this one.
- Limited foreign language skills for reading official working documents.
- The benefits of the EU Green Deal have still not been seen by AA farmers.
- Brussels sounds like a distant bla, bla, bla; detached from ground level.



How did we get here?

The reasons for this situation

- The Green Deal, and previous EU policies, have spined-off numerous initiatives to protect and restore the natural environment (good!) but too few initiatives to support the livelihoods of people that work in coastal or riverine areas.
- It is a fact that ecosystems are more important in the EU political and legal strategies than the people that make a living by working in the natural environment .
[Example: the thriving population of European cormorants is clearly more important than the decimated artisanal aquaculture farmers population].
Key fact → European public administrations in charge of nature conservation believe that other public administrations will develop protective nets and support for primary producers. But the impacts of both works are orders of magnitude apart, and overwhelmingly larger in the case of environmental protection.
- Truth is that displaced EU AAF can find other job possibilities, but EU food supply will falter. Even after Covid and the war in Ukraine, food production in the EU continues to be a second level political target.

The reasons for this situation

Case study: EC vs FAO

- To picture the position of the strategic approach of the European Commission on nature conservation with respect to the development of aquaculture let's compare it with FAO's:

EC doctrine on nature restoration, biodiversity, etc.:

- Lay down rules for the long-term recovery of biodiversity and resilient nature across the Union's land and sea areas through the *restoration of ecosystems*.
- Driving EU aquaculture towards *extensive production* (read Mission Oceans & Waters) as the future.

FAO's Blue Transformation:

(The Blue Transformation roadmap recognizes the importance of aquatic food systems as drivers of employment, economic growth, social development and environmental recovery, which all underpin the SDGs).

- Facing the *twin challenges* of food security *and* environmental sustainability.
- Seeking to promote sustainable aquaculture expansion *and intensification* to meet the growing demand for aquatic food and enhance inclusive livelihoods.

→ Can you spot the differences?

The reasons for this situation

Case study: EC vs FAO → consequences

1. The EC strategy has driven EU aquaculture to a standstill; while the FAO formula is fueling the fastest growing global food sector.
2. The EU food system is failing to deliver enough aquatic food to its population: 65% imports; while in the rest of the world aquatic food is becoming a more and more important part of diets.
3. The EU environmental protection policy will perhaps deliver better quality ecosystems in Europe. But with a population of 447 million, an ever-growing global population and a declining EU relative purchasing capacity, food (in)security could soon knock at EU's door.

Conclusions and requests

Conclusions and requests

1. The conservation of the EU aquatic ecosystems cannot be done to the detriment of the sustainable production of the most nutritious animal food in the world, of which the EU is highly deficient.
2. EU artisanal aquaculture farmers favour the conservation and restoration of the ecosystems (of course!) but not in the way that the EC-EP-Council are going. The EU must continue promoting the protection and restoration of the natural environment but in a way compatible with those activities that take place in the coastal and riverine ecosystems and provide food to the Union.
3. Help is needed for artisanal aquaculture farmers to integrate in Producer Organisations and professional associations.
4. The future requires bringing young artisanal aquaculture farmers into the sector. But this requires an attractive sector and an investment-favourable environment.

Conclusions and requests

5. Extensive aquaculture has an important role to play in the EU, but sustainable intensification is the main path to follow to face limited natural resources.
6. The EC should link environmental objectives to social or economic targets. This could be materialized through the establishment of legally binding quantitative targets not only for environmental protection, but also for aquatic food production in those same areas.

Concluding message:

→ EU artisanal aquaculture farmers want to be part of FAO's "Blue Transformation" and not to be annihilated by EU environmental policies.



WE ARE **THE SOLUTION** 
 WE ARE **THE FUTURE**

Thank you!

I hope you found this presentation inspiring.

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