



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 16 December 2020
(OR. en)

14142/20

PECHE 454

COVER NOTE

From: Secretary-General of the European Commission, signed by Ms Martine DEPREZ, Director

date of receipt: 16 December 2020

To: Mr Jeppe TRANHOLM-MIKKELSEN, Secretary-General of the Council of the European Union

No. Cion doc.: COM(2020) 809 final

Subject: REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL on the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the submission by Member States of statistics on aquaculture and repealing Council Regulation (EC) 788/96

Delegations will find attached document COM(2020) 809 final.

Encl.: COM(2020) 809 final



Brussels, 15.12.2020
COM(2020) 809 final

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REPORT FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL

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1 BACKGROUND

The Commission (Eurostat) collects statistics on aquaculture under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council¹. Article 11 of the Regulation states that every 3 years, the Commission must submit to the European Parliament and the Council a report on the quality and relevance of the statistics compiled. The report must also analyse the cost-effectiveness of the data collection system and pinpoint any best practices that could lessen the workload for Member States and lead to more useful, higher-quality data.

The Regulation applies to Member States, to the United Kingdom during the transitional period after its withdrawal from the EU, and to Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein (EEA relevance). Luxembourg and Liechtenstein do not have commercial aquaculture production, and are therefore exempted from the data reporting obligation.

This report is based primarily on the aquaculture quality reports submitted by the Member States. Eurostat also analysed the 2017-2018 aquaculture data. The European Statistical System provided information on the total costs of collecting the data. As a result, this report assesses the timeliness, completeness, consistency, accessibility and confidentiality of the data overall. It also looks at the burden and cost-effectiveness of the data collection process.

The Commission adopted the previous evaluation reports on aquaculture statistics submitted under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 in June 2015² (for 2011-2013 data) and in December 2017³ (for 2014-2015 data). This report covers the data for 2016-2018.

In 2018, Eurostat launched the project ‘Streamlining and simplifying European fishery statistics’. It consists of an evaluation of the current aquaculture, catch and landing statistics, and an impact assessment of future policy options and possible future legislation. The evaluation, which also covered the functioning of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 on aquaculture, was concluded in 2019, and the impact assessment was launched in 2020.

¹ Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on the submission by Member States of statistics on aquaculture and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 788/96 (OJ L 218, 13.8.2008, p. 1).

² Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on the submission by Member States of statistics on aquaculture and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 788/96; COM(2015) 297 final.

³ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on the implementation of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 July 2008 on the submission by Member States of statistics on aquaculture and repealing Council Regulation (EC) 788/96; COM(2017) 747 final.

2 MAIN FINDINGS

Eurostat strives to continually improve the quality and availability of European statistics. It is also committed to reducing the burden on Member States and respondents. To this end, the ‘Streamlining and simplifying European fishery statistics’ project looks at current data collection and draws up a strategy for making aquaculture statistics more fit for purpose. The project ensures coordination to dovetail with statistics collected under Regulation (EU) 2017/1004⁴ and better harmonisation with the standard aquaculture questionnaire recommended by the Coordinating Working Party on Fisheries Statistics⁵. The first milestone of the project – to finalise the evaluation of European fishery statistics – was reached in late 2019, when a staff working document was produced on the evaluation⁶.

2.1 Timeliness and completeness

2.1.1 Timeliness

Most Member States have met the data submission deadlines in recent years. However, a third of them sent some data sets after the deadline. In most cases, the delay was relatively short. However, Eurostat has taken steps to find solutions with France and Italy, which have repeatedly been sending in data very late, in particular for the reference year 2016.

Eurostat publishes the data immediately after validation. Valid data are normally published on its public database by the end of March of the year after the deadline. The data may be revised any time throughout the year.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) considered the deadlines of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 to be 6 months too late for their reporting needs, which resulted in a parallel data collection from countries.

2.1.2 Completeness

The main aquaculture dataset (production from aquaculture) was relatively complete. It has become more complete over time. Unfortunately, many values remain confidential as the sector is very specialised.

The dataset on the structure of the aquaculture sector is collected every 3 years, and was collected in 2017. This dataset posed serious concerns about its usability as the reporting units are both

⁴ Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 (OJ L 157, 20.6.2017, p. 1).

⁵ The Coordinating Working Party on Fisheries Statistics was established in 1959 by Resolution 23/59 of the FAO Conference to coordinate fishery statistical programmes of regional fishery bodies and other inter-governmental organisations. Its purpose is to (i) keep under continuous review the requirements for fisheries statistics (including aquaculture); (ii) agree standard concepts, definitions, classifications and methodologies for the collection and collation of fisheries statistics; and (iii) propose ways of coordinating and streamlining statistical activities among relevant intergovernmental organisations (<http://www.fao.org/fishery/cwp/en>). Recently, it has developed a draft standard aquaculture questionnaire as a recommendation for minimum requirements for aquaculture statistics.

⁶ Staff Working Document (2019) 425. Available only in English.

surfaces and volumes depending on the type of species. Because of this, the dataset provides users with ambiguous information, in particular when comparing data from countries that raise different species. The dataset has not yet been published.

Unit prices posed difficulties in general for all aquaculture production datasets. The most recent Fisheries Statistics Working Group meeting in October 2018 discussed the issue.

2.2 Consistency

2.2.1 Quality and accuracy

Eurostat collects yearly quality reports on aquaculture statistics. They describe the methods and quality aspects of data collection based on self-assessments by the countries. Eurostat has used the national quality reports to compile an EU-level quality report⁷. The overall quality is good as most of the countries follow a census approach, with non-response either non-existent or insignificant.

A quality management system is in place in more than half of the countries. Since the last report, the overall quality evaluated by Eurostat has improved in five countries. Most improvements targeted timeliness (seven countries), accuracy and reliability (five countries). All aspects of quality improved in 2018 for France, which runs a census. Relevance improved in one country, while no countries improved coherence and comparability.

2.2.2 Comparability

In October 2018, Eurostat published a handbook for aquaculture statistics⁸, which has further improved the homogeneity and therefore the comparability of the data between countries. The length of the time series – comparability over time – varies between the countries. In some countries, the time series go back to 1970, while other countries started only in 2011. However, for the period covered by this report, data are comparable over time.

2.3 Relevance

Aquaculture statistics are widely used by various data users. They form the basis for other data collections⁹, and in particular for freshwater aquaculture, where no other EU-level dataset is collected and published.

The data collected under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 are essential for informed, evidence-based policymaking at both national and EU level. The data on production levels and trends are important in analysing the development of the aquaculture sector as part of the common fisheries policy. Quantitative data are central in shaping the Member States' multiannual national plans for

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/fish_aq_esqrs.htm. Available only in English.

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/Annexes/fish_aq_esms_an2.pdf. Available only in English.

⁹ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) 2019/909 of 18 February 2019 establishing the list of mandatory research surveys and thresholds for the purposes of the multiannual Union programme for the collection and management of data in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors (OJ L 145, 4.6.2019, p. 21).

sustainable aquaculture. They provide policymakers and industry with solid foundations on which to build the sector's future.

Moreover, the data are an important source for other organisations' publications and services. The European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products uses European statistics on aquaculture in compiling its structural analysis of the European fisheries and aquaculture industry. The World Trade Organisation uses European statistics on aquaculture for its trade policy review.

Almost all Member States confirmed the need for aquaculture production data at national level as well. Most national data needs were fully or almost fully met by the data collected under the Regulation. However, Regulation EC (No) 762/2008 does not cover important data on microalgae, feed and juveniles input, product destination, production cost, employment and other socioeconomic variables. Socioeconomic information is collected for aquaculture under Regulation (EU) 2017/1004. By contrast, some Member States referred to the data collection as too detailed and burdensome for national needs. Despite the relevance of aquaculture statistics, the evaluation of fisheries statistics also confirmed a higher level of user dissatisfaction linked to unavailability caused by data confidentiality.

2.4 Accessibility

2.4.1 Online database

Eurostat's public database¹⁰ provides European statistics on aquaculture with the following datasets:

- production from aquaculture excluding hatcheries and nurseries (fish_aq2a);
- production of fish eggs for human consumption from aquaculture (fish_aq2b);
- input to capture-based aquaculture (fish_aq3);
- production of hatcheries and nurseries at eggs stage in life cycle (fish_aq4a); and
- Production of hatcheries and nurseries at juvenile stage in life cycle (fish_aq4b).

In addition, half of the Member States publish the data in national online databases or as downloadable annual tables. Access to these products is always free of charge.

2.4.2 Publications and data tables

Eurostat publishes data and articles on aquaculture in its online Statistics Explained collection and in statistical books¹¹.

Most Member States publish aquaculture statistics regularly in various reports, in some cases together with press releases.

2.4.3 Metadata

Eurostat collects national quality reports every year, as required under Annex 6 to Regulation (EC) No 762/2008. These reports contain detailed information on the quality of the data and on

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

¹¹ The most recent is 'Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics – 2019 edition', ISBN 978-92-76-13193-9 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/10317767/KS-FK-19-001-EN-N.pdf/742d3fd2-961e-68c1-47d0-11cf30b11489>. Available only in English.

the methods used to collect them. The ESS Metadata Handler¹² collects the national quality reports, which follow the European Statistical System guidelines.

The European reference metadata, including an EU-level quality report on aquaculture statistics¹³, are published on Eurostat's public database with the data tables listed above. Countries review the metadata each year.

2.5 Data confidentiality

A major shortcoming in aquaculture statistics collected under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 is the high number of confidential data cells. There are two main reasons for this. First, the Regulation calls for a highly detailed data structure, which in turn leads to very fragmented data. Second, the aquaculture sector is highly specialised, as there are companies that grow very few species with one main production method or production environment. As a result, a large number of data on single species and aggregates have become confidential.

In 2018, almost half of the Member States faced data confidentiality issues with the main aquaculture production dataset. This meant that EU aggregates remained confidential for most species, often because of confidential data in a single Member State. However, the national total production volume and value were published for 2016 for all Member States, while they became confidential for Latvia in 2017 and 2018. Confidential data from one Member State prevented publication of the EU aggregate for input to capture-based aquaculture. EU-wide production of fish eggs for human consumption remained confidential because of niche production in three Member States, while national production started to be confidential in Spain and Hungary in 2018. The data on the production from hatcheries and nurseries were confidential in several Member States.

Eurostat and the Member States have invested time and effort in making as many figures as possible available to data users, while safeguarding statistical confidentiality and keeping the process as efficient as possible.

3 BURDEN AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Eurostat assessed the cost-effectiveness of aquaculture data collection under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 using the methodological country reports for 2018, together with the cost analysis by statistical product carried out each year by the European Statistical System. The cost analysis corresponds to the year 2019, which covered the aquaculture data collection for the reference year 2017. Twenty-four countries replied to the cost analysis; in monetary terms, the average cost is approximately EUR 105 000 per year. A direct comparison with the figure from the last reporting exercise is not possible as not all countries replied to both exercises. Seventeen countries reported costs in both the previous and current reporting exercise. For those countries, costs fell by 3 %.

Based on the replies to the methodological country reports for 2018, the vast majority of countries cover national needs with the aquaculture data compiled under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008. Altogether, 16 countries collect the data as a census, and five derive the dataset from administrative sources; the remaining six countries run administrative sources or use expert estimates.

¹² <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/estat/spe/metaconv/>

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/fish_aq_esqrs.htm

Fifteen countries reported on efficiency gains. The main efficiency gains were linked to online surveys (six countries), further automation (four countries) and to the increased use of administrative data (two countries). There were burden reductions in 10 countries. Easier data transmission and multiple uses of data were the most common types of burden reduction measures.

From the country reports, it appears that more than half of the countries collect data directly from the facilities at production unit level, while the others have company managers fill out the questionnaires for all of their facilities. Collecting data at company level makes reporting under Regulation (EC) No 199/2008¹⁴ easier at the same time. The idea of covering both regulations with one data collection exercise may be worth investigating further to reduce the overall burden for Member States.

A number of countries have suggested improvements to reduce the burden of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008, particularly for improving the cooperation with other stakeholders in the field to standardise data submission requirements and deadlines. This concerns primarily the FAO and Data Collection Framework Regulation (EU) 2017/1004.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, aquaculture statistics have evolved into a stable set of data with timely and consistent output for data users not only at European and global levels, but also at national level.

At the same time, the consultation activities carried out as part of the recent evaluation on European fisheries statistics demonstrated that aquaculture statistics have a significant number of dissatisfied users. This is likely linked to the large number of confidential values in the dataset, which makes it harder to use the dataset. Confidential cells are linked to the detailed breakdown of the data requirements set by Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 and to the aquaculture sector's specialised and concentrated structure.

Some Member States have continued to face problems with the timeliness and punctuality of data collection and delivery. The Eurostat data collection guidelines have helped make aquaculture data collection more consistent.

In some countries, the burden was reduced and measurable efficiency gains were observed. The average annual cost of producing aquaculture statistics was EUR 105 000 for the reference year 2017. This was 3 % less than in the previous period (for countries that delivered cost data for both periods). The share of the data collection costs in the total economic value of aquaculture production was rather low. Inefficiencies with other data collections (namely the FAO and Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 repealing Regulation (EC) No 199/2008) remain.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The most important outcome derived from the evaluation of fisheries statistics for aquaculture is that they are a very important and widely used part of fisheries statistics, but that they suffer from

¹⁴ Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 has been repealed by Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 May 2017 on the establishment of a Union framework for the collection, management and use of data in the fisheries sector and support for scientific advice regarding the common fisheries policy and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 199/2008 (OJ L 157, 20.6.2017, p. 1).

data confidentiality issues. Despite efforts made by the Commission (Eurostat) and by the Member States to reduce the amount of confidential data, their impact has been very limited. The sector's specialisation has in fact increased the amount of confidential data. The only solution to providing a better service to data users would be to amend the current legislation or replace it with another one that is more focused on production and less demanding on structural dimensions linked to production. A new legislation could also bring about efficiency gains, especially by aligning deadlines with the needs of other international organisations.

At national level, the use of electronic questionnaires should be further encouraged as it helps make data collection more efficient. National data collection guidelines and helpdesks that offer respondents tailor-made support are other examples of good practices.