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Accompanying the document

COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture

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This staff working document (SWD) summarises the extensive consultations carried out in support of the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture. It brings together the views of stakeholders from across the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, as well as public authorities, academia, civil society, youth representatives and the general public. The feedback shows that there is broad convergence around the need to strengthen the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors through healthy aquatic ecosystems, viable business models, innovation, skills, simplification, fair market conditions and a level playing field. It also underlines the importance of supporting the energy transition, sustainable aquaculture growth, generational renewal, effective maritime spatial planning and a stronger external dimension of fisheries policy. At the same time, it should be ensured that fisheries and aquaculture continue to contribute to food security, coastal communities and the sustainable blue economy.

Issues relating to the energy transition and the external dimension of fisheries policy were also examined through targeted consultation processes. The results of these are presented in the respective SWDs [1] accompanying the Communication on the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture.

1. Call for Evidence feedback

The following summary of the public consultation on the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture is structured around its three pillars, namely ***Supply, Demand and Tools.***

In addition, the feedback is divided by stakeholder group, namely businesses and business associations, academic/research institutions, public authorities, EU citizens, non-governmental organisations and environmental organisations.

A total of 171 valid feedback submissions were received, primarily from respondents in Belgium (18%), Spain (14%) and the Netherlands (11%). Closer examination of the stakeholder groups reveals that non-governmental organisations contributed the most feedback (32%), followed by business associations (16%), companies/businesses (12%) and other respondents (12%). Fewer, yet significant contributions came from EU citizens (9%), academic and research institutions (8%), public authorities (7%) and environmental organisations (2%).

Supply

Public authorities generally highlighted the need to modernise the EU's ageing fishing fleet, infrastructure and farming methods to achieve decarbonisation and safety improvements, while avoiding capacity increases.

To reduce dependence on imports (despite aquatic food's role in food security) and boost EU self-sufficiency by 2040, public authorities asked for binding self-sufficiency targets and fair trade

[1] SWD(2026)751, SWD(2026)752, SWD(2026)753.

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rules. These should include stricter bans on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and exploitative imports (through digital tracking and tighter import controls) to ensure fair competition with non-EU countries. According to the authorities, governance reforms and trade rules must reinforce all of the abovementioned goals. Additionally, small-scale fleets should be prioritised, while the Vision 2040 should also focus on low-impact, high-value production and non-fed aquaculture.

Some businesses and business associations called for promoting algae-based feed and innovative feed that uses circular-economy ingredients to reduce environmental pressure. A recurring priority is the need for robust EU-wide standards to ensure fair competition and prevent unfair imports. They also emphasised the need to embed these standards in global trade agreements to create a level playing field. Their contribution highlighted the unique challenges that small-scale fleets face, particularly in the Mediterranean. These challenges require tailored support and ecosystem-based management to ensure the fisheries' economic and environmental sustainability. Respondents stressed that food sovereignty must be treated as a geopolitical priority. Digitalisation and fleet modernisation – seen as critical enablers – improve traceability, fish health and disease prevention through new technologies, while also boosting overall efficiency. Additionally, the energy transition emerges as a key concern, with stakeholders calling for investment in low-carbon propulsion and energy-efficient technologies to reduce fuel dependency and mitigate cost volatility.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) stressed the importance of stricter animal welfare laws for aquatic animals. They argued that all imports must meet the EU's standards via trade and market policies, and that unethical farming should be banned to prevent unfair competition.

To cut reliance on wild-caught fishmeal and oil, they stressed that the Vision 2040 should promote sustainable, algae-based feed and low-trophic aquaculture (e.g. herbivores, bivalves), all while banning octopus farming. However, opinions on insect meal as feed remain divergent. Some NGOs called for reducing use of antibiotics by replacing them with vaccines.

NGOs support fleet decarbonisation and the phasing-out of fossil fuel subsidies, while prioritising small-scale coastal fisheries (SSCF) (e.g. via ring-fenced quotas and support for diversification). In addition, they highlighted the need for energy transition and more support for outermost regions. These stakeholders also called for an end to overfishing and for science-led quotas to rebuild fish stocks.

EU citizens and other organisations called for low-intensity aquaculture, alternative feed (e.g. insect proteins and algae) and a greater focus on low-trophic species. Some stressed the importance of both modernised infrastructure and food sovereignty.

Research institutions highlighted the importance of linking the energy transition to low-impact fishing to minimise seabed disturbance. They also mentioned the role of digitalisation and modernisation in increasing safety, but also in improving innovative, low-impact aquaculture. On this issue, they agreed with ***environmental organisations***, which stated the importance of phasing

out high-trophic aquaculture. They prioritised plankton-based feed to reduce reliance on wild-caught fish and supported biodiversity. These institutions also highlighted the importance of diversification to increase resilience and stabilise the incomes of fishers. Other stakeholders agreed on the need to prioritise food sovereignty and local production.

Demand

Public authorities recognised the need for a stronger regulatory framework to promote sustainable aquatic food products. A key demand was to improve labelling showing the origin of products to protect local producers and boost consumer trust.

NGOs asked for labelling to be reformed and for full disclosure of feed sourcing, farming method and origin/fishing location. They highlighted the need for market transparency and a focus on consumer awareness to better support local consumption and in turn production. They prioritised aquatic food as a core pillar of food security and sustainability, given its nutritional value, environmental impact and economic importance to guarantee fair livelihoods.

Businesses and business associations agreed on the importance of improving labelling, traceability and transparency. They ask for the measures under Vision 2040 to focus on boosting local markets and demand for sustainable aquatic food.

Local action groups agreed that consumer awareness is critical and should be increased by means of campaigns and clearer labelling. They ask for local sustainable production to be promoted under Vision 2040 to boost food sovereignty.

Tools

Business associations and businesses thought it was very important for regulations to be streamlined and administrative burden reduced under Vision 2040, while ensuring flexibility for small-scale operators. Their requests include easing gear restrictions, boosting research and development (R&D) funding (including for algae farming) and enforcing stricter quality controls with tougher penalties for operators breaching the law.

Some businesses argued that a shift towards freshwater and inland aquaculture (e.g. trout farming) would benefit ecosystems, while many stakeholders demanded expanded support for modernisation and decarbonisation under the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (EMFAF) and the programme of options specifically relating to remoteness and insularity (POSEI), as well as digital tools, especially for SSCF and remote regions. They argued that science-based co-management, tailored to regional needs (e.g. adaptations in the Mediterranean), would improve sustainability.

There were several requests for innovation, including the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital supply chains, as well as for simpler rules for DNA vaccines and parasite monitoring to

drive progress towards sustainability and efficiency. Some stakeholders stated that spatial planning must protect fishing grounds from wind farms and marine protected areas (MPAs), prioritising fishing and shellfish due to their ecological and economical roles.

Public authorities and other organisations agreed on the need to simplify the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) Regulation and other legislation to reduce administrative burden.

These stakeholders also asked for more support for outermost regions as well as for more regionalised governance and tailored management (e.g. quotas, MPAs and spatial planning) to empower regions and help SSCF. They highlighted the need to tackle conflicts with other maritime sectors (e.g. MPAs, energy, shipping and tourism) and called for fair spatial planning. There were demands for stable funding to strengthen and catalyse the energy transition, fleet renewal, infrastructure, modernisation and innovation, as well as to increase flexibility and boost funding for training. Additionally, they asked for stricter controls on IUU fishing to protect local fishers and sustainable stocks.

Academic/research institutions pointed out that Vision 2040 needs to place greater emphasis on innovation – such as cost-effective methods – and needs to leverage technology to achieve real-time monitoring and support data-driven/science-based decisions. They agreed with other stakeholders on the need to simplify and reform the CFP Regulation to reduce burden. Regarding funding, research institutions urge Vision 2040 to focus on sustainability, including waste-to-resource systems, as well as data collection, research workforce and ecosystem restoration. Some highlighted the demand for cross-border coordination, ecosystem-based management and more involvement of regional stakeholders. They proposed multi-use models to address the spatial planning conflict of interest (e.g. energy, fisheries and MPAs). These institutions stressed the importance of combating IUU fishing. ***EU citizens*** agreed with this point and highlighted the need for key performance indicators (KPIs) for circular aquaculture and the importance of funding innovation.

NGOs called on Vision 2040 to simplify legislation and improve consistency (e.g. with the Ocean Pact and Nature Restoration Regulation). They thought that funding should promote science-based and stakeholder-inclusive tools for climate-resilient management and innovation in decarbonisation and fleet modernisation/renewal. A particular focus should be placed on circular systems and habitat repair. These are all measures that are crucial to modernising the sector while minimising ecological impact and ensuring long-term resilience. NGOs also asked for Vision 2040 to address the lack of binding provisions on aquatic animal welfare. Some stakeholders highlighted the importance of greater support for SSCF and ecosystem restoration. In addition, some stakeholders called for a ban on destructive gear or destructive fishing, particularly in MPAs, the protection of which needs to be strengthened.

Labour as a key tool

Businesses and business associations stressed that industry faces pressing challenges, including labour shortages and an ageing workforce. These are challenges that threaten jobs and traditional practices. They therefore called for funding for training and generational renewal, which is essential to sustain local communities. In addition, they raised the point that environmental regulations must be carefully balanced to avoid undermining livelihoods or driving jobs to countries with lower standards. They believe that workers affected by industry closures should receive compensation, while improved pay and working conditions could help attract younger workers and women. They call for stronger enforcement of EU labour laws to protect migrant fishers.

These stakeholders stated that additional training in marketing, green technologies and selective fishing gear would support modernisation, thereby making the industry more appealing to new talent. They also claimed that reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and restrictive policies would further encourage innovation and growth, ensuring the sector remains viable for future generations.

NGOs agreed that fair wages, safer jobs and youth recruitment are needed, and they are calling for expanded participatory decision-making, especially for coastal communities. These communities, they argue, need extra support, and a shift to a regenerative blue economy would be welcomed.

Public authorities also asked for integrating fishers' knowledge into the design of management approaches, for training to attract new talent and for support for coastal communities.

Other organisations and EU citizens wanted Vision 2040 to simplify rules, create incentives to attract new talent and develop a regionally inclusive strategy to secure fisheries' role in the blue economy, as well as to diversify their income.

2. Targeted consultations

Targeted feedback through meetings and position papers was also received from regional authorities, NGOs, advisory councils (ACs) and scientific bodies. This revealed strong convergence on key priorities for the future of EU fisheries and aquaculture, with recurring demands for sustainability, economic viability, social equity and improved governance.

Some ACs and regional authorities emphasised a central and recurring demand for the EU to prioritise food sovereignty by reducing reliance on aquatic food imports. ACs strongly advised strengthening domestic production through the expansion of sustainable aquaculture, and ensuring a level playing field for imports, with strict alignment with EU sustainability standards. In addition, they highlighted a need for consumer-focused measures, such as harmonised value added tax (VAT) for sustainable aquatic food, clear labelling and promotion campaigns (e.g. 'Buy European Food') to shift demand towards local, high-quality products.

Another significant aspect in these consultations was the environmental dimension of the sectors. NGOs asked for fishing's ecological footprint to be minimised through different measures, such as banning or strictly regulating bottom trawling. They called for the promotion of low-impact,

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selective gear and multi-year management plans based on science and fishers' empirical knowledge and for the expansion of MPAs with co-management by SSCF, reserving the first 12 nautical miles for SSCF. They also thought that sustainable practices should be rewarded (e.g. quota bonuses under Article 17 for selective fishing).

Some regional authorities and ACs mentioned the importance of climate adaptation and decarbonisation by modernising the fleet to improve energy efficiency, safety and crew conditions, with public funding for alternative propulsion (batteries, hybrid systems). They think the rules should distinguish between fishing capacity (effort) and non-fishing capacity (e.g. space for safety equipment, decarbonisation tech) to avoid penalising sustainability upgrades. They stressed the necessity for better spatial planning to protect fishing grounds from competing maritime uses.

Some ACs and regional authorities called for more stable, dedicated EMFAF funding to support fleet renewal (the current rules are seen as too restrictive), innovation (AI, digitals tools, selective gear) and energy transition and diversification (e.g. ecotourism, direct marketing, multi-species fishing) to stabilise income.

Various ACs emphasised the need to create fair market conditions and reduce the administrative burden. They also argued that traceability needs to be improved to combat unfair competition from non-EU imports and that there is a need for higher prices for high-quality, sustainable seafood.

Some NGOs and ACs maintained that support for small-scale fishers should be prioritised, such as in quota allocation, and called for more recognition of women's roles and improved working conditions. In addition, they asked for stronger regionalisation of fisheries management and for regional knowledge to be integrated into co-management models alongside science. Furthermore, they stressed the need for simplified regulations and reduced bureaucratic hurdles as well as long-term, stable policies to attract young fishers.

Some ACs raised the importance of aquaculture for food security and asked for more streamlined permits and access to space. Additionally, they highlighted a need for investment in R&D for sustainable feed, digitalisation and net-zero technologies, as well as better traceability and high standards to boost consumer trust.

Further feedback was provided by some ACs on social equity and labour conditions. They stressed the need to increase the attractiveness of the sector, and the diversification of livelihoods.

3. Feedback from the European Ocean Days

The European Ocean Days, held in Brussels in March 2026, included a high-level panel and dedicated discussions on the future of fisheries and aquaculture. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen the sustainability, competitiveness and resilience of the sectors through support for small-scale fisheries, diversification of activities and greater value creation along the value chain. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of aquaculture for food security, sustainability and the

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blue economy, alongside the need for a clearer policy framework, simplified administrative procedures and improved access to space.

Discussions also underlined the importance of improving access to finance and supporting fleet modernisation, innovation and the energy transition, while reducing barriers that limit investment and the uptake of new technologies. The need for stronger support for R&D, sustainable fishing practices and business diversification was also emphasised. Participants highlighted the importance of skills development, training and digital literacy to attract new generations and support the deployment of advanced technologies, including AI and digital tools.

Further priorities included more inclusive governance, a level playing field for EU operators, stronger support for EU-produced aquatic food and sustainable value chains, and measures to reduce dependence on imports. Effective maritime spatial planning and better management of competing uses of marine and coastal space were also identified as essential to ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of fisheries and aquaculture.

4. Feedback from the Youth Policy Dialogue ‘Young Voices for the Ocean’

In March 2026, in Ayia Napa, Cyprus, 30 young representatives from 27 EU Member States took part in a Youth Policy Dialogue with Commissioners Costas Kadis and Glenn Micallef on the future of ocean policies and the Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture. Discussions focused on attracting young talent to the blue economy, highlighting the need for better working conditions, job stability, skills development, opportunities for mobility and greater awareness of career paths. Participants also called for expanded education and training opportunities, including apprenticeships and cross-border exchanges.

Looking ahead, young people emphasised that environmental sustainability must underpin the future of fisheries and aquaculture, ensuring healthy ecosystems, food security and resilience to climate change. They also highlighted the importance of sustainable aquaculture growth, simplification of administrative procedures and innovation, including low-impact technologies, digital tools and sustainable feed solutions accessible to all operators, including small-scale producers.

5. Feedback from the European Maritime Day

The European Maritime Day took place in Limassol, Cyprus, on 21-22 May 2026. It brought together representatives from maritime sectors, public authorities, academia, civil society and industry to discuss the future of the blue economy. Discussions highlighted the need to strengthen

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the competitiveness, sustainability and resilience of fisheries and aquaculture through fleet modernisation, innovation, skills development, generational renewal and the energy transition. Participants also stressed the importance of healthy ecosystems as the foundation for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, alongside effective maritime spatial planning, support for small-scale fisheries, sustainable aquaculture growth and a level playing field. The need for consistent implementation of existing rules, stronger value chains and reduced dependence on imports were also identified as essential for ensuring the long-term future of the sectors and their contribution to food security and coastal communities.