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**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**

1 BACKGROUND

The European 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 emphasise best practices that could reduce the workload for Member States and lead to more useful, higher-quality data.

The Regulation applies to Member States 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. Candidate countries also produce statistics and submit quality reports (all candidate countries sent data and quality reports for the 2021 reference year).

This report is based primarily on the aquaculture quality reports submitted by the above-mentioned reporting countries. Eurostat also analysed the 2019-2020 aquaculture data. The European Statistical System provided information on the total costs of collecting the data. As a result, this report assesses the overall timeliness, completeness, consistency, relevance, accessibility, and clarity of the data. 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), in December 2017³ (for 2014-2015 data) and in December 2020⁴ (for 2016-2018 data). This report covers the data for 2019-2020, quality reports for 2021, and declared costs for 2022.

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 of producing statistics.

Eurostat collects yearly quality reports on aquaculture statistics. These quality reports 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 report⁵. The overall

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.

⁴ 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(2020) 809 final.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/fish_aq_esqrs.htm. Available only in English.

quality is good, as most of the countries follow a census approach, with non-responses either non-existent or insignificant.

A quality-management system is in place in more than half of the countries. The overall quality of aquaculture statistics has improved in 7 countries since last reporting. Most improvements targeted timeliness (11 countries), followed by accuracy and reliability (8 countries). Relevance improved in 4 countries, comparability in 3, and coherence in 2.

2.1 Timeliness and punctuality

Most Member States have met the data-submission deadlines in recent years. The compliance assessment for the aquaculture statistics for the reference years 2019 and 2020 has been compared with that of previous years. Compared with the data collection for the 2018 reference year, the level of punctuality slightly improved in 2019 and 2020. However, some countries are still delivering quality reports after the deadline.

When Eurostat identified inconsistencies, reporting countries were asked to check the data and to submit corrected revisions. Feedback and revisions were mostly sent within an appropriate timeframe. Several reminders were required in only a few cases. In terms of availability, the number of missing datasets is relatively stable. It is also important to underline that significant efforts have been made by the reporting countries and Eurostat to further improve the quality of the data.

2.2 Coherence and comparability

2.2.1 Coherence

The aquaculture-production statistics are based on concepts and definitions laid down by the Coordinating Working Party on Fishery Statistics (CWP) and are therefore coherent with both statistics produced by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization and other international aquaculture statistics.

2.2.2 Comparability

In October 2018, Eurostat published a handbook for aquaculture statistics⁶, which has further improved the consistency – and therefore the comparability – of the data between countries. Eurostat is considering the possibility of further updating the handbook but needs to carefully evaluate the cost/benefit ratio of this action as the new legislation will most probably require the complete redrafting of the handbook.

The length of the time series – and therefore comparability over time – varies between the countries. On geographical comparability, for 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.

There were serious concerns about the comparability of the data in the dataset on the structure of the aquaculture sector, because the reporting units are both 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.

Eurostat plans to find a viable solution to this issue in the proposed future regulation (see Chapter 4).

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/Annexes/fish_aq_esms_an2.pdf. Available only in English.

2.3 Relevance

2.3.1 *User needs*

Aquaculture statistics are widely used by various data users. They form the basis for other data collections⁷, and in particular for data on 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 for 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 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. For example, the European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products uses European statistics on aquaculture to compile its structural analysis of the European fisheries and aquaculture industry. The World Trade Organization also uses European statistics on aquaculture for its trade-policy review.

In feedback, almost all Member States also confirmed the need for aquaculture-production data at national level. Most Member States have stated that 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, and product destinations. 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 has also confirmed a higher level of user dissatisfaction due to the unavailability of data caused by data confidentiality.

2.3.2 *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, but has comparability issues (see Chapter 2.2.2 above). For this reason, the dataset has not yet been published.

In general, unit prices posed difficulties for all aquaculture-production datasets. This is mainly linked to confidentiality values and to the different methodologies applied by the reporting countries, which often report estimated values.

2.4 Accessibility and clarity

2.4.1 *Online database*

Eurostat's public database⁸ provides European statistics on aquaculture with the following datasets:

- production from aquaculture excluding hatcheries and nurseries (fish_aq2a);

⁷ Commission Implementing Decision (EU) No 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).

⁸ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>.

- production of fish eggs for human consumption from aquaculture (fish_aq2b);
- input to capture-based aquaculture (fish_aq3);
- production of hatcheries and nurseries at egg stage in life cycle (fish_aq4a);
- 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 books⁹.

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 the methods used to collect the data.

The European reference metadata, including an EU-level quality report on aquaculture statistics¹⁰, 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 three main reasons for this. Firstly, the Regulation calls for a detailed data structure, which in turn leads to fragmented data. Secondly, the aquaculture sector is highly specialised, as there are companies that grow very few species with one main production method or production environment. Thirdly, Eurostat applies a strict rule for propagating the confidentiality when calculating aggregates (an aggregate is confidential if at least one value that composes it is confidential). Reporting countries indicated that this approach protects confidentiality but excessively limits the publication of data (especially for aggregates).

Eurostat has put in place some specific mechanisms to try to limit the impact of confidentiality for aggregates (e.g. by asking reporting countries to declare a non-confidential upper aggregate when this does not expose confidential data). This allowed the publication of all national aggregates and the EU total (2019 and 2020 reference years) for most datasets excluding ‘Input to capture-based aquaculture’ and ‘Production of hatcheries and nurseries at juveniles stage in life cycle’ (for the 2020 reference year).

It is worth noting that EU aggregates related to ‘Production of fish eggs for human consumption from aquaculture’ are confidential for 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2018 (a considerable effort was needed to publish EU aggregates since 2019), and that the confidential data of a single country has been preventing the publication of EU aggregates for ‘input to capture-based aquaculture’ for more than 10 years.

⁹ The most recent is ‘Key figures on the European food chain – 2022 edition’, ISBN 978-92-76- 59661-5. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/15216629/15559935/KS-FK-22-001-EN-N.pdf/1cb9d295-6868-70e3-0319-4725040cfdb8?version=3.0&t=1670599965263>. Available only in English.

¹⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/metadata/EN/fish_aq_esqrs.htm

Eurostat and the Member States have invested considerable time and effort into making as many figures as possible available to data users, while safeguarding statistical confidentiality and keeping the process as efficient as possible. A solution to the confidentiality issue is clearly needed. A possible solution could rely on the definition of an alternative approach for propagating confidentiality in the aggregates. Eurostat is actively working to solve this issue and has created a dedicated expert group on a ‘confidentiality charter’ composed of reporting countries’ representatives and Eurostat officials.

3 BURDEN AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS

Eurostat assessed the cost-effectiveness of aquaculture data collection under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008 using the quality reports for 2021, together with the cost analysis by statistical product carried out each year by the European Statistical System. The cost analysis was based on costs for 2022, which covered the aquaculture data collection for the 2021 reference year. A total of 26 countries replied to the cost analysis. In monetary terms, the average cost of producing aquaculture statistics (including data collection) is approximately EUR 103 487 per year per country. Reported costs in both the previous and current reporting exercises show a decrease of 1% when compared with the average in the 2019 reference year. As the value of European aquaculture in the reporting countries was roughly EUR 10 billion in 2020, the share of the data-collection costs in the total economic value of aquaculture production was around 0.03%.

A total of 29 EU Member States and EEA countries submitted the 2021 quality reports. The vast majority have corresponding national legislation covering the statistics compiled under Regulation (EC) No 762/2008, and only 3 countries reported a difference in the adopted definitions. Reporting countries can derive the data from multiple sources, but 26 countries collect the data as a census and 3 derive the dataset from administrative sources (8 countries use both approaches simultaneously). There are 4 countries that complement census or administrative sources with expert estimates and 2 that complement census or administrative sources with sample surveys. None reported the use of other sources.

A total of 19 countries reported on efficiency gains. The main efficiency gains were linked to further automation (6 countries) and online surveys (6 countries), and to the increased use of administrative data (5 countries). There were burden reductions in 8 countries. Multiple uses of data and more user-friendly questionnaires were the most common types of burden-reduction measures.

From the quality reports, it appears that more than three quarters of the countries collect data directly from the facilities at production-unit level, while the other countries ask company managers to fill out questionnaires for all their facilities. Collecting data at company level makes reporting under Regulation (EU) 2017/1004 easier. The idea of covering both regulations with one data-collection exercise was investigated further in 2022 to reduce the overall burden for Member States. Nevertheless, reporting countries found it useful to maintain the two distinct approaches, as data from the ‘facility’ make possible a regional vision that is lost when opting for a higher level of aggregation at ‘company’ level.

A number of reporting countries suggested improvements to reduce the burden of Regulation (EC) No 762/2008. Two improvements in particular were suggested: (i) improving coordination with other stakeholders, such as the EU Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, in particular, the Data Collection Framework (DCF) procedures; and (ii) improvements on deadline synchronisation. 16 countries stated that they are implementing strategies and actions to improve the quality of data collection, to increase accuracy, or to reduce burden on the reporting units.

4 WAY FORWARD: STREAMLINING AND SIMPLIFYING EUROPEAN FISHERY STATISTICS

In 2018, Eurostat launched the project ‘Streamlining and simplifying European fishery statistics’. The project consists of: (i) an evaluation of the current aquaculture, catch and landing statistics; and (ii) 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 2019¹¹.

The impact assessment of European fisheries statistics (EFS) was launched in early 2020 with: (i) the formation of a Commission inter-service group supporting Eurostat in its work; and (ii) the publication of an inception impact-assessment roadmap for feedback from 21 April to 19 May 2020.

The options under assessment were:

- Option 1: Baseline scenario: Continuation of the current policy;
- Option 2: Discontinuation of EFS;
- Option 3: A new streamlined legal framework for EFS;
- Option 4: A new legal basis for aquaculture and the compilation of other fisheries statistics from EU-level administrative sources.

A public consultation on the objectives, possible options, and impacts of the options ran on the Commission’s ‘Have your say’ web platform from 20 July to 23 November 2020¹², and a parallel expert consultation on specific data needs for fisheries ran until the end of August 2020.

The evaluation collected evidence from EFS stakeholders, for example via a workshop, case studies, in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and other consultation activities. The results of all these consultations were considered in the impact assessment report. The impact assessment report contains sections on a variety of topics, including: (i) definition of the problem; (ii) objectives; (iii) options; (iv) analysis and comparison of the options’ impacts; and (v) monitoring and evaluation. The impact assessment received a positive opinion from the Regulatory Scrutiny Board, an independent advisory body within the Commission, and was finalised in November 2021. It will be published with the new legislative proposal, expected for 2024.

In light of the evaluation, the impact assessment, the results of the consultation activities, and the discussions with the stakeholders, the preferred option is clearly option 3 – a new streamlined legal framework for EFS. This choice is supported by the main data users (DG MARE, the OECD, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, ICES, and several regional fisheries management organisations) and a large majority of the representatives of the national statistical authorities responsible for fisheries statistics.

Option 3 was also the preferred option in the public consultation. The supporters of option 3 were regional authorities, national authorities, international authorities, and NGOs. Option 3 scored the most positive impacts with all stakeholder groups. In addition, only very few respondents identified negative impacts for option 3.

The Commission is currently drafting the proposed new legal framework for EFS in close cooperation with the data users and national data providers. The Commission plans to adopt the legal proposal in 2024.

Inefficiencies remain when communicating data with other organisations or other EC data owners (namely those of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and those collected under Regulation

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/64157/4375784/SWD_2019_425_F1_SWD_EVALUATION_EN_V2_P1_1058634.pdf

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12344-European-fishery-statistics/public-consultation>.

(EU) No 2017/1004 repealing Regulation (EC) No 199/2008). The new EFS regulation, now proposed under the name ‘European Fisheries and Aquaculture Statistics’ (EFAS), could be an opportunity to adjust the formats and deadlines allowing for the smoother transfer and multiple use of collected data.

In line with the Commission’s communication ‘Towards a Strong and Sustainable EU Algae Sector’ (COM/2022/592)¹³, the Joint Research Centre recently issued a report *Biomass production, supply, uses and flows in the EU*¹⁴ concerning data on algae aquaculture. The Joint Research Centre’s report recommends: (i) assessing and comparing Eurostat data on algae aquaculture with other successful international systems (e.g. those of Chile); and (ii) the implementation of training programmes for harvesters, producers and personnel that record and process these data, thus ensuring the correct identification of species. Additionally, the report calls attention to the need to align national systems across Europe to ensure harmonisation (e.g. units of measure, species classifications used, times, locations), including the development of a user-friendly system to easily record the quantity of seaweed produced by harvest or aquaculture.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Published aquaculture statistics are a stable dataset with hundreds of data downloads every month.

However, the consultation activities carried out as part of the recent evaluation and impact assessment of European fisheries statistics demonstrated that aquaculture statistics have many dissatisfied users. This is likely related to the large number of confidential values in the dataset, which makes it harder to use. 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.

Improvements are also needed in deciding on a viable approach for describing the structure of the aquaculture sector with comparable data (see Chapter 2.2.2).

The need of supporting a strong and sustainable European algae sector was underlined.

Only a few reporting countries continue to face problems with the timeliness and punctuality of data collection and delivery. The Eurostat data-collection guidelines and other implemented strategies have helped make the collection of aquaculture data more consistent.

In some countries, the burden of collecting data was reduced in recent years. Additionally, a measurable efficiency gains were observed. The share of the data-collection costs in the total economic value of aquaculture production was around 0.03% or, in other words, rather low.

¹³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=COM:2022:592:FIN>.

¹⁴ <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC132358>.