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# Court of auditors says EU aquaculture production is 'stagnating' despite billions in funding

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By Responsible Seafood Advocate

## European Court of Auditors says aquaculture sector has disappointed

Although the EU framework for promoting the sustainable development of aquaculture in member states has improved, the substantially increased funding has not yielded tangible results, according to a new report published by the European Court of Auditors (ECA). In fact, European aquaculture production actually seems to be at a standstill.

With support from the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (U.S. \$1.3 billion allocated from 2014–2020) and its successor, the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund (U.S. \$1 billion allocated from 2021–2027), the European Union (EU) aims to secure the long-term environmental sustainability of aquaculture and to achieve economic, social and employment benefits. However, the EU reports that “results are slow to appear and cannot yet be reliably measured.”

“The EU has cast its nets wide for the aquaculture sector in recent years, as it is a major element of its Blue Economy strategy,” said Nikolaos Milionis, the ECA member who led the audit. “But they remain



Increased funding has not led to substantial growth for European aquaculture production, according to a new report from the European Court of Auditors. Photo credit: European Court of Auditors.

disappointingly empty.”

The amount of funding allocated exclusively to aquaculture for the 2014–2020 period was more than three times the total spent from 2007–2013. However, neither the European Commission nor the member states demonstrated the need for such a large increase, and the auditors have reason to believe that too much EU money was put on the table.

(<https://bspcertification.org/>).

“The fact is that a large part of it has not been used, and member states may not be able to spend all available funding by 2023, which is the deadline for expenditure to be considered eligible,” wrote the ECA in a press release. “A side-effect here is that, in practice, EU countries financed almost all projects,

irrespective of their expected contribution to the EU's objectives for aquaculture, whereas a more targeted hook-and-line approach might have yielded a bigger catch."

## 'Blue Farming' sustainable aquaculture document updates Europe's Farm to Fork strategy



The European Commission reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable aquaculture with the agri-food policy update Blue Farming in the European Green Deal.



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Despite the funding available for 2014–2020, the auditors note that overall EU aquaculture production has flatlined. It has even decreased in two of the largest producers (Italy and France). The socio-economic indicators do not look promising, either. The number of aquaculture businesses is declining, and employment in the sector fell from around 40,000 people to around 35,000 between 2014 and 2020.

The auditors also highlight weaknesses in the monitoring system. They could not find a single set of indicators allowing them to assess the environmental sustainability of the sector, despite this being one of the main objectives of EU policy. Even more concerning are the data currently reported on the achievements of EU funds.

"These data are neither consistent nor reliable, with clearly overstated results, triple-counted values, and figures that fluctuate, depending on the reporting system selected," wrote the ECA. "As a result, the auditors could not determine the EU funds' contribution to the aquaculture sector's environmental and social sustainability, or to its competitiveness."

In 2020, the EU's total aquaculture production was 1.1 million metric tons or less than 1 percent of the global total. Spain, France, Greece and Italy are the main producing countries in the EU, accounting for about two-thirds of total production.

The auditors looked at the 2014–2020 period and the provisions and programs that had already been established for the 2021–2027 period at the time of the audit.

**[Read the full report. \(https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/SR-2023-25\)](https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications/SR-2023-25)**

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