

Sea in distress - bringing sustainability to EU fisheries

Our fragile marine ecosystems are under threat. Sustainable use of resources is key to redressing the balance. Enter a network of EU-funding research agencies who have already offered a glimpse of the future of fisheries and aquaculture research.



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How can fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing be made more sustainable? How can innovative fishing and aquaculture technology enhance yield from exploited marine resources? How can adding cutting-edge technology along the entire seafood production chain help ensure healthy and high quality seafood? And, last but not least, how do the answers tie in with EU objectives on sustainable growth, creating a bioeconomy and securing the sector's competitive edge?

These are only some of the issues at the heart of the COFASP ERANET, a network of 27 funding organisations from 16 European countries.

ERANET consortia tend to comprise ministries, regional authorities, research councils or other research funding agencies, who will issue joint calls for research proposals to boost the cooperation and coordination of research activities at EU, national or regional level.

The project consortium wanted to hit the ground running and has done so. Less than two years after the project started, the team has already published the foresight study "View on the Future of European Fisheries, Aquaculture and food processing Research".

The study takes a look at seven areas – policy, economics, value chain, resource use, society, natural system, and knowledge – to propose a medium-term research agenda enabling the sustainable exploitation, farming, and retailing of aquatic resources.

Rising pressure on Europe's seas

The study concludes that the use of Europe's seas and oceans will intensify due to an increase of traditional uses of the sea combined with an increased relocation of land-based uses towards the sea (sea-based shipping terminals, oil platforms, and offshore wind farms for example) on the one hand, and a search for new ways to explore the richness of the seas and oceans on the other.

"We are dealing with three different sectors: fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing," says COFASP project coordinator Niels Gøtke, head of division at the Danish Agency for

Science, Technology and Innovation (DASTI). “Although these three sectors are linked in many ways, they are also very, very different, facing different challenges. Therefore, we have tried to identify the challenges in these different sectors as well as the more cross-cutting issues that are relevant to all three sectors.”

The study argues that further research into the optimal sustainable use of the sea is necessary before a value can be put on ecosystem goods and services. This value will provide a basis for a societal cost-benefit analysis of different activities.

For fisheries, developing long-term integrated management plans for resource use remains important, the study finds. For organic aquaculture, technology development, and species enhancement, including aquatic animal health and welfare, need more study. For the seafood processing sector, greater efficiency, more flexible production units as well as new products and production technologies are the priorities.

Scientific evidence the basis of fisheries policy

The COFASP team has also been charged with defining the science, information and data necessary to underpin the revision of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) – the rules for managing European fisheries fleets and conserving fish stocks.

“The CFP very much depends on having evidence,” stresses Gøtke. “When you are discussing quotas, discussing regulations, you really need evidence from research. Therefore, there has always been a close link between policymakers and researchers in the fisheries sector.”

These research needs fed into the topics and objectives for the ERANET's first joint call for research proposals in February 2014. The call focused on fisheries management, the ecosystems approach, energy optimisation, new capture technology, feed and nutrition technology, and traceability, to name but a few areas. The project partners are currently in the process of selecting and notifying the winning proposals.

A little over two years remain for the four-year project, during which the team is planning to issue another two calls. At the same time, the partners are continuing to work on case studies on various aspects of aquaculture, seafood processing, and fisheries spatial planning in order to bring sustainability to European fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing. On aquaculture, for instance, the team is analysing differences in how the sector is organised in Europe. It will also look into the way that aquaculture is regulated in different European countries.

Project details

- **Project acronym:** COFASP
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See also

Project web site: <http://www.cofasp.eu/>
Project information on CORDIS:
http://cordis.europa.eu/projects/rcn/106875_en.html

View the article online:

http://ec.europa.eu/research/infocentre/article_en.cfm?artid=36580

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