

# Breaking the Silos: Aquatic Foods in the EU Policy Debate

Aquatic foods are still too rarely treated as a cross-cutting policy issue in Brussels, even though they sit at the intersection of nutrition, health, ocean governance, biodiversity, food systems and development. That was the starting point for [this joint EBCD-Global Action Network event](#), held alongside the EU Ocean Days on 4 March, which set out to address the fragmented ways aquatic foods are dealt with in EU policymaking.

The event brought together speakers from across the European Commission, including DG MARE, DG SANTE and DG INTPA, several international bodies – notably WHO Europe, FAO Brussels and IUCN Europe – as well as the Norwegian government, Europêche and a Member of the European Parliament (MEP). Across two panels, discussions unpacked what it would take to integrate aquatic foods more coherently into EU policy discussions during the extended UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

In the first panel, Julianne Williams of WHO Europe linked aquatic foods to healthier diets and public health outcomes, pointing to work on non-communicable diseases, product reformulation, food labelling and school meal procurement. Raschad Al-Khafaji of FAO Brussels noted that less aquatic food production translates into less policy interest, arguing that the extension of the Decade of Action on Nutrition provides an opportunity to create additional momentum to ensure that aquatic foods are elevated further on the policy agenda. He highlighted how the FAO's Blue Transformation offers a framework to facilitate this. Elodie Champseix of IUCN added that ecosystem protection and food security should not be treated separately, highlighting the need to combine biodiversity goals with economic and social considerations, and pointing to work on nutrition, restoration and One Health.

The second panel jumped into the EU policy context, kicking off with Niall Gerlitz of DG MARE, who highlighted how aquatic foods are intrinsically linked to wider sustainability questions such as food loss and waste and packaging. In this regard, he outlined ongoing collaboration across DG MARE, DG AGRI, DG SANTE and DG ENV. Gaspar Avendano Perez of DG SANTE underlined the role of international food safety frameworks, including Codex Alimentarius, in supporting sustainable and trusted aquatic food value chains. Leonard Mizzi of DG INTPA brought in the external dimension, noting that aquatic foods are still not high enough on the international agenda despite their importance, especially for Small Island Developing States. He stressed the need for affordability, scale, equity and sustainability standards and shared information on two joint FAO initiatives, notably NAVAC and Fish4ACP.

Other interventions reinforced the political and strategic relevance of the topic. In opening remarks, Norway's Minister of Fisheries and Ocean Policy, Marianne Sivertsen Næss (via video message), and Europêche's Javier Garat helped frame the discussion within a broader fisheries and aquaculture policy perspective, while in closing remarks MEP Paulo do Nascimento Cabral linked aquatic foods to the EU Ocean Pact, global social standards, IUU fishing and strategic autonomy.

Finally, Anita Utheim Iversen, Head of the Global Action Network and Specialist Director at the Norwegian Ministry of Trade Industry and Fisheries, closed the event by reconnecting these strands to the broader objective of advancing sustainable aquatic food systems for food security and nutrition. Her message was clear: aquatic foods are not a niche issue, but one that reveals the need for greater coherence across the EU and international policy landscape.