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# FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

## Thirty-fourth Session

Rome, Italy, 14–17 May 2024

### Report on the work of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC)

#### Executive Summary

This document summarizes the main outcomes of the Thirty-first Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC), held in June 2022 in Killarney, Ireland, and the progress made since that Session.

EIFAAC continues to generate scientific advice for policymakers and managers involved in the Blue Transformation of inland fisheries and aquaculture. Blue Transformation of aquatic food systems is important for future food security, nutrition and resilient livelihoods throughout Europe.

EIFAAC membership has increased from 34 to 37 since 2022. The number of members nominating operational focal points increased from 17 to 32, showing the interest of EIFAAC members and the commission's role in the region. An increasing number of projects are active and delivering useful results for the membership.

For the first time, EIFAAC was able to mobilize resources for one of its projects. A modality has been identified that enables members to contribute financially to the implementation of the EIFAAC programme of work. To facilitate the participation of official development assistance-eligible countries in all EIFAAC activities, financial support from members is needed.

The Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC and the related international symposium on building a sustainable future for inland fisheries and aquaculture in a time of multiple stressors are scheduled to be hosted by the Government of Croatia in the coastal city of Pula, from 7 to 11 October 2024.

#### Suggested action by the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- a. affirm the importance of EIFAAC as a contributor to the Blue Transformation of aquatic food systems for future food security, nutrition and resilient livelihoods throughout Europe;

Documents can be consulted at [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)

- b. recognize that the scientific advice provided by EIFAAC to policymakers and managers in inland fisheries and aquaculture in Europe is essential for sustainable inland fisheries management and responsible aquaculture development, and requires more financial support from members to achieve results with the desired regional scope and with higher impact;
- c. commit adequate staff time of EIFAAC operational focal points and national fisheries and aquaculture scientists and managers to EIFAAC projects to strengthen collaboration within the EIFAAC network and enable the production and implementation of fisheries management guidelines and approaches that have buy-in and ownership throughout the region;
- d. contribute to the work of EIFAAC using the “contribution agreement” modality of FAO through which financial contributions can be made by EIFAAC members rapidly – with limited formalities and without associated administrative costs – to support the implementation of the agreed work programme, including the financing of travel and/or attendance at sessions/symposia/workshops, the organization of EIFAAC workshops/expert meetings, and interpretation and translation services; and
- e. ensure the participation of Member delegations at the Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC to work together to address common regional aquatic food systems challenges, transfer innovations and knowledge, and harmonize fisheries management approaches.

The Regional Conference is invited to call upon FAO to:

- a. continue mobilizing resources among Members to produce the highly needed scientific advice provided by EIFAAC for policy-making and management of inland fisheries and aquaculture and for achieving Blue Transformation in Europe;

*Queries on the content of this document may be addressed to:*

ERC Secretariat

[ERC-ECA-Secretariat@fao.org](mailto:ERC-ECA-Secretariat@fao.org)

## I. Introduction

1. The European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission (EIFAAC) was established in 1957 by the FAO Council under Article VI.1 of the FAO Constitution. Its mission is to promote the long-term sustainable development, utilization, conservation, restoration and responsible management of European inland fisheries and aquaculture, consistent with the objectives and principles of FAO's *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries* and other relevant international instruments, and to support sustainable economic, social and recreational activities towards these goals by providing advice, information and coordination; encouraging enhanced stakeholder participation and communication; and delivering effective research.

## II. Membership

2. FAO Members in Europe have an interest in EIFAAC, its objectives and its work. EIFAAC membership increased in 2022–2023 from 34 to 37 members, with the additions of the Republic of Moldova (November 2022), Serbia (April 2023) and North Macedonia (June 2023).<sup>1</sup>

## III. Thirty-first Session

3. The Thirty-first Session of EIFAAC was held in Killarney, Ireland, from 22 to 24 June 2022. The Session presented and discussed the results achieved by EIFAAC, its Management Committee and its Technical and Scientific Committee since the Thirtieth Session of EIFAAC in 2019 in Dresden, Germany. The Commission adopted four resolutions and one recommendation.

Resolutions:

- EIFAAC/31/2022/1 – On EIFAAC Resolutions, Recommendations and Advisory Notes
- EIFAAC/31/2022/2 – On the Code of Conduct for Recreational Fisheries and Invasive Alien Species
- EIFAAC/31/2022/3 – On the protection of vulnerable and endangered fish species from unsustainable predation from cormorants
- EIFAAC/31/2022/4 – On small-scale fisheries and aquaculture

Recommendation:

- EIFAAC/31/2022/1 – On the Code of Practice for Recreational Fisheries

4. The commission also reviewed the endorsed recommendations from the EIFAAC International Symposium on Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture “Advances in Technology, Stock Assessment and Citizen Science in an Era of Climate Change,” held in Killarney, Ireland, from 20 to 21 June 2022. The Symposium was attended by 105 scientists, fisheries managers and decision-makers from 14 countries. The Symposium proceedings were published in 2023 as EIFAAC Occasional Paper No. 51.<sup>2</sup>

5. The Commission reviewed and endorsed the work programme for 2022–2024 and elected new officers. The Session and Symposium received generous support from the host organizations (Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Irish Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications).

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<sup>1</sup> The 37 Members of EIFAAC (as of 1 January 2024) are Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, European Union (Member Organization), Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> For more information, please see the proceedings of the EIFAAC Symposium on inland fisheries and aquaculture from June 2022: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4931en>.

6. The report of the Session was published in 2022 as FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. 1383.<sup>3</sup>

#### IV. Management Committee and Technical and Scientific Committee

7. The Management Committee held monthly virtual meetings during the intersessional period. Its functions are to implement the decisions of the Commission between sessions and conduct other tasks entrusted to it by the Commission. The Chairperson of EIFAAC, Petri Heinimaa (Finland), is also the Chairperson of the Management Committee. The last physical meeting of the Management Committee (jointly with the Technical and Scientific Committee) took place in Rome, Italy, from 28 to 29 March 2023. The Management Committee also discussed and agreed on EIFAAC participation in meetings to which the Commission and its Secretariat are invited.

8. The Technical and Scientific Committee has the following tasks:

- a. make, review, evaluate and, as appropriate, recommend to the Management Committee proposals for programmes or projects to be carried out by the Commission;
- b. develop terms of reference for programmes and projects and monitor project implementation against those terms;
- c. provide technical oversight, monitoring and evaluation of projects and related programme of work activities;
- d. formulate and draft technical and scientific advice for consideration by the Management Committee and,
- e. function as an editorial and publications committee.

9. The Technical and Scientific Committee, chaired by Fiona Kelly (Ireland), met at least four times per year during the intersessional period, overseeing the development and implementation of EIFAAC projects, including the following:

Project	Project manager (country)	Status
Management/Threat of Aquatic Invasive Species in Europe	Marina Piria (Croatia)	Active
Developing Advice on Sustainable Management Actions on Cormorant Populations	Niels Jepsen (Denmark)	Active
Joint EIFAAC/ICES/GFCM Working Group on Eel (WGEEL)	Jan-Dag Pohlmann (Germany) and Caroline Durif (Chairperson) Ciara O'Leary (Ireland/EIFAAC)	Active
Citizen Science Workshop	Diarmuid Ryan (Ireland)	Active
The problems and challenges of climate change and its impact on inland aquatic resources and fisheries of Europe	James Barry (Ireland)	Active
Fish stocking guidelines, including general principles, best practices, economic aspects, interaction with natural stocks and safeguarding biodiversity	Ian Cowx (United Kingdom)	Active
Downstream passage of fish at hydropower dams	TBD (awaiting confirmation)	Stalled

<sup>3</sup> For more information, please see the report of the Thirty-first Session of the European Inland Fisheries and Aquaculture Advisory Commission from June 2022: <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc1986en>.

10. Many of the above-mentioned projects have good participation from scientists and managers from a variety of EIFAAC members. However, some members hardly participate in the projects due to staff time limitations or funding constraints. It is important that EIFAAC members – particularly the core institutions<sup>4</sup> involved in aquatic foods research, policy development and management – allocate sufficient staff resources to participate effectively in EIFAAC projects. This will result in strengthened collaboration within the EIFAAC network and enable the production and implementation of fisheries management guidelines and approaches that have buy-in and ownership throughout the region.

## V. EIFAAC operational focal points

11. The operational focal points are the first points of contact for the EIFAAC Secretariat and Management Committee for each Member. They are welcome to join in all EIFAAC projects, workshops and meetings. The number of EIFAAC members that officially nominated EIFAAC operational focal points has never been as high as at this moment; it increased from 17 in March 2022 to 32 in January 2024. Among EIFAAC members, only Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal have not (yet) nominated their operational focal points, despite numerous requests by the Secretariat through formal and informal channels of communication. The online list of EIFAAC operational focal points<sup>5</sup> is up to date.

12. Given the many new operational focal points, the Secretariat and Chairpersons organized two virtual briefing sessions (webinar style) on 6 December 2022 and 29 November 2023 that were attended by operational focal points from 16 and 22 EIFAAC members, respectively. The briefings included an overview of EIFAAC; its structure, management and operations; its projects and, a discussion of the duties of the operational focal points.

## VI. EIFAAC resource mobilization

13. In the intersessional period, the EIFAAC Secretary tried to mobilize resources to support the endorsed programme of work for 2022–2024. Specifically, the European Union, a Member of EIFAAC, was targeted. Two project concepts were formally submitted in July 2022 on:

- a. developing Europe-wide management advice to protect vulnerable and endangered fish species from unsustainable predation by cormorants (EUR 140 000); and
- b. developing capacity for the prevention and management of aquatic invasive alien species in the Western Balkans and European Union neighbouring countries (EUR 120 000).

14. EIFAAC is pleased that the European Union Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries decided to finance the project on protecting fish from cormorant predation under the 2024-2025 work programme of the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund. It is anticipated that this first project will become operational in February 2024.

15. The EIFAAC Management Committee, Technical and Scientific Committee and Secretariat will continue to develop concept notes and proposals in 2024 to support resource mobilization for the implementation of EIFAAC's programme of work.

16. The EIFAAC Secretary used EUR 19 000 income from his technical assistance services provision to other international FAO projects for a letter of agreement with the University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture in Croatia. The letter of agreement will support the organization of the Third Workshop on Freshwater Invasives – Networking for Strategy of EIFAAC. This workshop is scheduled to be held within the EIFAAC international symposium in 2024 (see below). The letter of

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<sup>4</sup> For a list of the national aquaculture and fisheries institutions, please see the following document: [https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/faoweb/FI/eifaac/List\\_of\\_institutions.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/FI/eifaac/List_of_institutions.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> The list of operational focal points is available at [https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/faoweb/FI/eifaac/eifaac\\_focal\\_points.pdf](https://www.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/faoweb/FI/eifaac/eifaac_focal_points.pdf).

agreement will facilitate the organization of the event and the travel of key participants from some official development assistance-eligible<sup>6</sup> EIFAAC members.

17. The EIFAAC and CACFish secretaries together allocated EUR 15 000 for the preparation of the EIFAAC/CACFish Fish Stocking Guidelines, using regular programme and CACFish Trust Fund resources. A letter of agreement was made with Angling Trust Ltd. in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to lead the technical drafting process of these guidelines, which would be ready for endorsement by the Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC and the Ninth Session of CACFish.

18. The EIFAAC Secretary highlighted the possibility for EIFAAC members in May 2023 of contributing to the work of EIFAAC through a “contribution agreement” with FAO. Members can make financial contributions to support the implementation of a predefined event or set of activities by funding:

- a. travel to and/or attendance at a session/symposium/workshop;
- b. the organization of a workshop/expert meeting/symposium;
- c. interpretation services for an EIFAAC session/symposium/meeting;
- d. the translation of EIFAAC documents; or
- e. the preparation of working documents (e.g. guidelines and recommendations) for an EIFAAC session.

19. The benefits of using FAO’s “contribution agreement” modality for EIFAAC activities are the following:

- a. FAO will not apply the usual project servicing costs (usually 7–13 percent of the total budget).
- b. There will be a short administrative process for signing the contribution agreement (within one month is possible).
- c. There will be no requirement for a lengthy project document (a two-page description of activities and budget is sufficient).

20. Nevertheless, no EIFAAC members have so far shown interest in using this modality.

21. The EIFAAC Secretariat continues to seek financial contributions from EIFAAC members for the following activities:

- a. supporting the travel and accommodation of EIFAAC operational focal points from countries eligible for official development assistance to the Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC and the related international symposium in October 2024 (EUR 40 000), with the goal of reaching a two-thirds quorum of the membership (i.e. 25 members) at the Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC to permit adoption of the updated EIFAAC Rules of Procedure;
- b. hosting a European conference to produce management advice for reducing the impact of cormorant predation on fish, fisheries and aquaculture in 2025 (EUR 30 000);
- c. the preparation of an EIFAAC working document on the social and economic value of eel fisheries and aquaculture in Europe (EUR 50 000); and
- d. the preparation of an EIFAAC working document on the status and trends of aquaculture development in Europe (EUR 20 000).

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<sup>6</sup> The Development Assistance Committee list of official development assistance recipients is available at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC-List-of-ODA-Recipients-for-reporting-2024-25-flows.pdf>.

## **VII. The Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC and the related International Symposium**

22. The Government of Croatia has kindly offered to host the Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC in 2024. The Session is scheduled to be held in Pula, Croatia, from 9 to 11 October 2024. The Thirty-second Session of EIFAAC will, among others, discuss and possibly endorse the EIFAAC/CACFish Fish Stocking Guidelines, an EIFAAC resolution on the future of European eel management and fisheries, and recommendations and resolutions from other EIFAAC projects and the international symposium.

23. The 2024 EIFAAC International Symposium is scheduled to be held in Pula, Croatia, from 7 to 9 October 2024. The provisional symposium title is: “Building a sustainable future for inland fisheries and aquaculture in a time of multiple stressors.”

24. The symposium will be organized by the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Zagreb and the Government of Croatia, and the provisional themes are as follows:

- a. stock assessment and freshwater fish management (stocking, habitat improvements);
- b. migratory fish problems and conservation;
- c. exploring the use of artificial intelligence in inland fisheries and aquaculture;
- d. freshwater invasives networking for strategy (FINS III);
- e. climate change and impacts on inland waters, fisheries and aquaculture;
- f. developments and challenges in freshwater aquaculture (technology, environment, economic and circular economy aspects);
- g. advances in recreational fisheries research and management;
- h. innovative management for the conservation of freshwater areas and aquatic biodiversity and,
- i. citizen science and socioeconomic aspects of freshwater fishery and aquaculture.

## **VIII. EIFAAC’s contribution to a Blue Transformation**

25. In 2024–2025, EIFAAC aims to generate scientific advice for policymakers and managers involved in the Blue Transformation of inland fisheries and aquaculture on the following goals:

- a. developing solutions for the adaptation of the fisheries and aquaculture sector to climate change and assessing the impacts of climate change on inland aquatic resources;
- b. supporting the innovation, sustainability and resilience of the European aquaculture sector and the transition to a sustainable food system in Europe;
- c. facilitating the access of micro- and small-aquaculture enterprises to essential inputs, technologies and financial resources through research, capacity building and policy advice;
- d. determining the socioeconomic value of inland commercial fisheries and recreational fisheries in Europe for better policy-making and targeted rural investments;
- e. increasing scientific knowledge in Europe on fish welfare and promoting aquaculture best practices on fish well-being;
- f. developing a Europe-wide great cormorant management plan to harmonize measures and regulations aimed at reducing the population of cormorants in Europe to a sustainable and manageable level;
- g. providing guidance and developing tools for aquaculture spatial planning;
- h. building capacity for better management to address the threat of aquatic invasive species in European inland waters and,
- i. developing (technical) guidelines on the responsible stocking of fish in inland waters.

26. EIFAAC contributes to FAO's *four betters*, and specifically to the Programme Priority Area "Better Production (BP)2: Blue Transformation."<sup>7</sup> The mandate, membership and network of EIFAAC enables the Commission to effectively support Blue Transformation in the region. Aquatic food systems are important for food security, nutrition and resilient livelihoods throughout Europe.

27. FAO's Blue Transformation vision has three clear long-term goals: intensification and expansion of sustainable aquaculture; effective management of all fisheries; and upgraded aquatic food value chains that share benefits equitably and deliver safe, affordable and nutritious food for all. Through this Blue Transformation, aquatic foods can maximize their role as drivers of employment, economic growth, social development and economic recovery, particularly in the face of conflict and climate change.

28. Using EIFAAC as a regional tool, FAO can assist its Members in the Europe and Central Asia region with Blue Transformation by supporting innovation and technology transfer to boost aquaculture growth and achieve responsible inland fisheries production in a region where aquatic food production has stagnated, as compared with the rest of the world.

29. EIFAAC serves as a network linking policymakers, managers, scientists and other stakeholders working on inland fisheries and aquaculture issues. EIFAAC provides technical advice on request and links those who seek technical expertise to those who can provide it. EIFAAC, therefore, relies on active membership in order to perform its role in Blue Transformation. To the best of its ability, EIFAAC's Secretariat continues to support the Commission in doing so.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information, please see FAO's *Blue Transformation Roadmap 2022-2030 - A vision for FAO's work on aquatic food systems* at <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0459en>.