

Enhancing Seaweed Aquaculture Governance: Working with public authorities to improve licensing and regulatory frameworks in the North Sea

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Theme: Governance

Workshop Summary

The workshop on seaweed aquaculture licensing in the EU explored challenges and opportunities for seaweed cultivation, highlighting fragmented regulatory frameworks, lack of zoning systems, and barriers such as environmental constraints, high costs, and an uneven playing field. Discussions emphasized the need for harmonized licensing procedures to unlock the potential of seaweed aquaculture. Case studies, including one in Mulroy Bay in Ireland, showcased potential as the country's first Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA) site, demonstrating synergies between seaweed and shellfish farming and their economic and ecological benefits.

The workshop proposed solutions such as flexible licensing, eco-technology adoption, and one-stop shops to streamline processes. Key tools, including the EU4Algae Toolkit, were identified to address bottlenecks through improved digital services, community-based licensing models, and clear multi-use site guidelines. Examples from the Netherlands and Denmark highlighted best practices, including hobby and joint licensing schemes.

Discussions underscored the need for MSP that considers seaweed aquaculture licensing, training for licensing authorities, and public communication to improve social acceptance and operational feasibility. Participants concluded that advancing seaweed aquaculture requires political will and coordinated efforts to enhance community engagement, support local economies, and drive sustainable aquaculture development.

Key Insights on Seaweed Aquaculture Licensing:

1. Licensing Challenges in Europe:

- Lack of a harmonised seaweed licensing system.
- Absence of MSP for seaweed farming in most Member States.
- Barriers such as uneven playing fields, environmental and technical challenges, and high costs.

2. Solutions to Licensing Barriers:

- Development of one-stop shops and digitalized services for licensing.
- Introduction of flexible, eco-friendly licensing and green technologies.
- Promotion of community-based models with small-scale farmer support.

3. EU Initiatives:

- EU4Algae Toolkit: A resource for streamlining seaweed licensing.
- Efforts to align licensing procedures with environmental and water protection standards.