

Impact assessment of the FP4 and FP5 Research Programmes on Fisheries, Aquaculture and Seafood Processing Research Area and the Fisheries Industry



IMPACT FISH



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Conclusions and recommendations

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European aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing development have benefited from considerable efforts in EC RTD projects. Reforms in European policies and programmes, accompanied by changing public priorities, have affected the way in which the fisheries is perceived and hence its further development. The Fourth and Fifth Framework Programmes of the European Commission in aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing RTD were built upon specific objectives for the continued development of the sector over the period 1994-2002.

The **Fourth Framework Programme (FP4 1994-1998 FAIR)** of the European Commission in aquaculture and fisheries targeted five areas – generating a better understanding of the impact of environmental factors; the effects of the activities on the ecosystem; the biology of species for aquaculture; socio-economic aspects of the fishing industry and improving existing methodologies for fish stock assessment and techniques for fisheries and aquaculture research. The **Fifth Framework Programme (FP5 1998-2002 Quality of Life QoL)** placed European citizens at the centre of the policy objectives. The general objective of QoL was to link the ability to discover to the ability to produce, in order to assess the needs of society and to meet the requirements of the consumers, leading to future wealth and job creation and improvement of the state of the environment. Specific objectives in fisheries and aquaculture related research were new and sustainable systems of production including breeding methods, exploitation in agriculture, fisheries and aquaculture, taking into account profitability and the sustainable management of resources, product quality and employment, as well as animal health and welfare.

In addition to the specific objectives of FAIR and QoL, the European Community aimed, as a horizontal objective common to all research programmes, to foster cooperation and cooperation in research between Member States, as well as placing the Community as a focal point of scientific and technological excellence.

As part of the integration and strengthening of the European Research Area, this specific support action (SSA) provides an impact assessment of RTD programmes on the research areas mentioned above and on the fishery industry (including aquaculture production systems). A **wide stakeholder consultation** was carried out, targeting the scientific community, the industry (SMEs, producer organisations, fisheries development agencies, aquaculture associations), policy makers, consumer organisations and other NGOs. Self-administered questionnaires addressed actual and perceived benefits, constraints, successes and failures of the RTD programmes.

1143 individual contacts received the IMPACT FISH questionnaire. Of the 209 respondents 43% are working in the aquaculture sector, 30% in fisheries, 15% in the seafood processing sector and 12% was considered as 'cross sectorial'. The breakdown per organisation type shows that the respondent pool consists of 16% individual companies, 13% professional organisations, 9% government agencies and 4% non- governmental organisations (NGO). The scientific community represents the major part (58%), and includes the research institutes (37% of the total respondent pool) and education, mainly universities (21% of the total respondent pool).

The majority of responses indicated some awareness on how the EC supports research in the fields of aquaculture, fisheries and seafood processing, although 15% for FP5 and 14% for FP4 of the respondents claim to know a lot about the results of research funded under the framework programmes. **Key conclusions** were drawn on the impact of research on better understanding; international cooperation and cooperation between science and industry, relevance to stakeholders; the availability and ease of understanding of research outputs; innovation; impact on employment, working conditions and equal opportunities; impact on sustainability, environment and public image and future dissemination and communication tools.

This document presents general conclusions of the study, and specific recommendations for the Research and Scientific Analysis unit of DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs.

The Full IMPACT FISH Report and an Extended Summary document are available as PDF files at www.easonline.org

The objective of obtaining quantifiable perceptions of the two Framework Programmes from a broad segment of stakeholders, including consumer associations and other NGOs and from government agencies has proven difficult to achieve. Despite a very close monitoring and follow-up strategy, the return rates (overall 19%, but significantly higher in the research community) are comparable to other studies (such as the 2005 EurActiv study on the Strategy and Governance of European Associations¹) but lower than the ambitions of the partners undertaking this study. It can be noted however that the respondents who endeavoured to give advice on scientific research are primarily those who have been involved to some extent in research projects. Correlatively, this would mean that organisations that did not respond were those that never participated in any research projects, and were unable (and/or unwilling) to give any opinion on the impact of research on their sectors of activity.

Logically from the above, most respondents claimed to have an awareness of Community programmes and objectives of EC RTD in the field of fisheries, aquaculture and seafood. Fewer, however, estimated to have good knowledge of the results of this research.

Many within the sectors, and within the wider group of stakeholders that were contacted had no desire to provide feedback, claiming a lack of awareness and knowledge of the subject. Some persuasion of the fact that 'don't know' is a valid response, was therefore required. This resulted in feedback from those that had not taken part on EC research, and representing 20% of the total respondents. Of these, half were Producer Associations.

As would be expected, there is a clear distinction of opinion between the scientific community, who have a generally high level of knowledge of EC research and NGOs, who generally have a low knowledge level. The key conclusions presented in the extended summary report may therefore be open to criticism on the weighting of comments provided by NGOs (especially consumer organisations) in the light of the low return rate from this group of stakeholders. This is arguable, although analyses showed their responses to be significant from a statistical point of view. In providing a balanced view of the impact of EC research, the authors of this study felt it necessary to highlight the differences in opinion described above.

While the general perception of the impact of EC RTD funding on networking and cooperation between European countries is high (specifically for the science community), the seafood processing sector has a lower general perception on cooperation, communication from science to industry and communication from science to society, than the other sectors. In fact, the seafood processing sector has a generally lower perception of the impact of research in both fisheries and aquaculture. This may be a direct result of a communication gap in the dissemination of RTD results.

EC RTD funding has led to a better understanding of aquaculture systems and seafood quality and safety, but a more neutral opinion is given for contribution of research to fisheries management. Furthermore, the private sector (including professional organisations and individual companies) tends to show less enthusiasm than the institutional partners (scientific community and policy makers) on the extent to which research contributed to a better understanding of the main issues at stake.

The scientific community has a consistently higher belief in all aspects of impact addressed in this study and especially the positive sustainability effects of research (resources and environmental benefits). However, this is not mirrored by NGOs (both environmental and consumers) and this may be linked to the lack of adapted communication of research results to them.

Finally, all respondents felt that all the current communication tools, and especially the internet, should be used more in the future and that the level of communication (and perhaps who actually does the dissemination) needs to be better adapted to the target audience. At present, it appears that most dissemination initiatives taken by project coordinators target primarily the scientific community, with little, if any, effort to reach a wider non-scientific audience. This is confirmed by the results of the survey of the outputs

¹ See EurActiv, Public Affairs section: www.euractiv.com/en/pa

of the research programmes with most dissemination material being in the form of peer-reviewed scientific papers.

One question that remains unanswered by this particular study, is the impact of EC RTD on what could be referred to as an 'intermediate' or 'associated' group of stakeholders. These include providers of scientific advice to the European institutes, such as the International Council for Exploration of the Seas (ICES) and the International Council for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT); Committees responsible for international and/or regional development, such as the FAO committees and including notably the aquaculture sub-committee of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI:AQ) and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). These organisations were of course contacted as part of this study, as well as for a more detailed qualitative assessment. No response, however, was forthcoming. It is probable that various units or departments within these large structures have a good knowledge of EC RTD results and are well informed of EU developments. A separate and expanded action is most probably required to assess the impact of RTD to this 'associated' group of stakeholders.

This study has highlighted various aspects of impact, relevance and adaptation of research outputs. In essence, the key word is communication. This is not a new finding in itself. The importance here is on the communication strategy, the communication tools, and the question of who should have the communication role.

The recommendations that follow are based on the findings of the current study. That is to say the impact of RTD in FP4 and FP5 (so up to 2002). As was commented previously on the fact that respondents may also be giving a perception based on the current FP6 programme, certain initiatives enacted by the Research and Scientific Analysis unit of DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs also affect perception and merit mention in this report.

Two major initiatives representing a dramatic change from previous framework Programmes are the Scientific Support to Policy (SSP) programme and the stakeholder and coordinator consultations.

While the consultations provide good feedback and better cooperation, Scientific Support to Policy has identified areas where gaps exist in the current knowledge base for policy development and in the light of, for example, the Commission strategy for sustainable aquaculture development in Europe. Targeted research using the new tools, such as Specific Targeted Research Projects (STREPS) and Specific Support Actions (SSAs) is undeniably having an impact. A major new initiative called PROFET POLICY will be launched before the end of 2005 to disseminate RTD results in the fisheries and aquaculture to policy makers throughout Europe and provide forums for exchange with other stakeholders.

With regard to this particular report, the authors propose the following recommendations for consideration by DG Fisheries and Maritime Affairs.

1 Validation of proposed research

- 1.1 In order to improve the relevance of EC RTD, stakeholders should be able to have input in the formulation of the Work Programmes and RTD calls. The Scientific Community alone tends to have a more optimistic perception of RTD impacts than the other stakeholders, and this may bias the future orientations chosen. The current level of stakeholder consultation should be expanded to include industry, consumer and environmental organisations involved in fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing at a European level. Recent examples of stakeholders outside the research community identifying research needs show the usefulness of this approach, and it should now be increased to address wider stakeholder groups and cross-sector issues.
- 1.2 The proposal stage is the first area where communication issues to stakeholders can and should be addressed. The guidelines for proposers have evolved significantly since FP4 and during the current Framework Programme (FP6), so that project consortia have to justify the impact of their research. Further developments could focus on the need to present communication strategies at the proposal stage, including how to position the research in the broader picture and to a non-expert target audience.
- 1.3 Consequently, while the scientific merits of the proposals should continue to be evaluated by selected panels of scientists, it could be envisaged that a panel of representatives of the industry is associated to evaluate, at the proposal stage, the dissemination strategy proposed. The results of this specific evaluation could lead to reject weak proposals on these particular dissemination aspects, or provide guidelines to the Commission services for negotiation of the contracts.

2 Dissemination strategies for different types of research project

- 2.1 The new types of project, introduced during FP6, are the Integrated Projects and Networks of Excellence. These are large initiatives, in terms of the number of sub-projects, the size of the consortia and the Community financial contribution. Although their dissemination and training budget should be maintained, dissemination activities are not generally funded at 100% of eligible costs (depending on the cost model adopted by contractors). Dissemination budgets for these larger research initiatives need to be fully funded in the same way as training.
- 2.2 The “smaller” RTD actions, notably Specific Targeted Research Projects (STREPS) and Specific Support Actions (SSAs) should not have a specific dissemination activity, but should finish the project by the provision of results in different formats for the different stakeholders.
- 2.3 A clause for the provision of summaries in simple language as well as the final public deliverables in a “web-friendly format” should be built in the contract for these STREPS and SSAs.
- 2.4 These actions should then be clustered together, based on a thematic segmentation or specific policy area of the Common Fisheries Policy.
- 2.5 This ‘clustered’ information could then be passed on to groups or organisations that can carry out dissemination activities at a European level and for the different stakeholder groups. After identification of these organisations and networks within the fields of fisheries, aquaculture and seafood processing, sufficient financial resources should be provided from Community funds to support dissemination activities, using the media tools (internet, audiovisual...) most adapted to the audience. This will have the effect of providing a higher

impact through a higher critical mass of information and a “proximity” to stakeholders. Furthermore, it will overcome the current situation where a high number of individual project web sites are created and then disappear once project funding ceases. Many useful reports and publications are lost in the process.

- 2.6 SME measures have shown increased participation in FP5 and certainly in FP6 in the sectors concerned, notably in aquaculture. However, broad dissemination is often against the interest of participants, especially for example in the CRAFT-type projects. Collective Research should therefore be further encouraged so that Industrial Associations and Groupings (IAGs) become the owners of research results and therefore more implied in their impact to the competitiveness of the sector.

3 Communication tools

- 3.1 Although both the objectives and results of the Community programmes in these sectors are important to provide, priority should be given to creating awareness in the wider stakeholder groups of the research results. The synopses of selected projects in the sectors, published by the EU publications office provide good basic information, although sometime outdated, but this should be expanded to better relate the research to the objectives (general and specific) for each Key Action.
- 3.2 These expanded synopses should be made available to all stakeholder groups, including all European producer or fisherman’s associations and other organisations and federations representing environmental and consumer interests, and the general food and health sectors.
- 3.3 Synopses show the essence of the work done, and should be considered only as information notes on the basis of which the reader can decide whether the research is of interest or not for his organisation / enterprise. The Commission should make sure that more detailed published material is readily available on the project when releasing the synopses.
- 3.4 The current web resources, especially CORDIS, but also EUROPA, need to provide more results and less “scope and objectives”. This may be extremely difficult to achieve for the sheer number of projects over all sectors, contained in these databases. Alternative approaches to the way in which the information is archived are needed, based on a common template.
- 3.5 Such databases could be maintained by the groups or organisations that carry out dissemination activities at a European level and for the different stakeholder groups.



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