

WELCOME SPEECH

by

Prof. Ivan Katavić
Assistant Minister, Director of Fisheries Directorate
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the
Government of the Republic of Croatia

Dear colleagues and friends of NACEE, dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to extend to you all a warm welcome on a behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management. We hope you will remember your visit to Dubrovnik not only because of your NACEE meeting, but also because of the beauty of Dalmatia and the hospitality of our hosts of the University of Dubrovnik.

We wish to commend the organizers of this NACEE meeting for addressing a number of the most pressing topics in aquaculture. Our special thanks go also to our distinguished colleague and friend Dr Laszlo Varadi for promoting the NACEE initiative of regional collaboration and networking in aquaculture.

Expectations and concerns

Dear colleagues, Croatia shares the same expectations and concerns for the future of aquaculture in our region. We recognize the need for predefined strategic goals of sustainable aquaculture development. To reach these goals we will rely on regional and international cooperation, on learning lessons from previous experiences and on scientific advice.

After a decade of fragmented policies, contradictory rules and ineffective guidance, Croatia is facing a new period of development and international cooperation. We are now in the process of reforming our political, economic, and legal systems in order to meet the EU standards. Our fishery and aquaculture sectors are considered major priority areas, and we presently are strengthening our capacity for management and implementation of the EU Common Fishery Policy.

Could we envision the NACEE network addressing the important aquaculture issues and relevant principles to help reduce the gap between leading EU member states and the less developed and developing countries in Central and Eastern Europe?

From past experience we know that very few initiatives of establishing aquaculture networks in the Mediterranean region have been successful. The reasons why the TECAM, SELAM, SIPAM and EAM networks have not managed to truly meet the needs and the expectations of the countries concerned, and why they have not managed to gain support of both potential users and national authorities, have to be acknowledged. One lesson is certain – without fully functional national networks, no regional network can be operational. The approach to active interactions among actors in most countries has been that of enthusiastic people participating voluntarily and trying to facilitate collaboration, while sacrificing their time and efforts, but

unfortunately without much progress. Their activities were not recognized within their own country and they remained locked within their institutions with a low level of effectiveness.

After all, you may ask yourself how many producers around the Mediterranean have been aware of these networks, and how many of them actually use it, and – above of all – how many of you - directors, researchers, developers consider those networks reliable?

Future aquaculture development

Aquaculture is growing and production figures will continue to rise, as well as the need for collaboration.

Progress was possible in the last two decades due to technological innovations in hatchery reproduction, genetics, new species, feed improvement and holding systems development. For example, new engineering of floating cages resulted in flexibility, durability, higher profitability, reduced environmental impact, and opportunities for farms to move offshore. Risk management, health management, traceability, and also environmental management in aquaculture have all advanced. However, recommended actions at both farm level (BMP) and sector level are still numerous.

Aquaculture products contribute to the growth of the seafood industry and are generally well accepted by consumers. Aquaculture increasingly is recognized as significant potential investment opportunity. Aquaculture is multi-functional as it contributes to aquatic values and traditions, water management, biodiversity and landscape preservation, quality of life and development of rural areas and local communities.

Most countries in the region are willing to realize the full potential of aquaculture, both in inland and coastal areas. Marine aquaculture has a great potential that is not fully recognized yet in most of Central and Eastern European countries.

Of course, we are concerned about issues such as impact on water quality, habitat interactions, aquatic animal health, food safety, and conflict with tourism. If public image of aquaculture would improve, water policy issues and access to the land and coastal areas would not be such a big problem as it is now.

Development trends and limitations

Human and institutional capacities to plan and manage sustainable aquaculture development are limiting factors in many countries. We do have undergraduate and postgraduate studies in aquaculture, while in some cases we even face overproduction of academic staff in aquaculture. However, we still lack sufficient qualified technical staff, with experience and practical skills to work on fishing vessels, the processing industry and fish farms respectively.

We all have learned that poor planning and management has led to a slow, uncoordinated, unbalanced and unsustainable growth in some countries. We also know that improved planning through integration of aquaculture development into the general planning exercises can mitigate if not avoid conflicts among users. And, through new technologies and best management practices we can reduce negative environmental and other impacts.

For the future of aquaculture, we will have to address a range of issues. These include:

- Raising cost of feed and protein dependence on fish meal may be critical to competitiveness in the future.
- Fish disease outbreaks are still causing substantial economic losses in the sector.
- Application of genetic principles to increase production carries potential to enhance aquaculture development.
- Research on better hatchery seed production is needed. Seed quality may be facilitated through seed networks of breeders, hatchery and nursery operators, service providers and traders.
- Intensification may sustain profitability, while it also raises concerns about carrying capacity. Capacities of suitable zones should be assessed and strategic management developed.
- Important roles of producer organizations in production, distribution and markets.

To conclude

National commitment to provide increased support to aquaculture research and education is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of the aquaculture industry. Government commitments to provide adequate funding support generally needs the form of clear formulation of goals, methodologies, plans and strategies. This can be significantly facilitated by NACEE through improved communication between member institutions, producer associations, and experts.

Your network has the potential to play a major role. If functional and flexible enough, aquaculture research and development in the region will benefit from your network.

We wish all participants a successful and enjoyable meeting and a pleasant stay in Croatia.