

Opening Statement
to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Fisheries & Maritime Affairs

Finian O'Sullivan IFA Aquaculture Chair

Aquaculture Licensing

Tuesday 20th January 2026

Chair and Committee Members, thank you for inviting IFA to address you today regarding Aquaculture Licensing.

I am joined by IFA Aquaculture Policy Executive, Teresa Morrissey.

The Irish aquaculture sector is a vital contributor to the national economy, through sustaining coastal communities and providing a sustainable food production system making a valuable contribution to food security. Our members operate in some of Ireland's most environmentally sensitive waters and are committed to meeting the highest environmental and regulatory standards.

However, the current aquaculture licensing system is failing both the Irish Aquaculture sector and the State.

Licence applications and renewals routinely take many years to complete. In some cases, aquaculture businesses have operated for a decade or more without appropriate licensing certainty, despite full compliance with regulatory requirements. This level of delay creates unacceptable uncertainty for operators, deters investment, restricts innovation, and places Irish Aquaculture at a significant disadvantage compared with our European counterparts.

The Irish Aquaculture industry provides essential employment opportunities for rural coastal communities with over 1,800 direct jobs and over 15,000 indirect jobs in seafood processing and marine ancillary services sectors. Irish Aquaculture produce is worth €211 million in production value from a production volume of 38,500 tonnes, according to the latest [BIM Business of Seafood 2024](#).

With a multiplier effect average of 1.5, a sustainable Irish Aquaculture industry has huge potential to create employment opportunities and further enhance coastal communities both through direct employment and indirect employment in marine industries and marine ancillary services.

Gross Value Added (GVA) to the Irish economy in 2024 was estimated at €73 million. This value and volume of Irish aquaculture production could be significantly increased by optimising the licenced aquaculture space we already have and allowing licence conditions to adapt to innovative, efficient aquaculture production systems.

With considerable investment and appropriate legislative changes for the Irish Aquaculture sector; there can be significant increases in both direct and indirect employment, volume and value of aquaculture produce. IFA Aquaculture believes in the future of rural coastal communities and industries such as aquaculture are imperative for the vitality of these communities.

Legislative Reform

During his visit to Ireland as part of EU Maritime Day 2025, the EU Commissioner for Fisheries & Oceans, Costas Kadis, gave recognition that Aquaculture has the potential to increase EU seafood production and contribute to food security as the fastest growing food production sector globally. The Commissioner also noted that sustainable development of EU Aquaculture is a shared competence with Member States having the ability to set ambitions for the Irish Aquaculture sector with the support of the EU Commission.

Coupled with that the '*Strategic Guidelines for Sustainable EU Aquaculture*' outline measures that address the complexity of regulatory and administrative burden impacting licensing systems, including streamlining legislation, a 'one-stop shop' system for aquaculture licensing under a single National entity – this approach has been adopted in other Member States and Ireland should also examine the feasibility of such measures to reform the licensing system.

It is now critical that a single piece of legislation is brought forward to implement and underpin appropriate aquaculture policy and bring together all the existing primary, secondary and amended legislation in one single provision.

IFA Aquaculture recognises the Programme for Government commitment to '*Continue to support the sustainable development of our aquaculture sector and modernise and streamline aquaculture licencing in the State through legislation changes*' - **Legislative Reform** is essential to move the Irish Aquaculture sector forward.

To further support the need for legislative reform, a recent licence appeal decision (AP1/2019 Decision – Sept 2025) from the Aquaculture Licensing Appeals Board (ALAB) also described the current licence conditions in the appeal determination as '*inappropriate, outdated, and inconsistent with best practice and not commercially viable*'. The determination also concluded that '*There is a recognised need to update licence conditions and there are significant delays in the licensing system*'.

It is important to stress that IFA Aquaculture members are **not seeking weaker regulation**. The aquaculture sector fully supports robust environmental assessment, compliance with National & EU legislation, and the protection of our marine environment. What we are seeking is a **licensing process that is timely, coherent, properly resourced, and legally robust**.

At present, the system is characterised by fragmented decision-making, duplicated assessments, sequential rather than parallel processes, and an ongoing vulnerability to legal challenge. This does not serve environmental protection, public confidence, or sustainable development. Instead, it results in paralysis—where decisions are delayed and opportunities are lost.

Aquaculture Licensing Reform

IFA acknowledges that progress has been made with the Aquaculture licensing review recommendations however, from the perspective of the sector, progress on implementation has been too slow, and significant progress still to be made. Particularly, establishing a 20-year licence term, alongside a robust monitoring and compliance system, which would be significant step forward for the sector providing certainty for generational renewal and securing investment in the sector. The potential accumulation of a backlog of aquaculture licence determinations has the detrimental effect on the sustainable development of Irish Aquaculture.

There is a very significant knock-on effect resulting from delays in the licensing system in relation to Grant-Aid eligibility, which is impacting the ability of the sector to sustainably develop and integrate innovative practices. It is not the fault of the applicant awaiting an aquaculture licence determination for a number of years in the case of shellfish licences, up to 20 years for finfish licence renewals, and 15 years for new finfish licence applications - and now also find they are ineligible for grant aid while they await their licence determination.

The Irish Aquaculture sector believes that meaningful aquaculture licensing reform must deliver:

- Legislative reform and consolidation.
- Modernisation of the licensing system with 20-year licences, Clear timelines & certainty for licence determinations.
- Resources, Staffing & Expertise for appropriate assessment and environmental assessment work.
- Improved access to funding despite licensing delays.
- Examine the validity of a Plan-led approach – a Designated Maritime Area Plan (DMAP) for the Irish Aquaculture sector must be examined, to investigate if there are advantages of the plan-led approach.

Concluding Comments

It is now critical that a single piece of legislation is brought forward to implement and underpin appropriate aquaculture policy and bring together all the existing primary, secondary and amended legislation in one single provision – this must be a National priority for the Minister and his DAFM officials.

The consequences are real and immediate. Delayed licensing affects business continuity, access to finance, generational succession, and Ireland's ability to deliver on national strategies such as Food Vision 2030 and the National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture. It also undermines confidence among coastal communities who depend on aquaculture as a stable source of employment and income.

There must be an immediate effort made to reform, modernise, and improve the aquaculture licensing system. Reducing the administrative burden and having an efficient, transparent aquaculture licensing system is of benefit to regulators, the industry and aquaculture stakeholders alike.

Ireland has a natural competitive advantage in aquaculture. With the right licensing framework, we can grow this sector sustainably, support resilient coastal communities, and contribute to national food security and climate objectives.

All stakeholders, industry, State agencies, Government departments must work collaboratively and constructively to address obstacles - There must be certainty in the aquaculture licensing system to secure investment potential and facilitate generational renewal.

We welcome the Committee's engagement on this issue and look forward to your questions.

References:

ALAB, 2025 – AP1/2019 Licence Appeal Determination-Sept 2025

BIM, 2025 - *Business of Seafood 2024*

BIM, 2024 – *Annual Aquaculture Report 2024*

BIM, 2023 – *National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development*

BIM, 2022 - *The Economic Contribution of the Aquaculture Sector across Ireland's Bay areas*

EU Commission, 2021 - *EU Strategic Guidelines for sustainable & competitive EU Aquaculture 2021-2030*

Background Information

The IFA is Ireland's largest farming organisation, with 72,000 farmer members covering all production systems. The Association is structured with 947 branches and 29 County Executives across the country.

IFA Aquaculture is a consolidated representative body comprised of representatives from all sectors of the Irish aquaculture industry, this includes all stakeholders that farm fish, shellfish, seaweeds and for other novel species that may be cultured around the coastline of Ireland.

The National committee of IFA Aquaculture is comprised of representatives across all sub-sectors of Irish Aquaculture. IFA Aquaculture provides strong industry representation nationally and internationally, supporting the improvement and development of the Irish aquaculture industry and promoting positive aspects of Irish aquaculture.

IFA Aquaculture is a member of the Aquaculture Advisory Council in Brussels, the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP), the European Mollusc Producers Association (EMPA), and the International Salmon Farmers Association (ISFA).

Appendix 1:

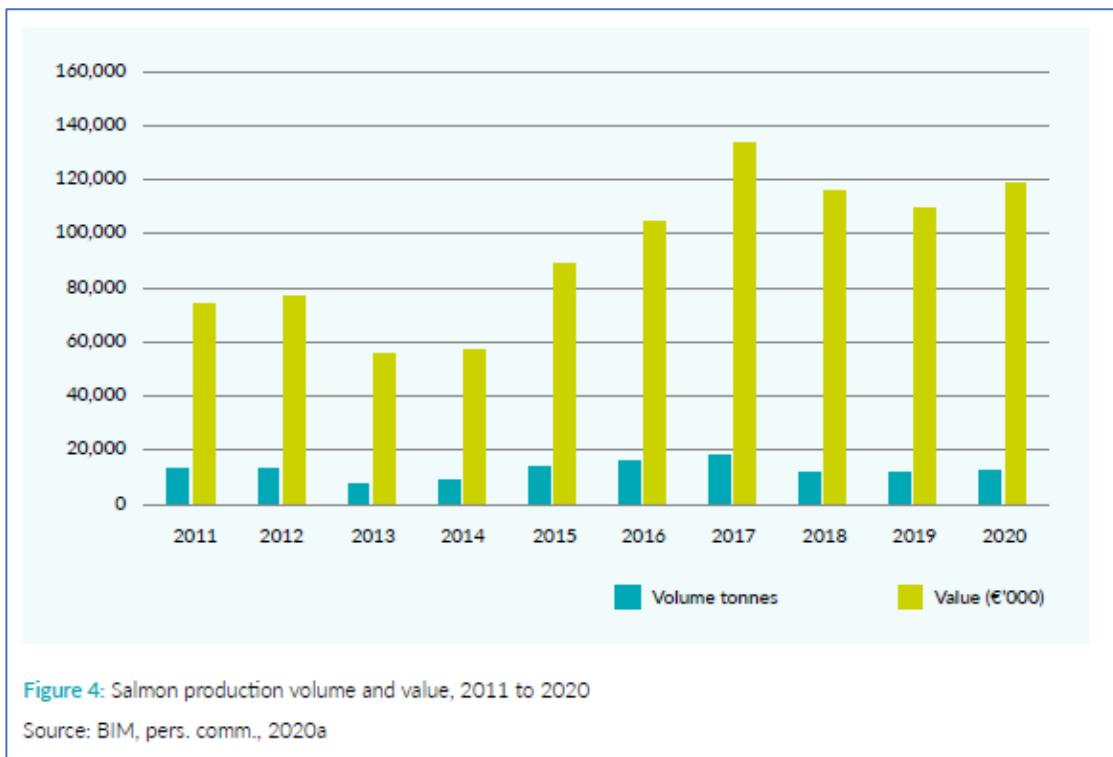


Fig. 1 – Irish Aquaculture Production in Value (€) & Volume (T) from 2011-2020

Source: National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development

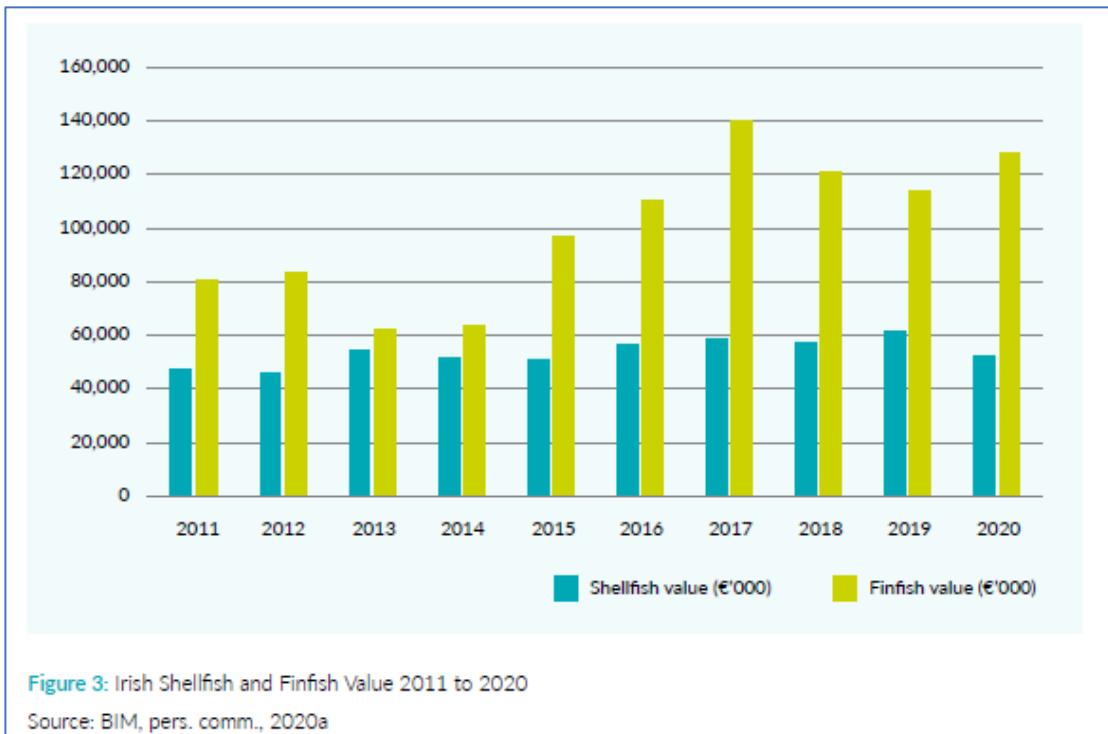


Figure 3: Irish Shellfish and Finfish Value 2011 to 2020

Source: BIM, pers. comm., 2020a

Fig. 2 – Irish Aquaculture Value in Shellfish & Finfish from 2011-2020

Source: National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development

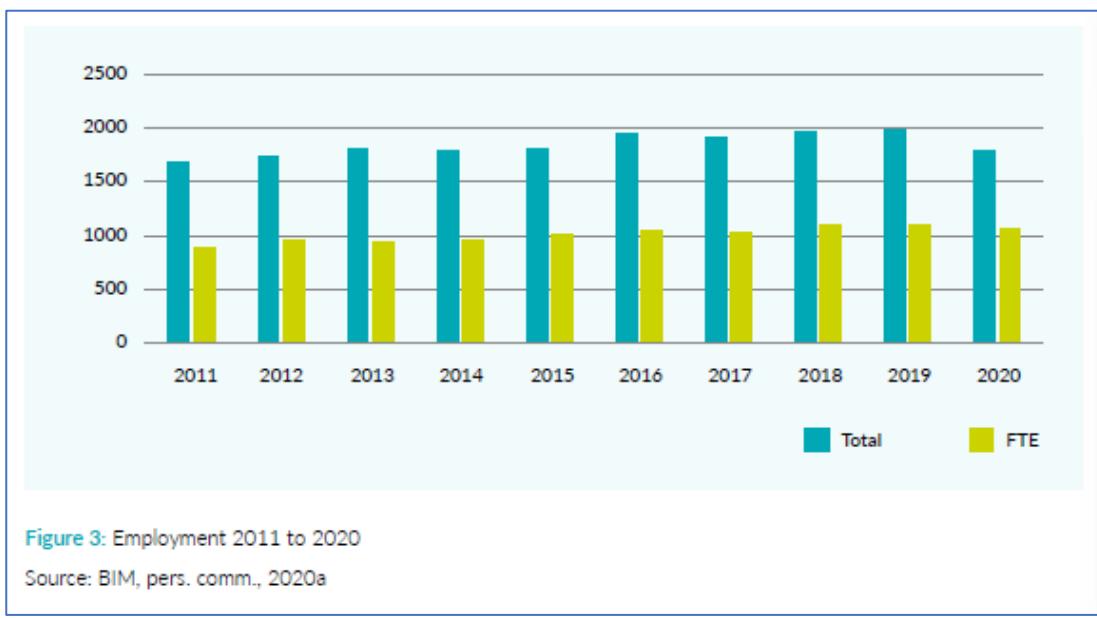


Figure 3: Employment 2011 to 2020

Source: BIM, pers. comm., 2020a

Fig. 3 – Total Employment and FTE in the Irish Aquaculture Sector from 2011-2020

Source: National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Aquaculture Development

Destination	Tonnes exported	% of export
France	14,719	58
The Netherlands	4,232	17
UK	966	4
Other EU	2,508	10
Southeast Asia	699	3
Other	2,125	8
Total export volume	25,249	100

Fig. 4 – Irish Aquaculture Production Exports (Total) for 2023 in Volume (T) & Destination

Source: BIM Annual Aquaculture Report 2024

Farming sector	GVA	Employment	Wages
Oyster farming	1.6	1.3	1.8
Mussel and other shellfish farming	1.6	1.2	1.8
Finfish farming	1.9	3.3	3.2
All aquaculture	1.7	1.5	2.2

Source: Oxford Economics, Perceptive Insight, CSO

Fig. 5 - Snapshot showing Irish Aquaculture multipliers by subsector

Source: BIM Report - The Economic Contribution of the Aquaculture Sector

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