POSITION PAPER

The Contribution of the EU Insect Sector to Resilient, Diversified, and Prosperous Coastal Communities

Submitted to: European Commission – DG MARE
In response to: Call for Evidence for an EU Strategy for Coastal Communities
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Submitted by: International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed (IPIFF)

1. Introduction

The International Platform of Insects for Food and Feed (IPIFF) welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Call for Evidence for an EU Strategy for Coastal Communities. As the umbrella organisation representing the European insect production sector, IPIFF together with the UK Edible Insect Association represents over 100 members, from small and medium-sized enterprises to industrial-scale producers, many of whom are already operating in or collaborating with coastal and rural regions across the EU without mentioning several Universities and research centres based in both the EU and the UK.

We commend the European Commission's commitment, as outlined in the European Ocean Pact and the mission letters of Executive Vice-President Fitto and Commissioner Kadis, to ensure that coastal communities can seize growth opportunities, adapt to climate impacts, and develop resilient, innovative blue economies. IPIFF firmly believes that the European insect sector is a vital and ready-to-scale partner in achieving these objectives.

This paper outlines how the EU insect sector can directly contribute to the three pillars of the proposed strategy: **strengthening economic competitiveness**, **enhancing resilience and adaptation**, and **fostering inclusive and vibrant communities**. We also provide concrete policy recommendations for how the EU can unlock this potential.

2. The EU Insect Sector: A Strategic Partner for Coastal Communities

The European insect sector has passed a critical threshold, with over **150 production facilities** across Europe, creating more than **3,500 jobs to date** and projected to deliver up to **30,000 jobs by 2030**. These are predominantly green, local jobs in regions that often face economic stagnation and an ageing workforce. By 2030, insect protein for aquafeed alone could reach **200,000 metric tons**, representing approximately 40% of the insect protein market.

The sector's unique value lies in its circularity: insects convert low-value organic by-products into high-quality protein, oil, and fertiliser (frass), creating new economic activity while reducing waste and import dependency.

3. Contribution to the Strategic Pillars

Pillar 1: Strengthening Economic Competitiveness and Diversification

Livelihood diversification for fishing communities. Many EU coastal communities are heavily dependent on fishing, a sector facing declining profitability, stock pressures, and generational renewal challenges. Insect farming offers a complementary, resilient source of income. Like successful international examples where insect farming has been introduced alongside traditional livelihoods to build resilience, EU coastal communities can integrate insect production as a new agricultural activity. This provides an alternative revenue stream that does not add pressure on marine stocks.

Supporting a competitive EU aquaculture sector. Aquafeed accounts for up to **70% of production costs** for fish farmers. Insect meal, produced locally within the EU, can reduce this cost burden and insulate producers from the high volatility of fishmeal and soybean meal prices caused by geopolitical instability and climate events. By supporting the uptake of insect-based aquafeed, the Strategy can directly improve the profitability and global competitiveness of EU aquaculture, a sector currently accounting for less than 1% of world production.

Creating new value chains from local resources. Insect farms can be strategically located in coastal areas to utilise regional by-products (e.g., from fish processing, food manufacturing) as feed substrates. This creates a circular economy loop, turning a waste management cost into a revenue-generating resource.

According to the European Court of Auditors, the large increase in EU funding available for aquaculture over the 2014-2020 period was followed by relatively low absorption and undemanding project selection criteria. EU aquaculture has seen little growth over the period, and there are no reliable indicators to track the sector's sustainability or the contribution of the increased EU funding.

The ECA Recommends that the Commission:

- *support member states in addressing the obstacles to a sustainable development of EU aquaculture.*
- *improve targeting of EU funds; and*
- *enhance the monitoring of EU funding's performance and of environmental sustainability.*

Source: *European Court of Auditors-Report- special report 25/2023: EU aquaculture policy - stagnating production and unclear results despite increased EU funding*

Pillar 2: Enhancing Resilience and Adaptation

Reducing dependency on imported protein. The EU currently relies on imports for 70% of its animal feed protein, creating strategic vulnerabilities. Insect protein, produced domestically in EU coastal and rural regions, directly addresses this deficit, enhancing the EU's open strategic autonomy and food system resilience in the face of trade disruptions and climate-induced supply shocks. The 2025 World Bank Report highlights that meeting future aquaculture demand will require alternative feed sources to double or triple by 2050, representing a trillion-dollar investment opportunity.

The European Parliament in its resolution of the 4th of October 2022 'On striving for a sustainable and competitive EU aquaculture: the way forward' stresses the need to promote ecologically sustainable marine proteins and oils to be used as feed (…), such as insect meal (…) and the partial replacement of marine proteins and oils with non-marine alternatives that are sustainably produced.

Climate-resilient production. Insect farming requires significantly less land and water than traditional protein production and has a lower carbon footprint. Life Cycle Analyses of leading EU producers demonstrate that insect meal can already achieve carbon scores as low as **1kg CO_2e/kg**, outperforming many conventional ingredients. This aligns with the Strategy's objective to promote decarbonisation and reduce energy dependency.

According to the European Commission's strategic guidelines for aquaculture, producing fish feeds that are sustainable is vital to the environmental performance of the EU aquaculture sector.

Also, the European Commission states that feed producers should limit reliance on fish meal and fish oil. Instead, alternative protein ingredients such as insects or the waste from other industries should be used.

Pillar 3: Fostering Inclusive and Vibrant Communities

Creating green jobs for youth and women. The insect sector is particularly well-suited to engaging young people and women in economic activity. International projects have demonstrated the success of targeting these groups for training and empowerment in insect-based agribusiness. By integrating insect farming into local economic development plans, coastal communities can offer attractive, innovative career paths that help retain and attract talent, directly addressing the challenge of an ageing workforce.

Complementing income for fishers and aquaculture producers. Insect production can provide a stable, year-round income source that complements the seasonal and variable nature of fishing. This diversification strengthens the overall economic fabric of coastal towns, reducing vulnerability to single-industry downturns.

Sustaining local identity through innovation. Rather than replacing traditional maritime heritage, insect farming builds upon it by creating new, locally owned industries that

support the core activity of sustainable seafood production. The connection is direct: local insects feed local fish, creating a vertically integrated, traceable, and sustainable value chain that communities can be proud of.

According to EIT Food, the cost of feed is a significant expense to aquaculture producers, so developing more cost-effective solutions is also important. Alternatives to commercial feeds must be affordable and accessible to aquaculture producers, so they are encouraged and able to use them on their farms. The need to develop sustainable feed products in itself creates an economic opportunity. It can help to develop a new industry that could have high market and societal impact by creating new jobs, thereby improving livelihoods. Therefore, the environment, social and economic impact of developing alternative fish feeds that are sustainable is largely positive.

***Source**: Fish feed: Why we need sustainable alternatives*

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4. Policy Recommendations for the EU Strategy for Coastal Communities

To fully realise the potential of the insect sector for coastal communities, IPIFF calls on the European Commission to include the following measures in the Strategy:

1. Recognise Insect Production as a Strategic Activity for Coastal Areas

- Explicitly include insect farming and processing within the definition of "blue economy" activities eligible for support under relevant EU funds (EMFAF, CAP, ERDF).
- Acknowledge the insect sector's contribution to the EU Protein Strategy and its role in reducing import dependency.

2. Promote Integrated Local Value Chains

- Incentivise the establishment of circular economy hubs in coastal regions that connect local by-product streams (e.g., fish waste, agri-food residues) with insect farms and aquaculture producers.
- Support pilot and demonstration projects that showcase integrated models, providing technical assistance and knowledge transfer to local authorities and entrepreneurs.

3. Enhance Access to Finance for Startups and Scaling

- Respond to the urgent need for tailored financial mechanisms, as highlighted by IPIFF's engagement with the EU Startup and Scaleup Strategy. The European Investment Bank should develop dedicated de-risking instruments and loan guarantees for capital-intensive insect production facilities in coastal and rural areas.
- Ensure that EMFAF 2028-2032 includes clear eligibility for investments in alternative feed ingredient production, including insect meal facilities.

4. Support Workforce Training and Inclusivity

- Fund training and upskilling programmes targeting fishers, young people, and women in coastal communities to develop expertise in insect rearing, bioconversion, and value-added processing.
- Integrate insect farming into vocational training curricula for agriculture and aquaculture.

5. Drive Market Demand for Sustainable Aquafeed

Following the example of the EU ReFuel Aviation Initiative, introduce **progressive, mandatory inclusion targets for sustainable aquafeed ingredients** (such as insect meal) in the upcoming Common Fisheries Policy Regulation. IPIFF suggests indicative targets of **3% by 2027, 5% by 2028, 7% by 2029, and 15% by 2030**. This would create predictable demand, de-risk investment, and ensure that the environmental and economic benefits are realised across EU aquaculture.

6. Remove Regulatory Bottlenecks

Accelerate the authorisation of a wider range of circular substrates (e.g., former foodstuffs containing meat and fish) for insect farming, based on scientific risk assessments. This would reduce input costs and maximise circularity. Finalise EU harmonised standards for insect frass (organic fertiliser) to enable its full commercial valorisation, adding another revenue stream for producers.

Please see the EU Feed Circularity Catalogue Outlines Barriers and Solutions for Advancing Circular Animal Feed, from FEFAC, IPIFF and 6 other EU umbrella organizations.

Also refer to the Aquaculture Advisory Council Recommendations on Circularity in Fish Feed.

5. Conclusion

The EU insect sector stands at a crossroads. It has proven its technical viability and environmental benefits, but its full potential to contribute to thriving, resilient coastal communities will only be unlocked with a supportive policy framework.

By including the recommendations outlined above in the EU Strategy for Coastal Communities, the European Commission can catalyse a new, sustainable industry that creates local jobs, diversifies incomes for fishers, strengthens the competitiveness of EU aquaculture, and enhances Europe's strategic autonomy. We stand ready to work with DG MARE, Member States, and local stakeholders to turn this vision into reality.

Please read the **Position Paper submitted by IPIFF to the Open Consultation on a 'Vision for Aquaculture 2040'** together with its scientific bibliography and market reports to complement your reading to the proposals on behalf of the EU insect sector.