

Andromeda CEO: It's time for Greek aquaculture to reinvent itself

The company's deal to consolidate the country's bass and bream sector is a symbol of a larger change, exec tells IntraFish.

by

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*Andromeda Group's recent acquisition of Selonda and Nireus – the two largest sea bass and sea bream producers in Greece – is clearly an important turning point for the country's aquaculture sector, but it is more symbolic of a wider step change taking place in the industry, CEO Dimitris Valachis told **IntraFish** at the inaugural Hellenic Aquaculture Congress in Athens.*

"The big news is Greek aquaculture as a whole," said Valachis. "It has taken four years to build up trust between members but now we have joined together through the Hellenic Aquaculture Producers Organization (HAPO), and this is a step change for Greek aquaculture."



Selonda, Nireus takeover ends era of 'standstill' for Greek producers

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According to Valachis, the story isn't just about Andromeda merging three companies but of the combination of 21 companies through the producer's organization to promote the industry.

While Valachis said the deal between Andromeda, Selonda and Nireus is a "very important step to leave problems in the past and create a strong company in Greece," it is the wider sector that will benefit.

"It is very integral to have strong companies so everybody is positive – it is an opportunity to bring stability to companies and to the sector," he said.

"A stable regulatory environment will grow businesses for the benefit of the whole sector."

Speaking on the sidelines of the Hellenic Aquaculture Congress, Valachis was more eager to discuss the new strategy for Greece and its aquaculture sector in general.

Specifically, the importance of the country's producer organization HAPO, which although set up in 2016, was only officially recognized as a producers organization a couple of weeks ago.

"We need to revamp, reinstate and recover ourselves, we've got all the major producers joining forces, to get us back on track of growth, and through HAPO we can compete successfully with other countries," said Valachis.

Taking on the competition together

HAPO and its 21 producer members, who together represent 80 percent or around 85,000 metric tons of Greek aquaculture production, was established to take on international competitors and exploit the significantly expanding demand for aquaculture products worldwide.



The primary objectives of HAPO are to achieve a 4 percent increase in yearly production, provide consumers with proper information on aquaculture products and execute an integrated communication and promotion plan focusing on the characteristics and value of Greek fish.

The common reference point of all this is the creation of the national identity of all fresh Greek fish produced by its members, represented by the new collective label "Fish from Greece."

The common branding indicates Greece, a European member

state, as the place of provenance of all fresh fish raised in the unspoiled Greek sea, by the members of HAPO.

The group hopes "Fish from Greece" will become a seal of confidence, trust, freshness, quality and taste, for seafood buyers and consumers across the globe.

"We are trying to do something similar to Norway and promote the value of Greek fish in all markets," said Valachis, who is also president of HAPO.

But it is step by step process, he said, and producers were hesitant to join up at first.

"We need to build trust and walk the talk – in the past this was not the case -- but they've seen the development we've done so far," he said.

To become a member, producers must pay a per-kilo fee, based on their production volume.

As a group, the producers will be able to combine their money, efforts and resource for the benefit of the Greek sector as a whole.

Posidonia Aquaculture is one of the smaller producers that forms part of HAPO and is already seeing the benefits of the industry coming together and acting as one group.

"No-one knows what fish from Greece is so we need to add value," said Stefanos Dimas, sales manager at Posidonia Aquaculture.

"There is now a new strategy, where we are competing against others rather than between ourselves. It will take time, but it is good for the small producers, we are stronger together."