



ALLIANCE™

(<https://www.globalseafood.org>).

---



 Intelligence

---

# After first harvest, offshore aquaculture venture in Qatar sets fresh ambitions

12 July 2021

By Jason Holland

**Sea bass producer Samkna has the Qatari government's backing, as the Middle East country furthers its development and tightens its food security**



The Samkna offshore fish farm site – spanning some 900,000 square meters – is located roughly 31 miles (50 kilometers) off the Qatar coast in the Persian Gulf. Photo courtesy of Al Qamra Group.

Having successfully harvested its first sea bass batch in November 2020, Qatar’s only offshore aquaculture venture is now setting its sights on doubling production and diversifying into other species. The enterprise expansion is backed by the Qatari government, which has prioritized the need to strengthen food security and meet the growing demand for fresh fish.

The Al Qamra Group – a leading business conglomerate in the state of Qatar – established **Samkna** (<https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/01/03/2021/Samkna-eyes-expansion-to-meet-rising-demand>), fish farm in 2015 under the Food Security Programme of Qatar’s Ministry of Municipality and Environment (MME). The project supports objectives contained in the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV2030) – a state roadmap designed “to transform Qatar into a developed country, achieving sustainable development and securing a decent life for its present and future generations.” The first national project of its kind, the project is also intended to fulfill both the National Strategy for Food Security 2018-2023 and the MME’s 2018-2022 strategy.

Qatar implemented a strategy to encourage investment in aquaculture in recognition of the importance of the fisheries sector in the region and its pivotal role in enhancing food security, explained Mahmoud Tahoun, Al Qamra Holdings’ (AQH) operations and development director for marine aquaculture.

Qatar’s government has rushed to take proactive steps to support local production of protein-rich fish, while offshore marine sites using floating-cage technologies were identified for their potential in line with the recommendations of aquaculture experts, he said.



## A salmon farm in Dubai, because of course

Last year Dubai-based Fish Farm LLC sold the first batch of salmon to be born and bred in the United Arab Emirates. More are certainly coming.



Global Seafood Alliance

## Collaborative planning

Ahead of putting any infrastructure in place, and with support from international aquaculture technology and service providers, Al Qamra conducted in-depth research, studies and analysis of the water available to offshore open-water fish farming. The needs of the Qatari market were also evaluated.

Today, Samkna's site – spanning some 900,000 square meters – is located roughly 31 miles (50 kilometers) off the Qatar coast in the Persian Gulf. It has the capacity to produce 2,000 metric tons (MT) annually, although the company intends to double this by the end of 2022, Tahoun told the *Advocate*.

The fish are being supplied to the local market, with the current volume expected to boost the state's self-sufficiency levels by 20 percent, and to ensure consistently high levels of quality in its product, and to safeguard biosecurity, Samkna is using the latest available technology, he pointed out.

## Deepsea investments

While offshore aquaculture can produce large volumes of seafood and reduce conflicts with other coastal users, the remoteness of such operations necessitates a specific infrastructure. In the case of the Samkna fish farm project, a specialized fully automated feed storage and feeding barge was brought in. This was in addition to the installation of a floating "jack up barge" in August 2020.

Capable of accommodating 70 people, the platform is equipped with kitchens and refrigerated storage rooms stocked with enough food and essentials to meet staff needs for 30 days at a time. It also houses a system for the desalination of sea water, meeting rooms and a helipad.

Meanwhile, back on shore, to ensure fresh, high-quality products and a rapid delivery time to market, a 10,000-square-meter sorting and packaging factory has been built in the Ruwais region, near to the project site. The fish are kept at a low temperature – ranging between 0 and 4 degrees-C – from harvest through to the consumer point of sale.

“Feedback from consumers has been very good,” Tahoun said. As such, the company also intends to introduce a number of other species, with yellowfin sea bream (*Acanthopagrus australis*), red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) and sobaity sea bream under consideration. Production trials with some of these will be conducted this year, he said.

## Ongoing climate crisis could disrupt expansion

The project holds promise for supplying fresh fish and enhancing food security, but increased offshore aquaculture production is one measure to help prevent fish stock depletion. The threat is real: [A 2018 University of British Columbia study \(https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0194537\)](https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0194537) found that by 2090, one-third of marine species could become extinct in the Persian Gulf due to rising water temperature, changing salinity and oxygen levels and human activities such as overfishing.

However, [experts at Qatar University \(https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/qatar-expands-fish-farming-climate-change-affects-sea-stocks-2021-04-29/\)](https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/qatar-expands-fish-farming-climate-change-affects-sea-stocks-2021-04-29/) have said that any efforts will fail if “the broader international problem of excessive production of greenhouse gases that create climate change is not tackled.”

Follow the *Advocate* on Twitter [@GAA\\_Advocate \(https://twitter.com/GAA\\_Advocate\)](https://twitter.com/GAA_Advocate).

## Author

---



**JASON HOLLAND**

Jason Holland is a London-based writer for the international seafood, aquaculture and fisheries sectors. Jason has accrued more than 25 years' experience as a B2B journalist, editor and communications consultant – a career that has taken him all over the world. He believes he found his true professional calling in 2004 when he started documenting the many facets of the international seafood industry, and particularly those enterprises and individuals bringing change to it.

Copyright © 2021 Global Seafood Alliance

All rights reserved.