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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

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RESPONSIBLE FISHING OPERATIONS WORKPLAN

Executive Summary

The environmental and biodiversity impacts of fishing operations, including those caused by fishing gear misuse or mismanagement, continue to undermine the sustainability of fisheries, the conservation of oceans and are a major challenge to be addressed within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular within Sustainable Development Goal 14 “Life below Water” and Goal 2 “Zero Hunger”.

Implementation of these policy instruments and the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, as well as associated measures and tools, is required to effectively address unsustainable and harmful fishing practices.

The suite of activities related to Responsible Fishing Operations (i.e. RFO Workplan) support and promote responsible fishing practices that contribute to sustainable fisheries and the reduction of impacts of fishing operations. This information document provides an overview of the Workplan including expected benefits, outputs, and how foreseen activities map to these. The following Session Background Documents provide more details on initiatives mentioned in the present information document:

- COFI/2020/SBD.6. Report of the 2019 FAO/GGGI Regional Workshops on Best Practices to Prevent and Reduce Abandoned, Lost and otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear
- COFI/2020/SBD.7. Technical Guidelines to Prevent and Reduce Bycatch of Marine Mammals in Capture Fisheries.
- COFI/2020/SBD.8. Sea-based sources of marine litter-A review of current knowledge and assessment of data gaps. Second Interim Report of GESAMP Working Group 43, 4 June 2020.
- COFI/2020/SBD.13. IMO-FAO GloLitter Partnerships Programme.
- COFI/2020/SBD.14. Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin America and Caribbean Trawl Fisheries: the REBYC-II LAC project and beyond.

¹ Rescheduled from 13-17 July 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The environmental and biodiversity impacts of fishing operations, including those caused by fishing gear misuse or mismanagement, continue to undermine the sustainability of fisheries, the conservation of oceans and are a major challenge to be addressed within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular within Sustainable Development Goal 14 “Life below Water” and Goal 2 “Zero Hunger”.
2. FAO’s 1995 Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) sets out the core principles, goals and elements for action that States should address to achieve responsible conservation and management of the world’s fisheries. Over the years FAO has developed several associated policy instruments which provide detailed and specific guidance to States, Regional Fisheries Bodies, including Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, and other relevant parties, on particular aspects of the Code of Conduct. These International Guidelines (hereafter, the FAO Guidelines) include those directly relating to interactions between fishing operations and the marine environment, for example, the International Guidelines on the Management of Bycatch and the Reduction of Discards (2011), the Voluntary Guidelines for the Marking of Fishing Gear (2018), and the Technical Guidelines to Prevent and Reduce Bycatch of Marine Mammals in Capture Fisheries (2020).
3. Implementation of these policy instruments and the ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management, as well as associated measures and tools, is required to effectively address unsustainable and harmful fishing practices.
4. In order to promote responsible fishing practices that contribute to the reduction of impacts of fishing operations on ecosystems, FAO Fisheries Division proposes a suite of activities (the RFO Workplan) outlined in this document. These activities will assist States, and especially developing countries including small-island developing States, to put policies and measures in place to effectively address environmental and biodiversity impacts of fishing operations identified in each particular country context. Actions will support the use of selective fishing gear to support responsible fishing practices within the context of the CCRF and will be particularly focussed on: a) supporting the development of practices to reduce unwanted bycatch, discards, pollution, marine plastic litter, abandoned lost and other wise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) and associated “ghost fishing”; and b) developing and implementing a global capacity development Workplan to support these actions.

II. EXPECTED BENEFITS AND OUTPUTS

5. Expected benefits of the RFO Workplan will include:
 - i. Reduction of ALDFG in the marine environment globally;
 - ii. Improved management of fishing gear use and introduction of waste disposal systems for the disposal of unwanted fishing gear and promotion of the circular economy in recipient countries;
 - iii. Reduced levels of discards and unwanted bycatch of non- target species, both fish and non-fish species, and endangered, threatened or protected (ETP) species globally including marine mammals;
 - iv. Reduced impact on the seabed and benthic ecosystem that will help sustainable fisheries;
 - v. Positive socio-economic and food security benefits to coastal communities, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDs) and in artisanal fisheries including through reduced incidences of food loss through ‘ghost fishing’, discards and unwanted bycatch, improved energy efficiency of harvesting activities, implementing circular economy approaches within the fisheries sector and development of tools and or strategies to more quickly react to emergency situations;
 - vi. Improved collaboration across the lead UN agencies working to address marine plastic litter, in particular FAO, UNEP and IMO;

- vii. Improved collaboration between Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs), including Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, and other relevant regional entities;
 - viii. Enhanced measures to detect and mitigate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
6. In order to achieve the benefits outlined above, this Workplan aims to deliver the following outputs:
- Output 1.* Governments and relevant stakeholders are aware of the FAO Guidelines and other existing international instruments available to support responsible fishing operations and understand their principles and provisions.
- Output 2.* Government's capacities to enhance and implement responsible fishing operations by and for all stakeholders are strengthened.
- Output 3.* Mechanisms are established and supported for the monitoring, assessment and report of fishing operations trends and impacts.

III. ACTIVITIES

7. Output 1 activities include:

Activity 1.1 Develop and implement an awareness raising strategy of FAO Guidelines and other related tools and instruments on responsible fishing operations.

- i. FAO Fisheries Division will use new projects and other global and/or regional projects/programmes such as REBYC² (see COFI/2020/SBD.14), GloLitter Partnerships Programme (see COFI/2020/SBD.13), studies being produced by the GESAMP³ Working Group 43 on Sea-Based Sources of Marine Litter (see COFI/2020/SBD.8) to help raise awareness of the FAO Guidelines and related tools and instruments on responsible fishing operations.
- ii. This activity will include developing awareness raising materials in at least 3 official FAO languages (for example, banners, brochures, fact sheets, policy briefs, presentations and audio-visual productions).

Activity 1.2 Promote approaches to help integrate good management of fishing operations into broader frameworks of ocean management and conservation.

- i. Collaborate with relevant international organizations, donors, countries and development agencies, including other UN agencies, and create or support events and mechanisms for dialogue involving different actors (including the private sector) for responsible fishing related activities and marine environmental management.
- ii. This activity will contribute to enhance existing collaborations such as the IMO-FAO GloLitter Partnerships Programme, the ICES-FAO Working Group on Fishing Technology

²Reduction of Environmental Impact from Tropical Shrimp Trawling, through the Introduction of Bycatch Reduction Technologies and Change of Management (REBYC), 2002-2008
www.fao.org/fishery/organization/24545/en
 Strategies for trawl fisheries bycatch management - REBYC-II CTI or the Coral Triangle Initiative, 2011-2015
www.seafdec.or.th/home/thrust-3/rebyc-ii-cti
 Sustainable Management of Bycatch in Latin America and Caribbean Trawl Fisheries (REBYC-II LAC) 2015-2020 www.fao.org/in-action/rebyc-2/en/

³ Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection.
www.gesamp.org/work/groups/wg-43-on-sea-based-sources-of-marine-litter

and Fish Behaviour (WGFTFB), the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML)⁴, the International Whaling Commission's Bycatch Mitigation Initiative (BMI)⁵.

Activity 1.3. Facilitate knowledge management. Document, analyse and synthesize RFO Workplan experiences and publish knowledge/capacity building and reference material (for example, methodological tools and guidelines, manuals and good practices) in a dedicated website. This will include:

- i. review and update of FAO Guidelines and fishing gear factsheets, and
- ii. produce knowledge products highlighting good practices, trends, gaps and monitoring progress based on the results of Activities 2.2, 3.1 and 3.2. These knowledge products will contribute not only to knowledge building for better analyses and improved policy-making, but also to capacity building for the implementation of the principles established by the CCRF and associated FAO Guidelines.

8. *Output 2* activities include:

Activity 2.1 Support to development and/or implementation of national strategic action plans which build upon the FAO Guidelines on responsible fishing operations. This activity will include:

- i. Developing a curriculum and a capacity building programme for public officials concerned with the design and implementation of such national strategic action plans.
- ii. Customising and validating the curriculum and capacity building programme with the relevant Line Ministries (LMs) nationally appointed or Lead Project Agencies (LPAs), relevant institutions and national associations.
- iii. Delivering the customised capacity building programme, via a series of workshops, trainings and technical assistance.

Activity 2.2 Develop pilot projects to test practices and technologies developed in accordance with the FAO guidelines on responsible fishing operations, for example, gear marking schemes, bycatch/discard reduction, innovative technologies to reduce fuel consumption. The pilot projects will: a) build on existing good practices and scientific knowledge on responsible fishing operations at national level; b) identify relevant stakeholders, incentives and challenges to implement such good practices in target countries; and c) include an assessment of existing policies and legal frameworks at the national level that are relevant to the FAO guidelines. Where necessary, support to reform the existing policy and legal framework will be provided through this activity.

9. *Output 3* activities include:

Activity 3.1 Enhance existing fishing vessel reporting requirements and systems at regional level.

- i. Reporting on fishing vessel activities should not only include information on gear, catch and discards, but also gear loss and abandonment, where relevant, in order to fulfil reporting requirement of "discharge" of plastic at sea in MARPOL Annex V. The process of enhancing fishing vessel reporting systems will be achieved through a participatory approach in which representation of all relevant stakeholders (governments, regional bodies, fishers, NGOs) will be invited.
- ii. The objectives of this activity will be achieved through FAO participation in relevant regional and international meetings organized by RFBs and other UN agencies as IMO through its Marine Environment Protection Committee.

⁴ www.gpmarinelitter.org/

⁵ <https://iwc.int/bycatch>

Activity 3.2. Implement surveys to collect data on ALDFG and develop a database to record this information. This activity aims to help establish a baseline of gear loss quantity, to inform the spatial distribution of gear loss, and the assessment of impacts to fishery resources, biodiversity, and other ocean users. Through this activity an ALDFG database will be developed and managed by FAO, where this information will be recorded and analysis of long term trends facilitated. Complimentary data collected through this survey will include, costs of gear loss and end of life management of unwanted fishing gears. Survey implementation will be guided by recommendations provided by GESAMP WG43⁶.

Activity 3.3 Development of an online global information portal on fishing gears. This will be a web-based tool aimed at informing fisheries managers and interested stakeholders on the design and operation of each fishing gear and inform on the risk, and possible means of mitigation, for each fishing method in relation to the following:

- i. ALDFG and contribution to marine plastic litter;
- ii. Potential for ‘ghost fishing’.
- iii. Bycatch issues.
- iv. Discard issues.

⁶ www.gesamp.org/work/groups/wg-43-on-sea-based-sources-of-marine-litter