EUROPEAN UNION

Item 4. Status, trends, emerging issues and innovative responses to ensure responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture: Building back better

UNION POSITION

- Mr President, distinguished Members and Representatives of the Secretariat, I have the honor to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.

- Let me first congratulate FAO for the successful International Symposium on Sustainable Fisheries. The EU was one of the financial partners to the symposium and we can very much subscribe to the main messages resulting from these discussions.

- We also very much welcome the 2020 SOFIA report. It is a critical source of information for supporting our policy decisions, even if data largely dates from before the pandemic.

- The FAO assessments of the impacts of the pandemic on fisheries and aquaculture are very useful to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the sector and to orient the recovery towards more resilience.

- It is not possible to address all aspects covered by these reports but the EU and its Member States would like to emphasise a few.

Situation of the sector

- The fisheries and aquaculture sector makes a vital contribution to the world economy, as well as to food and nutrition security.

- The sector has been heavily hit by the pandemic. It suffers from criticism because it worsens certain challenges, in particular biodiversity loss and ecosystems damages, and it contributes to others, like climate change or pollution.

- As the pandemic is hopefully ending, we need to focus on recovery in the longer term and refrain from using subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. We must keep our actions sustainable and make sure that they do not compromise marine ecosystems.

- As also recommended by the Symposium on Sustainable Fisheries, a more positive narrative on fisheries and aquaculture is needed.

Improving fisheries management

- However, a new narrative will not be sufficient and credible if States and the global community do not succeed to reverse the continuing global trend of
overfished stocks highlighted in the SOFIA report. Poorly managed fisheries can damage the ecosystems that sustain them and fleets targeting overexploited stocks tend to perform worse.

- **Within the EU** we have been taking actions to improve the sustainability of fish stocks, which result in a significant progress towards sustainability of stocks and increased profitability of the sector. Despite the impact of COVID-19, projections are that the EU fleet ended 2020 with a reasonable level of profitability. This indicates a strong resilience, which is the result of the efforts made by the sector in previous years to achieve the maximum sustainable yield objective.

- We will continue to strengthen our efforts to minimise the negative impact of fishing activities on the marine environment and to reduce the by-catch of sensitive species. In 2022, we will assess our policy, looking particularly at how it caters for the social dimension, climate change and clean oceans.

- On aquaculture, we note potential but we are concerned with the analysis of the progress made under the Code of Conduct, according to which the development of policy, legal and institutional frameworks has not kept pace with the rapid growth of the sector.

- For populations to benefit fully from aquaculture, the sector must develop in a sustainable manner, in economic, environmental and social terms.

- We therefore stress the importance to progress on the elaboration of the FAO Sustainable Aquaculture Guidelines, to ensure that aquaculture development worldwide is consistent with the principles of responsible aquaculture laid down in the FAO Code of Conduct for responsible fisheries.

*Improving COFI preparation on these issues*

- Mr Chair, I end this intervention with a positive and a negative note. The positive note is that we can confirm the agreement of the EU on the Declaration on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture. We thank the Canadian facilitator for the remarkable work all along the process of elaboration of the declaration.

- The negative note is our frustration that the time we devote to these issues today is not sufficient in view of their importance. The EU therefore calls on the members of this Committee to pay particular attention to improve the preparation of COFI discussions, an issue that we will debate later in our meeting.