



# COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

## Thirty-fourth Session

1–5 February 2021

### DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SEVENTEENTH SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE, VIGO, SPAIN, 25–29 NOVEMBER 2019

#### Executive Summary

This document summarizes the main outcomes of the 17th session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI/FT/XVII). The full report is available as document COFI/2020/Inf.10.

#### Suggested action by the Committee

**The Committee is invited to:**

- Endorse the report of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade; and
- Provide guidance on the follow-up to the matters raised.

*Queries on the substantive content of this document may be addressed to:*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 17th Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI:FT) was held in Vigo, Spain, from 25 to 29 November 2019, at the kind invitation of the Government of Spain. It was attended by 48 Members of FAO and by observers from 16 intergovernmental and international non-governmental organizations.
2. Ms Carola Gonzalez Kessler (Spain) was Chairperson of the Sub-Committee. Argentina was First Vice-Chair. Senegal and New Zealand were the other Vice-Chairs.
3. In order to facilitate discussion, the working documents presented were organized into four major areas: i) economics and statistics of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors; ii) international fisheries frameworks; iii) market access for fish and fish products; and iv) recent FAO trade-related activities linked to previous COFI:FT sessions.
4. In this document, section II summarizes items from the COFI:FT report (paragraph numbers indicated within parentheses correspond to those from the COFI:FT report. Section III contains references to trade-related updates on FAO main activities and deliverables after COFI:FT/XVII.

## II. MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE SESSION

### *Economics and statistics of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors*

5. The Sub-Committee commended the Secretariat for the comprehensive analysis and scenarios provided in the area of production and consumption of fish and fish products, including the main species and information on the FAO Fish Price Index and fisheries and aquaculture outlook reports. It also suggested areas for future analysis of fish trade, particularly in addressing the problems associated with incomplete recordings of intra-regional trade. (Para. 7)
6. The important role that FAO plays in fisheries and aquaculture statistics was also stressed, particularly regarding the need for accurate and timely data and information in support of policy setting, monitoring, and management of fisheries and aquaculture. It was requested that FAO continues with capacity-building actions related to the improvement of national data collection. (Para. 11)
7. In addition, the Sub-Committee stressed the key role played by the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in terms of production and trade, contributing to: (i) global food security; (ii) economic growth and development, livelihoods and income; (iii) the inclusiveness of women; and (iv) the participation of developing countries. (Para. 8)
8. Nevertheless, some of the challenges associated with inclusiveness and market access problems in international or regional contexts were highlighted, particularly as regards the participation of small-scale fisheries and developing countries; and the challenges of climate change and inadequate governance. (Paras. 8, 9 and 10)
9. The Sub-Committee reiterated the importance of the basic principles of predictability, transparency, and non-discrimination associated with the world trade system. It supported the role FAO plays in providing specialized technical expertise, capacity-building, and analytical work on trade-related issues of fish and fish products. The importance of the Sub-Committee as the only global forum dedicated to discussions on trade issues in fisheries and aquaculture was also emphasized. (Para. 9)

### *International fisheries frameworks*

10. The main topics discussed in the area of the applicable international fisheries frameworks were the cooperation with other international organizations, the work on illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, the methodologies developed by FAO for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators, and the implementation of Article 11 of the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).
11. For the SDG indicators, the Sub-Committee recognized that the methodologies developed by FAO provide Members with the ability to report in a timely fashion on their progress towards the achievement of SDGs. (Para. 13)
12. The positive collaboration of FAO with other international organizations was acknowledged, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the World Customs Organization (WCO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Continued collaboration was encouraged, focusing on core elements related to trade in fisheries and aquaculture. (Para. 14)
13. Regarding the collaboration with other international organizations, the following were noted: (i) streamlining statistics requests with the OECD; (ii) supporting OECD to expand the database on Fishery Support Estimates (FSE); and (iii) improving the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS Code) for fish and fish products, supporting the work of WCO. (Paras. 15 and 16)
14. The Sub-Committee requested FAO to continue actively contributing to provide technical support to Members on fisheries topics in support of the fisheries subsidies negotiations, and to WTO, whenever requested. (Para. 17)
15. In the area of IUU fishing, the Sub-Committee expressed support for measures leading to its prevention, deterrence and elimination, and requested FAO to continue to support Members' development and implementation of National Plans of Action to Combat IUU Fishing (NPOA-IUU). (Paras. 10 and 18)
16. The Sub-Committee underscored that the responses to the questionnaire monitoring the implementation of Article 11 of the FAO CCRF should be seen as a platform for action to facilitate analysis, future technical assistance, and capacity building actions, addressing the challenges faced by Members. The outstanding and continuously increasing response rate was appreciated, but it was indicated that the Secretariat should persevere in increasing the responsiveness of non-responsive countries. It was requested that FAO should redraft the questions to obtain more specific responses from Members and conduct further analysis of the open-ended responses to identify trends and inform the work of COFI and COFI:FT. (Paras. 19 and 20)

### *Market access for fish and fish products*

17. The work developed by FAO on information on markets and trade, quality and safety, small-scale fisheries, product legality and transparency, traceability, biodiversity conservation and trade agreements was presented.
18. The Sub-Committee acknowledged the services provided by FAO GLOBEFISH on information sharing and data collection and their relevance to countries. The services included current and future work on market access, regulations of international fish trade, WTO "specific trade concerns," and a user-oriented HS code publication for fish and fish products. The importance of coordinating with the FISH INFONetwork was reiterated and the need for a specific effort towards supporting INFOPÊCHE stressed. (Paras. 21–24)

19. The work of FAO in the area of quality and safety of fishery and aquaculture products was welcomed, including the importance of joint work and collaboration with other agencies. In particular, there was strong support expressed for the work of FAO in providing scientific advice to support the standard-setting process of Codex and the need to continue with the provision of FAO funds to facilitate this work. Also, the work of FAO on marine toxins, microplastics, early detection of harmful algal blooms, food loss and waste, border rejections, and the impact of climate change on food safety was appreciated, and the Sub-Committee stressed the need for their continuation or expansion. (Paras. 25–31)

20. The Sub-Committee reiterated the critical role played by small-scale fisheries around the world in underpinning food security, supporting livelihoods, reducing poverty and promoting sustainable resource use. The Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) were recalled as an important tool in this regard, and continuous support for its implementation was recommended. The need for FAO to continue its work was reiterated, including capacity-building efforts to enhance Members' understanding of value chains, post-harvest operations and trade in small-scale fisheries. This work should mainly focus on the realization of the benefits of trade, including market access, achieving SDG 14.b, public and private requirements (certification and traceability), and dealing with the problems associated with climate change. (Paras. 32–35, 38 and 39)

21. In the area of legality and transparency, the Sub-Committee supported FAO to complete a practical guidance document to provide an in-depth explanation of key technical and practical aspects of the Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS Guidelines), including a compilation of information when establishing trade measures to combat IUU fishing and highlighting the need to avoid unnecessary trade barriers. In addition, FAO should continue to provide technical assistance to support programmes to combat IUU fishing, including accession to and implementation of the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA) and the development of appropriate CDS. (Paras. 42, 44 and 45)

22. FAO was encouraged to continue the ongoing work on food fraud, taking into consideration its multifaceted aspects, and identify key measures, regulations, tools, and procedures aiming to combat it across value chains and to provide technical assistance to countries in this area. (Para. 46)

23. The Sub-Committee encouraged FAO to continue granting technical assistance to develop and implement traceability systems by providing insights and gap analysis in building-up and implementing such systems in the private and government sectors. (Paras. 49 and 50)

24. FAO was recognized as the preminent UN body for fisheries and aquaculture. Mainstreaming biodiversity considerations in the work of FAO was supported and the continued participation in, and provision of fisheries advice to, multilateral environmental agreements and fora was requested. The Sub-Committee also emphasized the importance of decisions based on the best available scientific information and the continuous cooperation between FAO and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It was recommended that FAO be more active in communicating the status of aquatic resources and the progress in establishing and implementing measures for sustainable fisheries management and biodiversity conservation. (Paras. 54, 55 and 61)

25. The Sub-Committee recognized that the summaries of trade agreements could facilitate the understanding of recent developments. FAO should continue its analytical work of the “non-traditional provisions” in trade agreements using a factual, non-prejudicial and comprehensive approach. (Para. 63)

### *Recent FAO trade-related activities linked to previous COFI:FT sessions*

26. Members recognized the importance of social responsibility in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. The Sub-Committee reiterated that the work carried out by FAO should be fisheries sector-specific, in close collaboration with other relevant specialized agencies and stakeholders. In addition, future guidance on social responsibility along the fish value chain, as recommended by the last session of COFI, should be voluntary in nature, nonbinding, inclusive and practical in order to assist fisheries sector actors in applying and implementing existing relevant instruments and guidelines. (Paras. 70 and 71)

27. The Sub-Committee highlighted that trade in fisheries-related services is poorly understood and recommended that FAO continue working on this topic from a value chain perspective. FAO shall seek to provide more clarity, particularly in connection with the associated benefits and existing opportunities, including the generation of foreign exchange and employment opportunities for developing countries. (Paras. 74 and 75)

### *Administrative and other matters*

28. As recommended by the previous session, the Sub-Committee welcomed having a more trade-oriented agenda for the current session. (Para. 78)

29. Mr Diéne Ndiaye (Senegal) was elected Chairperson of the Sub-Committee. Mr James Brown (New Zealand) was elected First Vice-Chairperson. The other elected Vice-Chairs were Brazil, Iceland, Oman and the United States of America. The dates and place of the next session of the Sub-Committee are yet to be determined. (Paras. 77 and 81)

## **III. UPDATES ON FAO MAIN ACTIVITIES AND DELIVERABLES AFTER THE LAST SESSION OF COFI:FT**

30. Based on recommendations of previous sessions of COFI:FT, the following main activities have been developed since the last session of the Sub-Committee.

### *COVID-19 and the trade-related activities of FAO in the area of fisheries and aquaculture*

31. Since the beginning of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented in modern times, has caused major disruption in societies worldwide with severe negative impacts on the global economy, including to the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. At first, many capacity building activities, technical assistance and related country support by FAO were also disrupted.

32. Nevertheless, adaptation and mitigation measures were immediately implemented by FAO, including in connection with ongoing and planned activities in the area of trade of fish and fish products in order to considerably reduce any possible disruption on programmes and products. FAO has been able to maintain deliverables of most of its outputs in this area, including increasing the dissemination of market information.

33. Following the recommendation of the last session of COFI:FT, FAO continued publicizing information and enhancing collaboration on themes associated with fish production, fish trade, the SDGs, and transparency. Such regional and global activities were undertaken primarily through participation in virtual events in partnership with other international organizations, transparency initiatives<sup>1</sup>, and the FISH INFONetwork.

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<sup>1</sup> FAO is an observer of the Board of the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (<https://fisheriestransparency.org>), which aims to increase transparency and participation in fisheries governance for the benefit of a more sustainable management of marine fisheries.

### *Value Chains*

34. FAO is developing the “FAO Practical Guidance on Developing Sustainable Value Chains for Aquatic Products in ACP Countries” project (FISH4ACP)<sup>2</sup>, focusing on a standardized approach for value chain analysis and development in fisheries and aquaculture. The methodology is being field-tested in ten African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and will be used in other ongoing fish value chain projects.

35. In November 2019, together with the Port of Vigo in Spain, FAO organized a workshop on the implementation of the Blue Growth/Blue Economy initiative for ports. The workshop facilitated the exchange of good practices, capacity building, and innovative projects, taking into consideration the social, economic, and environmental dimensions within the overall framework of developing a Blue Fishing Ports Network. In October 2020, another workshop was organized by FAO, together with the port of Vigo and in collaboration with the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The European Sea Ports Organisation (ESPO) and the International Association of Ports and Harbors (IAPH) participated together with port representatives from 14 different countries. Considering the importance of the economic role that ports play at local, regional, and national levels, it was agreed to create an international network to exchange and implement technical assistance and projects to promote a blue economy approach on ports management.

36. A recent FAO publication, “*Securing sustainable small-scale fisheries: Showcasing applied practices in value chains, post-harvest operations and trade*”<sup>3</sup>, includes nine studies highlighting applied practices and successful initiatives in support of enhancing small-scale fisheries value chains, post-harvest operations, and trade, based on the recommendations contained in the SSF Guidelines. An analysis of enabling conditions, related challenges, and opportunities are discussed. Cases were selected on the ability to be emulated elsewhere by small-scale fishery proponents. This document supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – specifically SDG 14.b<sup>4</sup> and SDG 2.3<sup>5</sup>.

37. In collaboration with ILO, FAO also published the “*Guide to improved dried shrimp production*”<sup>6</sup>, for producers, buyers, and those involved in extension services, aiming to describe good processing, handling and hygiene practices that will help producers maximize the value and income from dried shrimp, meet required national standards and access new and high-value markets. Poor quality dried shrimp results in low price and reduced income for producers, and possible health threats for the consumers.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the FAO Sustainable Food Value Chain (SFVC) and the EC Value Chain Analysis for Development (VCA4D).

<sup>3</sup> [www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8402en/](http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8402en/)

<sup>4</sup> SDG 14.b – provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.

<sup>5</sup> SDG 2.3 – by 2030, double the agricultural productivity and the incomes of small-scale food producers, particularly women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

<sup>6</sup> [www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8928en/](http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca8928en/)

### *Food Loss and Waste in Fish and Aquaculture Value Chains*

38. Since its launch in May 2019, the food loss and waste in the fish value chain website<sup>7</sup> is updated regularly with new information and resources. The website is designed to provide information on the causes and solutions to loss and waste in fish value chains. A monthly newsletter is distributed to reflect topical issues and associated solutions.

39. In early 2020, an e-learning course, “Food Loss and Waste in Fish Value Chains”<sup>8</sup>, was launched with a target audience of programme officers, technical specialists and extension agents involved in loss and waste prevention and reduction. It helps learners understand key concepts related to food loss and waste in fish value chains, including causes and possible solutions.

40. In November 2020, FAO, in conjunction with the African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (AWFishNET), held an initial virtual event to raise awareness on the interlinked issues of gender and food loss and waste in African fish value chains. The workshop's recommendations will guide actions to strengthen stakeholders' capacity and support the design of a capacity building workshop in 2021, analyzing how to adapt the FAO gender and food loss methodology for use in fish value chains.

### *Food Safety*

41. FAO published the report of the "FAO Workshop on Fish Rejection at Borders" with a summary of the causes of rejections of fishery and aquaculture products in some of the main importing countries, highlighting the difficulties that exporting countries face in accessing major markets, describing different national inspection systems and providing recommendations to improve reporting and promote transparency in international trade. In addition, FAO continues to publish updates on border rejections of fishery and aquaculture products on the FAO GLOBEFISH website.

42. FAO published the Joint FAO-WHO Report of the Expert Meeting on Ciguatera Poisoning<sup>9</sup> to enable the development of appropriate risk management options, with an evaluation of known ciguatoxins, including geographic distribution and rate of illness, congeners, and methods of detection; and guidance for the development of risk management options. FAO also developed, in cooperation with IOC-UNESCO<sup>10</sup>/IAEA<sup>11</sup>/WHO, an e-learning course to support the implementation of the guidance at a national level.

43. In October 2020, FAO hosted the Virtual Expert Meeting on Early Warning Systems for Harmful Algal Blooms, focusing on definition; identifying components, analytical models, data sources, and route maps to promote data reporting.

### *Traceability and Certification*

44. Two publications, “Beyond regulatory compliance – Seafood traceability benefits and success cases”<sup>12</sup> and “Blockchain application in seafood value chains”<sup>13</sup>, were published and released in the first half of 2020.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.fao.org/flw-in-fish-value-chains/en/](http://www.fao.org/flw-in-fish-value-chains/en/)

<sup>8</sup> <https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id=567>

<sup>9</sup> [www.fao.org/3/ca8817en/CA8817EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca8817en/CA8817EN.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (IOC).

<sup>11</sup> The International Atomic Energy Agency.

<sup>12</sup> [www.fao.org/3/ca9550en/ca9550en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca9550en/ca9550en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [www.fao.org/3/ca8751en/ca8751en.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca8751en/ca8751en.pdf)

45. FAO has been providing technical advice to the Global Sustainable Seafood Initiative's (GSSI) expert working groups to revise the second version of the Global Benchmark Tool. The alignment of the tool with FAO instruments will be enhanced with the inclusion of new components focused on small-scale fisheries and referenced in the SSF Guidelines, the FAO Guidelines for the Ecolabelling of Fish and Fishery Products from Marine Capture Fisheries and the CCRF.

46. In addition, FAO has been assisting the development of Seafood MAP, GSSI's novel approach to support non-certified fisheries and farms by providing a common language framework towards responsible and sustainable practice pathways.

*The Vigo Dialogue 2020 on Social Responsibility in the Fish Value Chains:  
Addressing current problems triggered by COVID-19*

47. In line with earlier editions, the Vigo Dialogue 2020 continued to promote human and labour rights along fish value chains in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. This year's edition emphasized social problems faced by fish workers and the industry, particularly small- and medium-size enterprises, associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

48. The Vigo Dialogue 2020 was held virtually over three sessions covering different time zones, in Spanish and English, allowing for a wide participation of stakeholders. Over 350 representatives from industry, government, trade unions, UN agencies, IGOs, NGOs, and academia participated, setting a new standard for future editions in terms of inclusiveness and geographical coverage.

49. The Dialogue contributes to the ongoing development of a guidance on social sustainability, as recommended by the 33rd Session of COFI. This is being developed in close cooperation with relevant UN agencies and stakeholders in order to have a guidance mainly addressed to business actors, voluntary, non-binding, inclusive and pragmatic, founded exclusively on pertinent existing instruments and guidelines.

*Publication - OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2020-2029*

50. Launched in July 2020, the publication provides market analysis of the ten-year prospects for major agricultural and fish commodity markets at national, regional and global levels. The fish chapter<sup>14</sup> provides projections on fisheries and aquaculture production, trade, consumption and prices, as well as key factors that might influence future supply and demand.

*Publication – FAO Yearbook of Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics 2018*

51. The most recent edition of the FAO Yearbook of Fishery and Aquaculture Statistics<sup>15</sup>, launched in October 2020, provides a comprehensive set of statistics, including trade, production, consumption, fleets and employment, highlighting the key role played by the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the provision of food security and livelihoods of millions of people and delivering social, economic and nutritional benefits.

52. FAO fishery and aquaculture statistics are also available in detailed form through online query panels<sup>16</sup> and the workspaces in FishStatJ<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.fao.org/3/ca8861en/Fish.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/ca8861en/Fish.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [www.fao.org/3/cb1213t/CB1213T.pdf](http://www.fao.org/3/cb1213t/CB1213T.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [www.fao.org/fishery/topic/16140/en](http://www.fao.org/fishery/topic/16140/en)

<sup>17</sup> [www.fao.org/fishery/statistics/software/fishstatj/en](http://www.fao.org/fishery/statistics/software/fishstatj/en)

*Publication – HS Codes for fish and fish products*

53. In order to facilitate the understanding, dissemination, and overall use of the classification of fish-related products, FAO, with the technical support of WCO, developed a specific publication on the HS codes for fish and fish products. This publication is entirely based on the HS Code, which is used to classify traded products in order to gather statistics and also assess duties and taxes.

54. The publication presents all commodity codes for fish, including related products that are classified in HS Code chapters 3, 5, 12, 13, 15, 16, and 23, providing a comprehensive description of the coverage of every single code.

*Inter-Agency Joint Plan of Action (IAPoA) to accelerate achievements of the trade-related targets of SDG 14*

55. UNCTAD, FAO and UNEP have been participating and promoting virtual events to present the objectives and goals of the IAPoA in order to disseminate it for voluntary contributions by donors.

56. The overall goal of the IAPoA is to accelerate the achievement of trade-related targets of SDG 14 through improved trade and trade-related policies that safeguard food security and contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, living marine resources and livelihoods. The unique format of the plan of action allows proper identification of the gaps and propose tailored solutions of technical advice, policy reforms and capacity building at multilateral, regional and national levels.

57. UNCTAD, FAO and UNEP have so far implemented the IAPoA in strengthening their cooperation on specific SDG 14 trade-related activities associated with the UN Oceans Conference, UNCTAD Oceans Forum, and meetings at other UN agencies, by providing technical inputs and raising awareness of fish-related trade topics, including ocean plastic pollution and non-tariff measures.