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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Thirty-fifth Session

5–9 September 2022

DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE 18TH SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE 8 APRIL–8 MAY, 7–9 AND 20 JUNE 2022

Executive Summary

This document summarizes the main outcomes of the 18th Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI/FT/XVIII). The report is available as document COFI/2022/INF/15.

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 18th Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI:FT) of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) was held virtually from 8 April to 8 May 2022, as well as on 7, 8, 9, and 20 June 2022. Sixty-seven Members of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and 35 observers from governments, intergovernmental organizations, and international non-governmental organizations attended the session.
2. Mr Diene Ndiaye (Senegal) was the Chairperson of the Sub-Committee. Mr James Brown was the First Vice-Chairperson. The other Vice-Chairpersons were from Brazil, Canada, Iceland, Oman, and the United States of America.
3. Following consultations with the COFI:FT Bureau, the session was convened in virtual mode on an exceptional basis in light of the COVID-19 epidemic and public health concerns. From 8 April to 8 May, six documents were evaluated on a site dedicated to the Written Correspondence Procedure. The other four documents were discussed in a virtual plenary session on 7, 8, 9, and 20 June.
4. Dr QU Dongyu, Director-General of FAO, delivered the opening statement at the virtual plenary session on 7 June 2022.
5. The Sub-Committee requested that documents for future COFI and its sub-committee meetings be released promptly following the practice implemented at the current COFI:FT Session. The Sub-Committee noted that many of the positive elements in the session's organization and development could be replicated in future FAO meetings.
6. The Sub-Committee underscored the importance of its mandate, considering the worldwide relevance of fisheries and aquaculture product trade and its interconnectivity with social inclusion and food security.
7. The Sub-Committee welcomed the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies – and the Ministerial decision of 17 June 2022¹ – and encouraged FAO to support Members in its implementation and cooperate closely with WTO.

II. MAIN OUTCOMES OF THE SESSION

Global themes and ongoing work with other FAO bodies and international organizations

8. The Sub-Committee acknowledged FAO's engagement with other international organizations, and supported further collaborative engagements using the specific guidance provided by the Sub-Committee. The alignment of FAO's efforts with the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 14 and SDG 8, as well as the Blue Transformation Priority Programme Area, were welcomed by the Sub-Committee.
9. The Sub-Committee stressed the need for collaboration across the COFI Sub-Committees, and supported FAO's ongoing work on assessing data-poor fisheries and developing and implementing National Plans of Action to Combat Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing (NPOA-IUU).

Aquatic food systems and utilization: a nutritional and food loss and waste (FLW) approach

10. The Sub-Committee dutifully recognized the need to assess and address factors affecting national capacities in FLW prevention using a multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder approach and recognized the importance of information dissemination, including the relevance of the dedicated

¹ [directdoc.aspx \(wto.org\)](https://directdoc.aspx (wto.org))

FAO's webpage. The Sub-Committee called on Members to supply FAO with relevant publications and information on FLW and the need for a gender-focused FLW assessment and intervention.

11. The Sub-Committee recognized the relevance of aquatic foods in food and nutrition security and advocated initiatives to improve FAO's assistance to Members so that aquatic foods can play a more prominent role in this area.

***Implementation of Article 11 of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF):
features, challenges, and insights from the perspective of FAO Members***

12. The Sub-Committee welcomed the adoption of the revised questionnaire, noting the steadily increasing response rate and the thorough examination of results. It was agreed that the questionnaire could be used as an effective analytical tool for improving post-harvest practices and trade on a long-term basis and that the responses to the questionnaire should be used as a springboard for action, addressing the challenges that Members face.

13. To improve the accuracy and reliability of the CCRF reporting system, the Sub-Committee advised FAO to upgrade the online reporting system and the questionnaire platform.

Small-scale fisheries and international trade

14. FAO was asked by the Sub-Committee to distribute additional information on international trade measures and tariffs for small-scale fisheries (SSF) and to provide specific support to SSF producers and organizations in terms of trade and market access, with an emphasis on women and youth.

15. The Sub-Committee emphasized the importance of FAO assisting Members in developing legal frameworks and multi-stakeholder collaboration to promote market access for SSF and requested that FAO investigate traceability and certification systems for SSF.

Trade agreements and market access for fisheries and aquaculture products

16. The Sub-Committee emphasized the need to disseminate information on trade agreements from the perspective of fisheries and aquaculture and endorsed FAO's proposal for a database on the subject, recommending that a scoping paper detailing its foundation be submitted.

17. The Sub-Committee noticed the obstacles experienced in the international trade of fisheries and aquaculture products, such as rules of origin compliance, tariff escalation, and non-tariff barriers.

***Influence of biodiversity conservation initiatives on trade of
commercially exploited aquatic species***

18. The Sub-Committee reaffirmed FAO's role as the global reference organization for scientific advice and technical information on fisheries and aquaculture in various international environmental fora, acknowledging FAO's work and collaboration on multilateral environmental agreements to strengthen policies and practices in biodiversity mainstreaming.

19. The Sub-Committee stressed the need for FAO to assist Members in developing their capacity so that global commitments can be implemented.

Overview of recent trends in the fisheries and aquaculture sector

20. The Sub-Committee highlighted the current and growing importance of the fisheries and aquaculture sector, as well as associated trade, in assuring global food security and contributing to economic growth and development, as well as livelihoods and income.

21. The Sub-Committee emphasized the importance of FAO data and analysis in fisheries and aquaculture. The Sub-Committee duly acknowledged the partnership with the OECD on the annual medium-term projections.

22. The Sub-Committee emphasized the importance of a transparent, robust, and harmonized trading system, with measures that are applied consistently and without discrimination, avoiding the creation of unnecessary barriers to trade. The Sub-Committee expressed concern about the growing number of trade measures, such as sanitary measures and import requirements that are negatively impacting the trade of fisheries and aquaculture products, particularly since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Food safety and quality for fisheries and aquaculture products

23. The Sub-Committee emphasized the necessity of continuing the collaboration with other agencies in food safety and the One Health Approach. The Sub-Committee encouraged the Secretariat to continue to give high priority to Codex Alimentarius and its scientific advice programme and the scientific advice to support the standard-setting process within Codex Alimentarius.

24. The Sub-Committee emphasized the importance of international initiatives for building capacity for food safety within the fisheries and aquaculture sector, especially for developing countries.

Update of FAO's work on traceability and the Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes

25. The Sub-Committee reiterated the importance of streamlining Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS) and traceability requirements to ensure they are risk-based and do not unduly create barriers to trade, particularly considering data equivalency benefits and flexibility in data needs, taking note of national experiences in implementing traceability systems to address multiple issues.

26. The Sub-Committee requested that FAO continue to assist Members in creating and implementing efficient and effective traceability systems and CDS, emphasizing the importance of FAO's work on a multilateral collaborative approach.

Social responsibility: scoping paper and future developments

27. The Sub-Committee reiterated the importance of addressing social responsibility and decent working conditions in the fisheries and aquaculture sector, the continued relevance of the FAO's mandate conferred by COFI, and welcomed the development of the FAO Guidance on Social Responsibility in Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains (FAO Guidance).

28. The Sub-Committee reiterated that the FAO Guidance should be voluntary, non-binding, practical, complementary, written in simple language, supportive, and based on the wide range of existing international conventions, agreements and standards. The FAO Guidance should be developed in consultation with other international organizations and relevant stakeholders.