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MAINSTREAMING BIODIVERSITY IN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE: IDENTIFYING AND IMPLEMENTING OTHER EFFECTIVE AREA-BASED CONSERVATION MEASURES (OECMS)

Executive Summary

Area-based measures are a key tool for many fisheries management and biodiversity conservation-focused strategies and actions and are part of SDG 14 (SDG14.5). These measures are strongly advocated as biodiversity conservation measures. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 called for countries to commit to conserving 10 percent of marine and coastal environments within marine protected areas and ‘other effective area-based conservation measures’ (OECMs). The challenge for many countries was how to meet their Target 11 commitment. Mainstreaming biodiversity across marine resource use sectors and Target 11’s reference to OECMs provided opportunities to overcome that challenge, although many countries still were not able to meet their area-based commitments due to a lack of common understanding about what counted as an OECM before late 2018 when a definition and criteria were adopted. As Parties to the CBD continue to negotiate the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, there is an opportunity to continue to recognize OECMs in order to help acknowledge that a variety of area-based management measures can deliver biodiversity benefits, including those initiated and managed by use sectors.

This information document provides the background and scope of the OECM concept, explains why OECMs present an important opportunity for the fisheries sector and how they fit into the global fisheries management and biodiversity conservation agenda. A summary of FAO’s recent work and intended future work on OECMs is also included.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The global decline of biodiversity has led to increased global attention to safeguard environmental processes and mitigate anthropogenic impacts. The intersection between sustainable use of natural resources and conservation of biodiversity is therefore crucial to achieving global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets. Biodiversity is essential to the food security, nutrition and livelihoods of millions of people around the world. FAO Members have supported a number of biodiversity-related commitments through decisions of FAO's Technical Committees, including the Committee on Fisheries (COFI).

2. As mandated by the 41st Session of the FAO Conference,¹ the FAO Council, at its 163rd Session, adopted the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors (Strategy).² The Strategy aims to achieve its goals in a structured and coherent manner, taking into account national priorities, needs, regulations and policies, and country programming frameworks. At its 166th Session, the Council approved the 2021-23 Action Plan for the Implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors (Action Plan).³

3. Fisheries have an important role to play in conserving ocean biodiversity and contributing to human well-being. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes SDG14, which aims to reconcile the sustainable use of fisheries resources, social equity and economic development. The sustainability of natural resources involves many actors working across different sectors. With a growing global population that relies more and more on fisheries and aquaculture for food, nutrition and livelihood security, improved actions and synergies at the global and regional levels are essential.

II. AREA-BASED MANAGEMENT IN BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

4. Area-based conservation of marine resources is a key focus of many conservation-focused strategies and actions. The Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) officially recognized the role of area-based management in biodiversity conservation through the adoption of Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 (Target 11) in 2010. Target 11 specifically captures the role of area-based conservation in marine biodiversity and calls for 10 percent of coastal and marine areas to be conserved under protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) by 2020 (Decision x/2)⁴. The UN General Assembly has reinforced this in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda through the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 14.5, which includes a similar target of conservation of 10 percent coastal and marine areas by 2030.

5. Much attention is currently focused on the concept of OECMs, which allows for a variety of sustainable use sectors to contribute to meeting global biodiversity targets through their own area-based management initiatives, thus helping countries meet their area-based conservation commitments. A definition, suite of criteria, and guiding principles for OECMs were formally adopted at the 14th Conference of Parties (COP) to the CBD in November 2018. The Decision (14/8)⁵ defines OECMs by the outcomes produced by the area: "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the *in situ* conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values."

¹ C 2019/REP, paragraph 48 b. www.fao.org/3/na421en/na421en.pdf

² FAO. 2020. *FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca7722en>

³ CL 166/REP, paragraph 24 h. www.fao.org/3/nf693en/nf693en.pdf

⁴ <https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12268>

⁵ [CBD/COP/DEC/14/8](https://www.cbd.int/decision/cop/?id=12268)

III. OECMS IN THE GLOBAL CONSERVATION AGENDA

6. The OECM concept represents a new opportunity for states to recognize biodiversity conservation potential from a wider range of spatial management measures than ever before. Various international efforts have been pursued to define, operationalize, and provide guidance on OECMs across multiple sectors. Specifically within the fisheries realm, many area-based fisheries management measures (ABFMs) already aim to meet sustainability goals and are well poised to meet the OECM criteria. Such measures are widely included in fisheries management plans and processes.⁶ OECM recognition provides states with an incentive to coordinate ABFM efforts across fisheries with area-based management tools being used in other relevant sectors that take place within their exclusive economic zones. These formally established, spatially-defined fishery management measures can be integrated across competing sectors in order to reduce conflicts and help stakeholders in achieving a balance between the competing uses of the marine environment.

7. OECMs represent an important opportunity to facilitate the involvement of people from sustainable use sectors, as well as from many other communities, on biodiversity conservation. In particular, the OECM concept allows for a variety of sustainable use sectors to contribute to meeting global biodiversity targets through their own area-based management initiatives. This can result in three significant steps forward in achieving biodiversity conservation: 1) mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives in the management of natural resource use; 2) ensuring that the objectives of sustainable use sectors are included in biodiversity conservation discussions and decisions; and 3) improving cross-sectoral dialogue and coordination by having to coordinate across sustainable use/natural resources sectors and environment agencies, as well as any other sector involved (e.g., public transports, forestry, energy, planning). Recognizing OECMs also makes conservation a multi-sectoral effort and explicitly acknowledges the needs of people (e.g., food security, income generation, livelihoods, cultural values).

8. Although an official definition and criteria for OECMs now exist ([CBD/COP/DEC/14/8](#)),⁷ many countries have struggled with how to interpret and apply the OECM concept in order to meet their Target 11 commitment. As Parties to the CBD now negotiate new targets in the Post-2020 Framework, it is likely that a new area-based management target will be adopted that calls for up to 30 percent of marine and coastal environments to be conserved in MPAs or OECMs. If countries are going to be successful at meeting this new target, reporting a combination of both MPAs and OECMs in fisheries and other sectors will be necessary.

9. Many countries are now in need of guidance on how to interpret and apply the OECM official definition and meet the criteria, including in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors. Such guidance will enable them to use both MPAs and OECMs to meet the area-based targets agreed to in the CBD's Post-2020 Framework. This is particularly important for countries that do not already have the capacity to identify and assess potential OECMs for the purposes to CBD reporting.

IV. SUMMARY OF FAO'S WORK ON OECMS

10. FAO's recent work on area-based management has focused on the implementation of spatial management measures, with a particular focus on OECMS and the long-term conservation and sustainable use of fisheries resources. This work includes actions to manage and conserve ecosystems through support for the implementation of spatial management measures in fisheries. This work has been directed by previous COFI meetings, in particular the 33rd Session of COFI where:

“The Committee welcomed the support of FAO to the CBD towards achieving the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and FAO participation in the post 2020 vision of CBD. It requested FAO to continue the work concerning area-based management tools and its cooperation with other organizations working on this matter. The

⁶ Diz, D., Johnson, D., Riddell, M., Rees, S., Battle, J., Gjerde, K., Hennige, S. & Roberts, J.M. (2018). Mainstreaming marine biodiversity into the SDGs: the role of other effective area-based conservation measures (SDG 14.5). *Marine Policy*, 93, 251-261.

⁷ www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf

Committee requested FAO to continue cooperation with CBD and UN Environment in facilitating formal coordination mechanisms between the Regional Fishery Bodies and the Regional Seas Programmes (para. 79, Report of the 33rd Session of COFI)."

11. In February 2021, the 34th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI34) noted the importance of considering multiple effective time and area-based management tools (ABMTs), such as protected areas and OECMs for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. COFI also noted the relevance of OECMs to achieving a number of the SDGs and global biodiversity targets and requested that FAO produce and disseminate practical guidelines to support Members in their identification and implementation (para.17d and 17e of the 34th COFI report).

12. Following the request of COFI 34, FAO began to develop the practical guidance called for by COFI. The guidance aims to explain the role of OECMs in mainstreaming biodiversity, provide both a general and technical understanding of OECMs and the CBD Decision 14/8, and outline a process by which governments and rights holders can identify areas in which ABMTs used in fisheries have led to positive and long-term positive biodiversity outcomes. The guidance poses questions that agencies and entities assessing potential OECM should consider, with case studies that illustrate the different approaches that can be taken for assessing whether areas lead to the kind of biodiversity protection that the OECM label signifies will occur.

13. In parallel, FAO developed a series of shared learning workshops with the following objectives: 1) to support countries, fisheries related agencies and stakeholders to understand, discuss and apply the CBD's criteria for identifying fisheries-related OECMs; and 2) to synthesize lessons learned from countries' experience in applying the CBD criteria in support of the development of the practical guidance called for by COFI34. The workshops aim to build the capacity of states and experts in the region by: increasing their understanding of OECMs and the benefits associated with identifying/creating OECMs; increasing their understanding of the criteria to identify and report OECMs, and their ability to apply these criteria in the context of marine fisheries measures; and applying the OECM criteria on a test basis on selected illustrative case studies in the region. To date, FAO has organized and held, together with other partners, three online shared learning workshops:

- a. *Workshop on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Baltic Sea Area, 1-3 February 2022.* This workshop was organized by FAO together with the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM). During the workshop, participants discussed the potential as OECMs of a diverse range of marine ABMTs from the fisheries, shipping, cultural and archaeological, and energy sectors in the Baltic Sea.
- b. *Expert Meeting on Fisheries-Related Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Mediterranean, 16-17 February 2022.* This workshop was organized by FAO together with the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM). During the workshop, participants discussed the potential as OECMs of the GFCM 1 000 m Fisheries Restricted Area and other ABFMs in the Adriatic, Central Mediterranean, and Eastern Mediterranean regions.
- c. *Sustainable Ocean Initiative Capacity-Building Workshop for the Wider Caribbean and Central America on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures in the Marine Fishery Sector, 20-21 April and 27-28 April 2022.* This workshop was organized by FAO together with the CBD Secretariat, in collaboration with Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism, the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission, the Caribbean Environment Programme, the UNDP/GEF PROCARIBE + PPG Coordination Unit, and the IUCN Fisheries Expert Group. During the workshop, participants discussed the potential as OECMs of several ABFMs from Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico and Puerto Rico.

14. FAO invites any individual Members, regional seas conventions, or regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs) to formally request the organization of a shared learning workshop.

15. FAO will continue to help build the capacity of its Members, upon their request, to report on how the fisheries sector is contributing to current and future area-based biodiversity conservation goals. In order to assist its Members and Regional Fisheries Bodies (RFBs) assess and identify fisheries OECMs, FAO is undertaking six main activities:

- a. continue to host and participate in shared learning events in additional regions. The goal of these events is: 1) to bring stakeholders, experts and governments together and help guide countries in the identification, establishment, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of ABFMs that can contribute to marine biodiversity conservation; and 2) to learn from countries' experience in using area-based management tools in the marine context, which will support Activity c) below. Such workshops are envisioned to include staff from fishery related agencies as well as staff from RFBs. The CBD Secretariat has proposed joining FAO in planning and facilitating these events.
- b. build general awareness on the use of spatial management tools and their benefits to fisheries and biodiversity, both at global and regional levels through advisory processes and communications materials.
- c. continue to solicit input and finalize practical guidance for the establishment and management of OECMs in the fisheries sector. Activity a) will inform preparation and review of this guidance, allowing for both global and regionally specific guidance to be developed.
- d. provide on the ground assistance to Members at regional/national level to share experience on the implementation of ABFM that delivers biodiversity co-benefits with the aim of increasing OECM coverage.
- e. support FAO Members in applying the guidance to ABFM in their national waters with the intent of assisting countries meet global area-based management targets while increasing food security and nutrition.
- f. assist FAO Members in developing social, economic and environmental indicators that can be used to monitor MPA and other ABFM (including OECMs) performance so that they effectively contribute to fishery and biodiversity conservation, food security and meeting the SDGs.