

U.S. Statement on Agenda Item 14: Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) of the Committee

- Overall, the United States is pleased with the progress and work done intersessionally in accordance with the multi-year program of work from 2018-2020 – especially in light of the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19 – and welcomes the Bureau's defining indicators, targets, and outputs for the MYPOW 2020-23.
- However, while we commend the excellent work of the Department to prepare the papers for this session, we are deeply disappointed that all the COFI working documents were not finalized and made available in all official languages at least four weeks before COFI. Indeed, the documents for this session were available in all official languages just one week in advance.
- This is unacceptable, given the deep concerns expressed at COFI 32 and 33 about paper availability and the clear guidance in the MYPOW 2018-2020 that all documents be available at least four weeks before any sessions.
- We are also deeply concerned that several of the documents that COFI is being asked to endorse were shared with Members a week or less before this meeting.
- We are, frankly, surprised by this situation, given that the postponement of this session allowed the Organization an extra six months to clear and finalize the documents.
- We were particularly frustrated that the information about the written correspondence procedure was only posted on January 18, a full week into the period established for providing submissions, and this information was not clearly shared via a notice to Members. We hope that this has not hampered Members' ability to ensure their views are fully reflected.
- That said, we do appreciate that the Secretariat made the Sub-committee papers, as well as SOFIA, available in all official languages four weeks before their respective meetings.
- We fully recognize the enormous challenges we all are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact that has had on our work. At the same time, we urge the Organization to continue to improve processes to provide Members with the basic documentation – working documents, procedural documents, documents for endorsement – necessary to conduct the business of COFI in a timely way.
- We would like to offer one specific suggestion for improvement to the 2020-2023 MYPOW.
- We think that the ongoing work to advance a proposal related to a new COFI subcommittee on fisheries management should be included.
- We suggest additional text to “III. Effective Work Planning of COFI,” under “Activities,”

para 20, be added to item (c) under the to address the process regarding a new subcommittee:

“(c) Consider ways to improve the conduct of sessions more efficiently and effectively, including more efficient use of the time available [add: and the development of a third subcommittee].”

- Finally, we would like to offer a more general thought. The United States places great importance on the integrity and technical capacity at FAO Headquarters, and the overall program delivery of FAO’s core activities on fisheries and aquaculture.
- SOFIA remains the most accessed FAO flagship publication. This demonstrates the preeminent scientific and technical expertise of FAO and its Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, and why FAO must maintain or even enhance the Department’s technical capacity.
- While there is important work ahead on new and emerging issues, and there is always room to find ways to streamline and find efficiencies, the FAO must not neglect its core functions on fisheries and aquaculture and the programmatic work to support implementation of existing guidelines and other instruments.