

**EUROPEAN UNION POSITION
ON THE COFI 34 AGENDA ITEMS SUBJECT TO WRITTEN PROCEDURE**

Item 5. Decisions and recommendations of the Tenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, Trondheim, Norway, 23-27 August 2019 [WRITTEN PROCEDURE]

The EU and its Member States welcome the results of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture and endorse the report of the meeting to the elaboration of which they have actively participated in 2019.

Sustainable aquaculture has an increasing role in terms of food security and nutrition and is a key element of a transition towards more sustainable food systems, given its potential to provide a low carbon source of high-quality protein.

International cooperation and exchanges of best practices are very important and the EU and its Member States appreciate the efforts of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department in promoting the sustainable development of aquaculture worldwide by working on guidelines for the sector and providing technical assistance.

We, as all other Members of the Sub-Committee, welcomed and endorsed in particular the work by a group of experts on the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, which followed a recommendation endorsed by COFI. It is of utmost importance to ensure that the growth of global aquaculture necessary to meet increasing world demand for protein does not come at the expense of the environment, economic development or social conditions. Developing Sustainable Aquaculture Guidelines consolidating all tools and best practices available is also a necessary step in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries in the area of aquaculture.

The EU and its Member States would like to see definitive progress in this respect during 2021 and also more involvement of all Members in the process of the preparation of the Guidelines.

The next Sub-Committee on Aquaculture hosted by Mexico, and, more importantly, the Global Aquaculture Conference hosted by China will be important opportunities to send a strong signal and show commitment to the development of global aquaculture in a way that provides food security and nutrition, preserves the environment and contributes to social and economic development.

The EU and its Member States and representatives of the aquaculture industry and other stakeholders, have been working on new Strategic Guidelines for the sustainable development of EU aquaculture. We would therefore be happy to contribute with our own experience to the process of the elaboration of the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture.

We also consider the issue of biosecurity very important for the development of the sector. Aquatic animal disease remains a key challenge in the development of global aquaculture, including due to the fact that aquaculture-related products are highly traded. This is why we support the work on a Progressive Management Pathway for Aquaculture Biosecurity. EU experts are already participating in the technical work.

As expressed at the Sub-Committee, the EU and its Member States believe that it is important for the FAO to work on guidance for concrete action for the adaptation of the sector to climate change but also on how aquaculture development can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The EU and its Member States would like to encourage the FAO to work closely with Regional Commissions, in order to ensure a coordinated and coherent approach for the different topics that require our attention, as well as with UNEP and Regional Seas Conventions, as far as conservation of biodiversity is concerned.

Finally, we take note of the accomplishments of the implementation of the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) 2016-2020 in aquaculture.

Antimicrobial resistance is without any doubt one of the greatest challenges to global sustainable development and the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

We commend FAO for its leadership in the fight against AMR and encourage FAO to further strengthen its support to governments and stakeholders in this fight.

We call FAO to pursue these efforts in the context of the WHO/OIE/FAO Tripartite and in coordination with the Global Leaders Group on Antimicrobial Resistance and other global initiatives on AMR, in line with the One Health concept and with a view to prevent the occurrence of future pandemic diseases, also with greater involvement of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and, where appropriate, other multilateral environmental institutions.

We welcome the progress report on the implementation of the FAO Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance 2016-2020 that demonstrates numerous achievements, and we invite the FAO to make this important work more visible. The enhancement of data collection on antimicrobial use (AMU) and on AMR in the food and agriculture sector has been a critical step forward, notably with the extension of AMR surveillance to fisheries and environment.

Looking ahead, the EU and its Member States welcome the proposed FAO Action Plan on AMR for 2021-2025. We welcome the emphasis in the FAO's forthcoming Action Plan placed on the importance of responsible use of antimicrobials. We also endorse FAO's intention to strengthen research, which in the aquaculture sector should focus on finding alternatives to antimicrobials. We also endorse FAO's intention to strengthen research, which in the aquaculture sector should focus on finding alternatives to antimicrobials.

We also recognise the importance of developing monitoring systems for the use of antimicrobials and AMR globally and welcome FAO's drive to further support the development of such systems.

To conclude, we support the proposed FAO Action Plan on AMR for 2021-2025 that will strengthen multi-sectoral cooperation and follow a One Health Approach, and we emphasize the need for sufficient resources for its implementation.

Item 6. Decisions and recommendations of the Seventeenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, Vigo, Spain, 25-29 November 2019 [WRITTEN PROCEDURE]

The EU and its Member States welcome and endorse the report of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade. The Sub-Committee continues being a relevant forum for all members to consult and discuss the technical and economic aspects of international trade in fish and fishery products.

With regard to the WTO negotiation on fisheries subsidies, the EU and its Member States remain committed to reaching an ambitious agreement as soon as possible. We therefore regret that the WTO did not meet the deadline for concluding the negotiations.

We however remain optimistic that the WTO Members can reach an agreement soon by putting sustainability at the center of their considerations. WTO Members collectively should aim to conclude this agreement as soon as possible and before the next WTO Ministerial Conference.

It is of great importance to us that the WTO delivers meaningful results in prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies to ensure that the fish stocks globally are managed and harvested sustainably.

Experience shows that focusing on removing harmful subsidies can deliver real improvements. We have seen that in the positive trends of fish stocks in EU waters after our comprehensive policy reforms.

Finally, we support the mobilization of FAO technical assistance on fisheries issues within the framework of this agreement.

The EU and its Member States also welcome the efforts undertaken by the FAO in relation to the elaboration of draft guidance on social responsibility in fish value chains. We however consider that, in their current state, the draft guidance risk to undermine the ongoing efforts to ensure that all relevant international conventions are complied with on a global scale.

Therefore, we believe that the guidance should build more explicitly upon key conventions – in particular the ILO work in fishing Convention C-188, the IMO Convention on standards of training certification and watch keeping for fishing vessels personnel, and the Cape Town Agreement on Safety of Fishing vessels. Besides, to meet the specific needs of small-scale fisheries value chains (often informal) and their operators, particularly women, the guidance should also build on the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication (VG-SSF).

These conventions should also form the minimum baseline for a socially sustainable fish value chain.

We therefore look forward to discussing further the objective and content of the draft guidance on the basis of the scoping paper to be presented by the FAO's Secretariat at the next meeting of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

**Item 13.1 Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture
[WRITTEN PROCEDURE]**

The EU and its Member States welcome the decision of the FAO Council for FAO to host the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture as a flexible, light and consensual coordination mechanism and inclusive multi-stakeholder forum.

We also thank FAO for preparing the Terms of Reference for this Platform, which address many aspects important to the EU and its Member States, such as the principles of inclusiveness, transparency and regional distribution.

We are all committed to the sustainable exploitation of fish stocks, through better management and conservation of fisheries, ecosystem-based approaches and reducing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

New digital information and monitoring technologies are potential game-changers for fisheries management and can be of help in achieving green growth of the sector. They can allow to collect more data on fish stocks, better monitor, enforce and evaluate the environmental impacts of fisheries activities and improve the effectiveness of policies to sustainably manage fisheries. These digital technologies also become more compact and cheaper thus encouraging their use.

However, digitalization in fisheries is still limited by the cost of technologies, complex data requirements, challenges in sharing such data among fisheries management authorities and the limited numbers of individuals trained to use these tools.

Therefore, we take this opportunity to repeat our attachment to reflect the importance of overcoming the digital divide in the terms of reference of the platform and to address issues related to ensuring security and confidentiality of data through appropriate safeguard mechanisms. The mandate of this platform will have to be part of the cross-cutting data policy to ensure governance, data integrity and confidentiality, as well as intellectual property rights that the FAO committed itself to launching at the last Council (FAO Council 165 report, point 14i). This mandate will also have to comply with international standards and protocols.

We also support that the Platform should seek to work in synergy with other initiatives to avoid any duplication.

Finally, we stress the need for ensuring clarity on the sustainable funding for the Platform, based on voluntary extra budgetary contributions.

Item 14. Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) of the Committee [WRITTEN PROCEDURE]

With regard to the MYPOW 2018-2021, we read with interest under point 9 that “The first working document (COFI/2020/10) for COFI 34 was made available on the relevant website on 05 February 2020, namely six months prior to the 34th Session of COFI.” It should however be added that this document remained the sole published on the COFI 34 website until the 5th January 2021. The other documents were progressively published afterwards and not always in all languages.

Considering the circumstances, in particular that the COFI is meeting virtually for the first time and that its agenda still has 18 items, most of them including sub-items, we believe that it would have been adequate to circulate the supporting documents to the Agenda items of this COFI 34 much more in advance, to allow delegations to prepare and coordinate properly.

This, of course, does not jeopardize our appreciation that the decision was taken to hold COFI 34 virtually. We indeed consider important to continue discussing and exchanging on fisheries and aquaculture, particularly in light of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector.

As far as the MYPOW 2020-2023 is concerned, we note the very general nature of its drafting, which leaves a wide margin of manoeuvre as to the work to be carried out during the period and does not call, for the moment, for detailed substantial comments on our part.

We would however like to, firstly, question the intentions behind objective 1 d), which mentions that COFI shall “consider the desirability of preparing and submitting to Member Nations an international convention under Article XIV of the Constitution to ensure effective international cooperation and consultation in fisheries and aquaculture on a world scale”.

*Secondly, considering that the work on a proposal for a possible new sub-committee on capture fisheries is evolving towards reviewing the working method of COFI and its sub-committee, we would like to reflect, in point 18 c), as indicator of the effectiveness and efficiency of the committee that “the sessions are conducted in efficient and effective manner, **with sufficient time for each agenda item to allow for informed discussion and thoughtful decision-making.**”*

Finally, in reference to point 20 and the need to “formulate focused agendas in close consultation with the Bureau in a timely manner”, we note that COFI agenda items tend to be formulated in a generic manner and are not very informative about the exact scope of COFI's discussion until they have been clarified by the annotated agenda. Furthermore, it is clear from the annotated agenda that each agenda item covers a range of issues, without making a clear distinction between those that will be subject to discussion and those that will require a decision.

With a view to improving COFI's work, we therefore suggest that the annotated agenda be made available to all COFI members well in advance of the other session documents and that the agenda and annotated agenda specify which item will be subject to a decision.

**Item 17.1 Developments in fora of importance for the mandate of COFI: for information
[WRITTEN PROCEDURES]**

The EU and its Member States have no comment under this agenda item.