

## EUROPEAN UNION

**Item 4. Status, trends, emerging issues and innovative responses to ensure responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture: Building back better**

### UNION POSITION

- Mr President, distinguished Members and Representatives of the Secretariat, I have the honor to speak on behalf of the EU and its Member States.
- Let me first congratulate FAO for the **successful International Symposium** on Sustainable Fisheries. The EU was one of the financial partners to the symposium and we can very much **subscribe to the main messages** resulting from these discussions.
- We also very much **welcome the 2020 SOFIA report**. It is a **critical source of information** for supporting our policy decisions, even if data largely dates from before the pandemic.
- The **FAO assessments of the impacts of the pandemic** on fisheries and aquaculture are very useful to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the sector and to orient the recovery towards more resilience.
- It is not possible to address all aspects covered by these reports but the EU and its Member States would like to emphasise a few.

#### *Situation of the sector*

- The fisheries and aquaculture sector makes a **vital contribution to the world economy**, as well as to **food and nutrition security**.
- The sector has been heavily **hit by the pandemic**. It **suffers from criticism** because it worsens certain challenges, in particular biodiversity loss and ecosystems damages, and it contributes to others, like climate change or pollution.
- As the pandemic is hopefully ending, we need to focus on recovery in the longer term and **refrain from using subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing**. We must keep our actions sustainable and make sure that they do **not compromise marine ecosystems**.
- As also recommended by the Symposium on Sustainable Fisheries, a **more positive narrative on fisheries and aquaculture is needed**.

#### *Improving fisheries management*

- However, a new narrative will **not be sufficient** and credible if States and the global community do not succeed to **reverse the continuing global trend of**

**overfished stocks** highlighted in the SOFIA report. **Poorly managed fisheries can damage the ecosystems** that sustain them and fleets targeting overexploited stocks tend to perform worse.

- Within the EU we have been taking **actions to improve the sustainability** of fish stocks, which result in a **significant progress** towards sustainability of stocks and **increased profitability** of the sector. Despite the impact of COVID-19, projections are that **the EU fleet ended 2020 with a reasonable level of profitability**. This **indicates a strong resilience**, which is the **result of the efforts made by the sector in previous years** to achieve the maximum sustainable yield objective.
- We will continue to strengthen our efforts to **minimise the negative impact of fishing activities on the marine environment and to reduce the by-catch** of sensitive species. **In 2022, we will assess our policy**, looking particularly at how it caters for the **social dimension, climate change and clean oceans**.
- On **aquaculture**, we **note potential** but **we are concerned** with the analysis of the progress made under the Code of Conduct, according to which **the development of policy, legal and institutional frameworks has not kept pace with the rapid growth of the sector**.
- For populations to benefit fully from aquaculture, **the sector must develop in a sustainable manner, in economic, environmental and social terms**.
- We therefore stress the **importance to progress on the elaboration of the FAO Sustainable Aquaculture Guidelines**, to ensure that aquaculture development worldwide is consistent with the principles of responsible aquaculture laid down in the FAO Code of Conduct for responsible fisheries.

*Improving COFI preparation on these issues*

- Mr Chair, I end this intervention with a positive and a negative note. The positive note is that **we can confirm the agreement of the EU on the Declaration on Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture**. We thank **the Canadian facilitator for the remarkable work all along the process of elaboration of the declaration**.
- The negative note is our **frustration** that the **time we devote to these issues today is not sufficient in view of their importance**. The EU therefore calls on the members of this Committee to pay particular attention to **improve the preparation of COFI discussions**, an issue that we will debate later in our meeting.