

## **FAO COFI 2021 – Written submission by Iceland**

### Agenda item 4 – Status, trends, emerging issues and innovative responses to ensure responsible and sustainable fisheries and aquaculture: Building back better

Agenda item 4 is wide-ranging and gives the opportunity to raise a variety of different issues. Iceland will use the opportunity of submitting this written intervention to touch upon more issues than we would do under the time restraints of an oral intervention under this item. We will nevertheless include only short text regarding each of the issues, some of which we will say more about under other agenda items.

If Iceland will take the floor for an oral statement under agenda item 4, this will be for a shorter version of the current text and Iceland therefore requests that in any Chair's summary of discussions, and in the drafting of the report of the COFI meeting, both this written submission and any oral statement be noted.

No international organisation can stay static in its work or organisation. Iceland therefore welcomes FAO regularly reassessing its work and reorganising as appropriate. Any such reorganisation of FAO's work must result in an increase on the emphasis of the work relating to fisheries. After all, FAO remains the only viable global forum for cooperation and coordination regarding a variety of important fisheries-related issues. As ocean affairs receive ever more international attention, it is of vital importance that FAO likewise increase its work regarding fisheries.

Iceland notes that this is the first COFI of a newly elected Director General and welcomes him to this forum. FAO has a key role in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14. Therefore, this duty should be duly reflected in the formulation of a new strategic management plan for FAO this year, and the role of the Fisheries division in FAO's management structure clearly stated. Also, FAO must ensure that the importance of nutrition from the oceans and inland waters is well noted in the preparation of the Food Systems Summit of the United Nations which is now in preparation.

Fisheries are important for purposes that include food security, nutrition and economic and social development and well-being. Several issues related to fisheries require cooperation and coordination at a global level and FAO is the only organisation that can provide this. There have been a number of successes in the work of FAO in this context in recent years, including recently the Port State Measures Agreement and the Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes, which demonstrates that fisheries work in FAO can lead to concrete results. Iceland welcomes the continued good work of the Fisheries Department and encourages the FAO Secretariat to increase further its efforts regarding fisheries.

Among the focal points of FAO's work regarding fisheries is the issue of IUU fishing. Iceland supports maintaining this focus, as IUU fishing undermines the work of those who are managing fisheries in a responsible manner. We welcome the emphasis that has been on the Port State Measures Agreement and the Global Record of Fishing Vessels in this context and encourage continued efforts in this regard, including to promote wider ratification and implementation of the Agreement.

In the context of IUU fishing, Iceland also notes the work that has been done in FAO regarding Transshipment. We welcome the report of the new in-depth study of this issue and note that the report includes clear conclusions regarding key elements that could be included in FAO Guidelines on Transshipment. The report should serve as the basis for the development of such Guidelines, and Iceland supports commencing work towards making such Guidelines.

Iceland welcomes the intersessional work regarding the proposal for a new Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management. Iceland supports the proposal and finds that the issue is progressing well. Iceland is confident that we will be in a position to formally adopt a proposal for the new Sub-Committee no later than the next meeting of COFI. It is important that FAO provide a regular forum for a dialogue among COFI members at more of a technical and expert level than is realistically possible at COFI itself.

Iceland also endorses the Declaration for Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture presented at the High Level Event marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Code of Conduct for Fisheries.

Contributions to the work of other international organisations is also an important part of the fisheries work of FAO. This includes working with Regional Fisheries Bodies. Among such bodies, Regional Fisheries Management Organisations play a particularly important role that is needed for States to fulfil their duty to cooperate in fisheries management.

In this context, it must also be noted that FAO has an important role in cooperating with international organisations and processes that are not mainly focused on fisheries. In some cases it can be of vital importance that the FAO Secretariat provide information and context into such organisations, as they regularly engage in work that can impact fisheries without those who regularly work within such organisations or processes necessarily having much expertise on fisheries issues.

Iceland notes that FAO has been active in engaging with other international organisations and processes and encourages increased efforts in this regard. Particular attention should be given to international organisations and processes regarding biodiversity and other environmental issues. Iceland welcomes FAO's emphasis on biodiversity of the ocean. It is the basis for food security, one of the fundamental pillars of sustainable development and Iceland fully supports a comprehensive approach in this regard. At the same time, we underline the importance of acknowledging conservation as a tool to ensure sustainable use of biodiversity and emphasise the importance of any new developments not undermining existing legal instruments and frameworks and global, regional and sectoral bodies dealing in the field of fisheries.

These issues also relate back to COFI's role regarding fisheries management, as we must address these issues not only by providing input into the work of others but also by assessing our own fisheries management tools and examining how they can contribute to reaching our goals relating to biodiversity and the environment.

Another issue where FAO can make important contributions through working with other international organisations and processes is safety at sea. Iceland welcomes the continued emphasis on this issue and encourages continued efforts in this regard, including through

cooperation with IMO and ILO. The people who work in the fisheries sector form the basis of all work regarding fisheries and their safety and working conditions must always be regarded as an important issue. Icelanders know only too well, from operating in the treacherous waters of the North Atlantic, how important an issue this is.

Iceland would like to remind us all that sustainable fisheries and aquaculture are an important source of nutrition for a growing population of the world. This is an area for international development cooperation where the better off states should contribute generously to the developing nations. We must build a robust system against illegitimate exploitation of national resources of the poorest nations, enhance their institutional capacity to guard their interests, provide technical assistance to improve value chains and create a sustainable environment for fishing communities to develop and prosper. Iceland therefore welcomes the focus of the new Hand in Hand Initiative of FAO where Small Island Developing States are given prominence.

For States to fully enjoy the benefits of their living aquatic resources, the world trade system in seafood products must rest on the basic principles of predictability, transparency, and non-discrimination. Iceland therefore continues to place an emphasis on the work of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

The issues touched upon in this submission are far from comprehensive, but they should suffice to demonstrate that FAO has a unique role as a global body with competence and expertise regarding fisheries. This relates back to the first point made in this submission, regarding the importance of any reorganisation of FAO's work resulting in an increase in the emphasis placed on fisheries issues.

Finally, Iceland appreciates the efforts of the FAO Secretariat and of COFI members to hold this meeting despite the ongoing covid pandemic. We will try to make this work as close to a regular COFI meeting as is possible under the circumstances, while acknowledging that this type of virtual meeting has several limitations. We look forward to meeting colleagues from around the world face to face at the next COFI meeting.