

FAO COFI-34: 1-5 February 2021

UK Introductory Statement for Agenda Item 4: Status, Trends and Emerging Issues

The UK would like to thank the Chair and the FAO for their organisation of this meeting. We extend a warm welcome to other delegations joining from around the world. Our thoughts are with all those affected by the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic

It seems apt that the UK is joining COFI in our own right in the “Oceans Super year” which is so important to us. We appreciate the emphasis, running through the week, and within the FAO workplan, on the need to balance the sustainable use of the ocean’s resources with the conservation of its precious biodiversity.

The UK is proud to be ocean co-chair of the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People. We are building on our Global Ocean Alliance to protect at least 30% of the world’s ocean by the end of this decade, including in the High Seas.

At the COP26 Presidency our ambition is to put nature, and the ocean, at the heart of the global response to climate change. The UK will use our Presidency of the G7 to gather momentum for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

FAO has a vital role to play as the global forum for developing global fisheries policy. And we are keen to contribute as much as we can. The UK is delighted to welcome the SOFIA report; this is the kind of work only a global body like FAO could carry out. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of fisheries and aquaculture to food security and there are some powerful statistics in the summary.

We welcome the revised structure of the 2020 SOFIA report. It provides clear links between activities, outcomes and objectives, for example, as shaped by Sustainable Development Goals. We know that there must be differences between reporting and management systems of different countries. We think, where possible, it would be helpful for countries to make the distinction between catches in their EEZ and catches in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. Deep sea ecosystems play an important contribution in maintaining ocean health, function and biodiversity at a global scale. It is usually easier to monitor larger scale fishing. We welcome the inclusion of the development of technological solutions to help the effective, monitoring, compliance and surveillance of small-scale fishing activities. We think perhaps more information on these activities, with some case studies, would be useful in future reports.

The UK is pleased to endorse the Declaration on Sustainable Fisheries which sets out many of the challenges we are facing. The UK has committed to establish a £500m Blue Planet Fund to support developing countries to protect the marine environment and reduce poverty. Our aims, including through the fund, align closely to the recommendations in the Declaration.

The UK wants to contribute to the science and management needed to support many of the Symposium’s recommendations, especially linking conservation and food security. For example, the UK’s Centre for Aquaculture, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, CEFAS, was delighted to co-host, with FAO, a workshop on Bivalve Sanitation. CEFAS look forward to contributing to a Joint ICES/IUCN workshop to assess the utility of spatial fisheries management measures as potential OECMs.