



Lausanne, 5th February 2021

IWMC Closing Remarks to FAO/COFI 34

I would like to thank the FAO collaborators for the successful running of COFI 34. I am more than pleased that you have dispelled my doubts about the merits of digital, virtual online conferences. At my age, it took some doing!

The COFI 34 Committee made great progress this week and here are a few points I would like to celebrate:

- 1 - The adoption of the *Declaration on the Sustainability of Fisheries and Aquaculture*.
- 2 - Reinforcing further its commitment to the implementation of SDG 14 goals, within its 2030 Agenda to alleviate hunger and ensure Food Security through Fisheries and Aquaculture.
- 3 - Increasing and further develop the most needed international cooperation required to combat IUU fishing.
- 4 - Recognizing the important contribution of Small-scale and Artisanal fisheries to Food Security and Livelihoods.
- 5 - ... and many other important decisions creating a climate susceptible to align *sustainability imperatives with development requirements*.

That is not a trivial matter. So well done COFI 34!

Yet, I could not help noticing some unhelpful comments and decisions that could undermine and jeopardize the progress realized by COFI 34.

For example, following are two issues of relevance:

1 – The proliferation of Marine Protected Areas

MPAs are certainly not of a nature to promote Food Security and encourage Small-scale and Artisanal fisheries. Experience teaches us that when fisherfolk lose access to one area, they intensify it in another. Moreover, in the real-world, fish do not respect zones! Such self-defeating outcomes make holistic marine resource planning futile. It can even be argued that MPAs boost IUU fisheries.

Certain comments offered MPAs as a panacea to climate change. Climate changes are part of the live cycle of Planet Earth. According to scientists, 150,000 years ago global warming was much more serious than anything predicted for the next 100 years; some 30,000 years later, the Northern part of North America was entirely covered with ice; the Earth simply adjusted to the changes.

Now, how will no-take Marine Protected Areas assist in modifying climate changes and/or reducing global warming?

2 – CITES listings of Marine Fish Species

COFI 34 requested that FAO provides support to CITES in support of future listings in its Appendices to:

- a) advise on the appropriateness of the listings, and
- b) help in the implementation of the listings.

But forgotten were most of the existing listings: more precisely Seahorses, Eels, Humphead wrasse and Sharks; that backfired! An abundance of science-lite emotionally-driven marine listings in CITES' Appendices now threaten the livelihoods of small-fishing communities, small island states and coastal states. Sadly, this has weakened existing regulatory authorities and boosted IUU fisheries. Question: is it appropriate for the FAO to provide technical assistance to CITES for the implementation of their listings when the FAO recommended their rejection?

So, that is IWMC's balanced scorecard for COFI 34. Below is a suggested recommendation to improve the future.

SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATION

The World was shocked by a major scandal affecting not only the world of Fisheries but also depriving millions of consumers of their choice in tuna products. The scandal centered on an organization - founded by a major conservation NGO and leading tuna processing/trading/fishing industries - devoted to the sustainability of seafood. Thanks to the Government of the USA, this massive fraud was ended, resulting in several criminal convictions and even jail sentences for top executives.

It is important to note that all those, either directly or indirectly involved, were not subject to any scrutiny or control by regulatory instances, with the result that their activities/endeavors have black eyed the fishers and the fishing industries, while threatening the positive results of COFI 34.

Consequently, IWMC recommends that COFI 35 establishes a Code of Conduct or Guidelines for NGOs, trade associations and other third-party institutions involved in Fisheries in whatever capacity. This recommendation would cover much more than "how they should behave at and contribute to meetings".

It would benchmark the standards for the submission of credible evidence in support of their causes. It would also stipulate, in no uncertain terms, the ethical standards expected from such organizations, particularly when it comes to fundraising, acting, and speaking

responsibly and truthfully to the public about marine-related and food security issues that could have an impact on the FAO/COFI work.

IWMC would like to see this recommendation considered at COFI 35.

With my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. Lapointe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Eugene Lapointe
IWMC President
Former Secretary General of CITES (1982-1990)