

34th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries

Response of Secretariat to Written Correspondence

Agenda Item 13.1: Terms of Reference of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture

The Secretariat conveys its appreciation for the comments received from Members on Agenda Item 13.1- **International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture – Terms of Reference**. All comments are well noted.

1. At its 164th session, the FAO Council endorsed the proposal for hosting by FAO of the International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture (the Platform) and requested the review of the Terms of Reference for this Platform by the COAG, COFI, COFO, the Programme Committee and the FAO Council. In this context, document COFI/2021/13.1 International Platform for Digital Food and Agriculture - Terms of Reference was submitted to the Committee on Fisheries for comments. The Secretariat expresses its thanks and appreciation for the feedback received. The comments and inputs are duly noted, and these will be subsumed into future iterations of the document.
2. Regarding questions related to how aquaculture sectors are anticipated to be covered by the Platform, and how it will support the ongoing work on specific digital technology initiatives (e.g. e-monitoring and reporting such as traceability through digital means), the Secretariat would like to mention that the Platform would have a thematic focus when discussing issues related to digital technology applications. For example, the Platform could discuss best practices in harnessing digital technologies to strengthen market integration of small producers, including the particular challenges faced by small-scale fishers. The aim will be to improve economic, social and environmental dimensions within all sectors, while addressing key challenges.
3. In response to comments regarding the risk of duplication of activities under the mandate of other International Organizations, it is important to note that the Platform, through its Advisory Committee, will create close synergies with International Organizations, including those mandated in policy areas related to digital technologies and the digital economy (such as the International Telecommunication Union - ITU). Through its links with International Organizations that work on fisheries (for example the OECD), the Platform will relate to work undertaken in other international fora and committees. The Platform will by no means duplicate any activity or mandate of other International Organizations. Its objective will be to strengthen collaboration and, more importantly, awareness in the Organizations mandated with the digital economy on issues related to digital technologies in food and agriculture and better inform their discussions, without duplicating or prejudging their activities.
4. Regarding comments on nominating a representative of a Member to be part of the Inter-governmental Representatives Group, the Secretariat would like to underline that participation in

the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group is voluntary, under the authority of FAO Members and according to FAO Members' criteria.

5. In response to questions related to the regional representation of the Platform's Inter-governmental Representatives' Group, the Secretariat would like to mention that the ToRs propose that the Group will be comprised by twenty-seven senior officers/experts as per paragraph 9 of document COFI/2021/13.1. The distribution of representatives across regions attempts to ensure regional representation while, at the same time, address the trade-off between a larger group and an agile and efficient mechanism.

6. Regarding comments on issues surrounding data protection, confidentiality, and intellectual property rights, the Secretariat notes that these will be included in the priorities of the biennial Plan of Work and the Platform will align with FAO's new data policy.

7. In response to questions on the budget of the Platform, it should be noted that the initiative shall be funded through voluntary contributions from Members and other partners (extrabudgetary contributions). The Secretariat is working to develop a sustainable funding plan for the initiative. The Platform will be managed by FAO under its mandate and institutional framework.

8. In response to the comment that gender empowerment should be further integrated in the ToRs of the Platform and that the reference to "ethical challenges" should be included, the Secretariat would like to note that these will be included in the Terms of Reference.

9. Regarding comments on the role of the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group in endorsing voluntary guidelines and the linkages of the Platform with FAO's Governing Bodies (paragraph 10 of document COFI/2021/13.1), the Secretariat will further revise the text to clarify that the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group submits for consideration and endorsement through the FAO Governing Body process. This would strengthen the current text that is already in line with paragraph 24 b) of the report of the FAO Council (165th Session).

10. In response to the comment on the potential conflict by which senior public officers would serve in the Inter-governmental Representatives' Group in their personal capacity while these officials are required to always act under authority of the government, the Secretariat would like to note that the text will be revised accordingly.

11. In response to the comments on ensuring that all stakeholders are included in the Online Multi-stakeholder Forum of the Platform and on the provision of guidelines to Members to help promote participation, the Secretariat would like to note that every effort will be made to maximize inclusion from all Members and that the Platform will provide the necessary information to Members to facilitate multi-stakeholder participation.