

1. Opening of the Session

Union position

1. Mr President, distinguished Members and representatives of the FAO Secretariat, the EU and its Member States would like to start this meeting by thanking the COFI Presidency for the excellent conduct of the discussion on the preparation of our COFI session in the COFI Bureau and other gatherings during the intersessional period.
2. We wish you every success in chairing this meeting and can assure you of the full support of the EU and its Member States in this endeavor.
3. Before entering discussion on our agenda, the EU and its Member States reaffirm their strong condemnation of Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine and its impact on global food security and nutrition, including on the fisheries and aquaculture sector.
4. We thank FAO and the Rome-based UN agencies for their mandate and efforts and express our commitment to strengthen our cooperation to support the vulnerable populations most affected by the food crisis.
5. This food crisis is very unfortunate at a time we all wished to focus on economic recovery after two years of COVID-19 pandemic, which heavily affected the fisheries and aquaculture sector all around the world, in particular small-scale fishers, fish farmers and fish workers.
6. This International Year for Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture is the opportunity to emphasize the essential role of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition for billions of people. Small-scale fisheries and aquaculture deserve our political and financial attention.
7. The shadow of the pandemic still looms over us. We are nevertheless pleased that this COFI can take place in a hybrid format. We are grateful to FAO for providing several rooms and for making possible the virtual link for delegations that cannot be physically present.
8. While recognizing the disadvantages that this format continues to present for remote and/or developing country delegations, we are confident that it will be more conducive to fruitful exchanges than a fully virtual meeting.
9. The EU appreciates the efforts made by the FAO Secretariat to provide a detailed annotated agenda sufficiently in advance of our meeting. We also note the efforts to circulate all the meeting documents, translated into all UN languages, sufficiently in advance of COFI.
10. As anticipated by the EU at the 34th session of COFI, these laudable efforts were however frustrated by the scheduling of COFI at the beginning of September and the availability of documents from end-July or beginning of August. This forced the preparation into the month of August, which for many delegations, including ours, coincided with the summer break.
11. We will do our best to ensure that these circumstances do not affect our participation in this

meeting but they should be taken into account in the planning of our next COFI meetings to ensure efficiency and full relevance of our discussions and decisions.

4. State of world fisheries and aquaculture and progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the related instruments (for information and discussion)

Union position

1. The EU and its Member States underline the essential role of FAO regarding fisheries and aquaculture, including in reporting on the state of world fisheries and aquaculture. We continue to stress the need to enhance the emphasis and visibility of fisheries and aquaculture within the Organization.
2. We commend FAO for the 2022 SOFIA report, which constitutes a critical source of information for supporting our policy decisions. We welcome its timely launch at the UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon in June. The EU and its Member States would like to emphasize four aspects.
3. Firstly, we are confronted with high levels of uncertainty. We have endured two years of pandemic. We all wished to focus on resilient economic recovery while addressing climate change and biodiversity. Unfortunately, the effects of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine have disrupted food supplies and are driving food prices up, making the challenges even more complex.
4. We appreciate that the SOFIA report provides for a short preliminary assessment of these effects. We request FAO to continue monitoring the situation and deepen its assessment. We expect FAO to also contribute to the UN Secretary General's Global Crisis Response Group and its regular briefings by sharing up to date analyses and by monitoring results on the impact on the fisheries and aquaculture sectors and the availability, accessibility and affordability of aquatic food globally.
5. Secondly, we note the important role that the fisheries and aquaculture sector is called upon to play in providing food and nutrition. This importance should appear more prominently into the analysis and general debate on food security and nutrition. The EU and its Member States therefore welcome and support the Blue Food Coalition set up in the aftermath of the UN Food System Summit. We look forward to working with our partners and FAO to develop concrete solutions, in accordance with COFI decisions.
6. Thirdly, only effectively managed fisheries and sustainable aquaculture can contribute to the transformation of food systems. We call on all FAO members to strengthen the fight against IUU Fishing, and to become Parties to the Port State Measures Agreement if they are not yet.
7. SOFIA stresses again the potential of aquaculture for food security. The development of aquaculture cannot come at the expense of the environment or social conditions. It is therefore of utmost importance to finalize the work towards comprehensive and ambitious FAO Global Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, consolidating all available tools and best practices, and providing concrete pathways for the sustainable growth of the sector. The EU and two of its member states have already volunteered to participate in the task force

charged with taking this work forward in the coming months.

8. Fourthly, in this International Year for Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture, we appreciate that SOFIA highlights the vital contribution of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture to sustainable development. We take this opportunity to reiterate our commitment to advance the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-Scale Fisheries.
 9. Beyond the international year and the today discussion of our committee, small-scale fisheries as other issues relating to implementing the Blue Transformation roadmap and reconciling food security and environmental sustainability, would deserve further exchanges.
 10. We hope that COFI will be able to endorse later today the proposal on a new sub-committee on Fisheries Management. It could be instrumental for recommending action and strengthening cooperation on those aspects.
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