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REGIONAL FISHERIES COMMISSION

Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
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## WORKING GROUP ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

### TWELFTH MEETING

4-5 October 2021  
VIRTUAL

#### Outcomes of the RECOFI special workshop on SDG Indicator 14.4.1: Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels

##### Executive Summary

The RECOFI special workshop on SDG Indicator 14.4.1: proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels was held virtually on 5 August 2021. The objectives of the workshop were to raise awareness and understanding of the tools and methodologies developed on SDG Indicator 14.4.1, discuss challenges related to data collection, data availability and sources, analysis and reporting, to identify solutions and priority capacity development needs at the national level, and provide hands-on training towards reporting the Indicator. It was noted that RECOFI had a 50% response rate among its Member Countries for the 2019 round of questionnaires. The challenges in responding to the questionnaire at the frequency required was noted, as well as the need for an Arabic version.

##### The WGFM is invited to:

- Review the outcomes of the workshop on SDG Indicator 14.4.1 and comment on outcomes and follow-up activities

### Introduction

1. The RECOFI special workshop on SDG Indicator 14.4.1: proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels was held virtually on 5 August 2021. The workshop was attended by 19 participants from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The overall objectives of the workshop were to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of the tools and methodologies developed on SDG Indicator 14.4.1
- Discuss challenges related to data collection, data availability and sources, analysis and reporting, to identify solutions and priority capacity development needs at the national level;
- Provide hands-on training towards reporting the Indicator;
- Engage in dialogues between national fisheries agencies, national statistics offices and national SDG focal points to facilitate SDG 14.4.1 monitoring and reporting.

2. This document aims to present the background and outcomes of this workshop for the consideration of the RECOFI Working Group on Fisheries Management.

## Background

3. On 25 September 2015, the 193 Member States of the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets and 230 indicators. The 2030 Agenda is a global vision for people, for the planet and for long-term prosperity.

4. In recognition of the fisheries sector's contributions and responsibilities to the global goals, the SDG Target 14, Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, includes the following target and monitoring indicator specifically related to the sustainability of fish stocks:

- SDG Target 14.4 - By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics.

5. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has been appointed as the UN custodian for 21 SDG indicators, including the SDG 14.4.1. As a custodian agency, FAO is responsible for:

- Collecting data from national sources, validating and harmonizing them, estimating regional and global aggregates and making them available for international reporting.
- Contributing to annual SDG progress reports, feeding into the High-Level Political Forum's follow-up and review processes. Flagship publications are set to broaden their scope to include both a storyline and statistical annexes on relevant SDG indicators under FAO custodianship.
- Establishing partnerships with other international agencies to monitor the increased number of indicators, crucial to achieving interrelated goals.

6. In its role as custodian agency, FAO is working to support countries to strengthen their capacities to collect data, ensure that different national data sets are comparable and aggregated at sub-regional, regional and global levels in order to monitor the SDGs. With a view to raising awareness of countries in monitoring their progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, FAO is hosting a series of virtual regional workshops and training events to support the monitoring and reporting of SDG 14.4.1. In addition to the virtual workshop held 5 August 2021, RECOFI countries are also invited to participate in the global workshop series with other countries in the Mediterranean and Africa, as well as a final hands-on training on reporting the questionnaire on 7 February 2022 for RECOFI countries only.

## Outcomes of the Workshop

7. The workshop highlighted the national reporting framework for SDG 14.4.1, including steps at the country level as follows: the institutional set-up of the reporting team, the development of the country's reference list of stocks, the assignment of stock status to the stocks in the reference list, and reporting on the stock information through the questionnaire. A summary of monitoring and reporting steps is provided in the Annex.

8. The SDG 14.4.1 questionnaire will be dispatched every 2 years, and workshop participants stressed the difficulty in assessing stocks at this frequency (annually or every 2 years). FAO noted that the series of workshops would support countries in their capacity to conduct more frequent assessments.

9. Workshop participants requested that the SDG 14.4.1 questionnaire be translated and disseminated in Arabic.

10. The workshop was informed that 2019 was the first country-level data collection for SDG 14.4.1, and globally 82 countries submitted a completed questionnaire. Each questionnaire was

individually checked for compliance, accuracy and precision of content, with feedback given to each country, which then has a further opportunity to respond. The most common errors in the 1<sup>st</sup> review were related to more specific references required, stock type, straddling stocks, missing proportion of landings and no best available knowledge. The workshop was informed that a Level 2 review of the questionnaires is ongoing and improvements to the questionnaire could enhance clarity, understanding as well as accuracy, compliance and reliability in reporting.

11. Workshop participants noted that it would be useful to contact their SDG focal points to communicate their interest in internal discussions towards improving the quality of their reporting.

12. When comparing FIRMS-reported species and SDG-reported species, there were some discrepancies between the two lists; FAO clarified that, while it may appear that there is duplication between reporting to FIRMS and SDG 14.4.1, these are separate: FIRMS is relevant in a regional context handling migratory and shared stocks, and SDG is relevant in a national context handling shared and national stocks. It was noted that the relationship with RECOFI and FIRMS began 11 years ago and since then member countries have developed a list of 20-30 priority stocks, decided upon because they are of interest to everyone, but the scientific knowledge may not indicate that they are shared. The SDG framework is much more recent (2019) and the species listed have a national focus and will undoubtedly comprise national stocks not relevant in the RECOFI context. Countries were encouraged to discuss these list of stocks within their countries as well as with the RECOFI community, possibly via an independent consultant that would allow for anonymity of species lists for each country.

13. The following recommendations/summary of key points of the workshop are highlighted below, by topic of discussion:

#### *General SDG reporting framework*

- The 2030 Agenda sets in place a global SDG reporting framework that includes inputs at local, national, regional levels and culminates in the UN High-Level Political Forum. SDG indicators are the foundation of this global framework for mutual accountability of countries and custodian agencies. Its successful implementation rests largely on an effective monitoring, review and follow-up process.
- Voluntary – States who decide to report on the indicator understand that monitoring stock status is part of a national strategy aiming at a sustainable fishery sector. Countries should establish their own path responding to their specific needs, and create a community of collaboration among national data stakeholders
- It is recommended that a national framework be set-up for reporting on the indicator, bringing relevant stakeholders, to ensure that all aspects of the methodology are properly addressed

#### *Inclusion of stocks in the indicator*

- Straddling and highly migratory stocks are not included in the national indicator, because they are already part of the indicator calculated by FAO and Global and Regional levels
- A very important aspect is to maintain a stable list of stocks in the reference list, so to ensure a stable indicator, comparable over the years, allowing to consistently follow trends over time.
- Regarding shared stocks and straddling stocks in the Red Sea, the RECOFI secretariat explained that FAO-RNE is working with the concerned countries in the Red Sea countries to establish a Regional Commission for Aquaculture and Fisheries in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

#### *Capacities for reporting*

- Stocks should be added in the Reference list of stocks based on criteria defined for the indicator, regardless of whether individual stocks in this list have been assessed

- States experience difficulties with assessing certain stocks, or in frequently assessing the status of their stocks. While updates on stock status might not be available at a frequency higher than 5 or 7 years, past assessments combined with newly introduced methods in data poor context can be used for stock status determination
- Four RECOFI members reported for the first call, and are relatively well positioned in the Quality Assurance results, even though progress can be made with support of FAO and RECOFI

*Attendance/participation in the capacity development activities*

- SDG focal points and RECOFI secretariat will coordinate to enhance the participation and invite participants with profiles corresponding to each activity.
- SDG 14.4.1 data call can be communicated through RECOFI to ensure efficient reach-out of focal points

*Communication on SDG matters between FAO and the countries*

- FAO officially communicates with SDG national focal points in the NSO, and with focal point for Fisheries and Aquaculture in the line Ministry of fisheries. Such communication should be done in ample time before events because of internal delays in communicating to the right institutes
- It is important that all relevant stakeholders including technical experts in research institute and data collection units be informed about the Capacity building activities
- Announcements on events should be relayed through FAO national and regional offices and through RECOFI Secretariat with due consideration of the list of participants to this RECOFI workshop
- Individual feedback will be provided by FAO on the results of questionnaire analysis through the SDG focal points

*On comparison of SDG14.4.1 Reference list of Stocks with RECOFI-FIRMS stock inventories*

- Countries are encouraged to submit national and shared stocks to the upcoming SDG 14.4.1 data call with due consideration of the list of RECOFI priority species consistently with FIRMS inventories. This will ensure mainly consistency, and improved understanding of regional reference list of stocks
- RECOFI will assist countries to submit their reporting as appropriate
- Request of providing an Arabic version of the SDG 14.4.1 questionnaire and the SDG 14.4.1 e-learning course in the upcoming was well noted.

*Upcoming Capacity development opportunities*

- RECOFI countries are invited to participate in the global workshop series with other countries in the Mediterranean and Africa in mid-November 2021, as well as a final hands-on training on reporting via the questionnaire on 1 March 2022 for RECOFI countries only.

## **Annex: Process of SDG 14.4.1 monitoring and reporting**

This indicator measures the sustainability of the world's marine capture fisheries by their abundance. A fish stock of which abundance is at or greater than the level, that can produce the maximum sustainable yield (MSY) is classified as biologically sustainable. In contrast, when abundance falls below the MSY level, the stock is considered biologically unsustainable. The indicator measures progress towards SDG Target 14.4. There two main sources of primary data for the fish stock assessment are: the fishery dependent sources (collected from the fishery itself), and the fishery independent sources.

SDG 14.4.1 monitoring and determining indicator score require four steps at national level complemented by two additional two steps by FAO. The four steps are as follows:

- Step 1: Institutional set-up at the national level: Countries nominate a Principal National Correspondent from the NSO or alternatively from a line ministry (Ministry of Agriculture and/or Fisheries). Ideally, an alternate focal point I a leading scientist from each of the agency that is carrying stock assessment. Moreover, a technical working group is recommended to be created to facilitate the data collection process and to involve all stakeholders from government institutions, academia, fishing industries and NGOs. The main responsibilities of the National Correspondent are to lead the

process of consultation for indicator 14.4.1, to assemble and lead the technical working group, to prepare the final report using the questionnaire and to identify the capacity development and data gaps that require support from national, regional and international agencies.

- Step 2: Set-up of reference list of stocks: The reference list of stocks should be established by the national technical working group and should be a representative sample (at least 60%) of the current total national landed and/or reported catch. The list should be subject to minimal or if possible, no changes across time for a period of 5 years at least. This list must contain national and shared fish stocks of major importance in terms of catch, ecosystem, role, economic value, and social/cultural considerations. The straddling stocks are not included in this list.

- Step 3: Categorization of stocks' status and indicator calculation method: This step involves an evaluation of whether each stock can be considered "biologically sustainable", once done, the indicator can be calculated. The stock assessment method differs from a fish stock to another and from one country to another. Therefore, after setting-up the reference list, the assessor must determine the data available for each stock. Three main categories of data inputs are required: abundance, biology and catch.

- Step 4: Reporting to FAO through the questionnaire: FAO requests countries to report on this indicator every 2 years through FAO SDG 14.4.1 questionnaire. The process of reporting requires strong ownership and leadership of the process at the national level, in other terms of involvement of research institutes, universities and fisheries authorities for data collection, and liaising with the fisheries authorities and national institutions responsible for this indicator which will help raise the awareness of data gaps to ensure better future monitoring and reporting.

- Step 5: Data quality assurance and feedback to the country by FAO: FAO produces a unique identifier for each stock listed in the national report. FAO also conducts quality assurance of national submissions, provides feedback to national focal points and seeks validation of results to review the indicator value. FAO produces regional and global estimates and disseminate those only, national data at stock level are not disseminated by FAO.

- Step 6: Reporting to UNSD by FAO