

36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries
Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
Rome, Italy
July 8-12, 2024

The Nature Conservancy
Agenda Item 5 Intervention

5. *Decisions and recommendations of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, 16-19 May 2023*

TNC supports the new Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA), notably the recommendations on ensuring sound aquaculture governance; undertaking spatial planning and siting of facilities; the need to develop unfed species, including seaweed; and utilisation of aquaculture as a tool for ecosystem service provision and species restoration.

The GSA, however, fails to highlight the importance of sustainable aquaculture feeds to the necessary degree. Efforts must be taken to ensure the sustainability of marine ingredients utilised in aquaculture feeds, ensure usage of deforestation and conversion-free terrestrial ingredients, and reduce the carbon emissions profile of feeds.

Despite this challenge, in its current form, the GSA marks a significant step forward in guiding the sustainability of the sector. TNC supports COFI36's adoption of the GSA and encourages swift implementation by Members. TNC also encourages the Guidelines to be mainstreamed into the FAO's programmatic work on aquaculture and supports the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture's call for the FAO to raise awareness of the GSA and ensure capacity building and assistance around its implementation, including in a transboundary context. Furthermore, TNC agrees that the GSA should inform the future programmatic work of the Blue Transformation Roadmap, noting TNC would further encourage blue economy initiatives to take into account freshwater systems.

As previously mentioned, TNC emphasises the importance of undertaking spatial planning, siting, and zoning for aquaculture industries. With aquaculture on its current growth trajectory, there is only a limited window of opportunity to undertake these planning exercises, which are vitally important to ensure ecosystems are protected and businesses can thrive. TNC is working in several geographies, including Palau, the African Great Lakes, Baja California, and Mexico on suitability mapping and spatial planning for the aquaculture sector with an aim of expanding best practices and ensuring the conservation of key biodiversity areas through community-led management and recognition of other effective area-based conservation (OECMS) measures. TNC also emphasises the importance of seaweed value chains and advancing the development of the sector to ensure livelihood, food, and environmental benefits. TNC is working alongside local communities in Tanzania, Indonesia, Belize, Chile, and the USA to advance seaweed aquaculture development, and encourages more Members to engage in this space. Furthermore, careful consideration of the cultured species is necessary to minimise the threat of invasive species, especially in freshwater ecosystems where non-native species are a recognise primary threat to local biodiversity.

TNC would like to reiterate appreciation to the FAO for inviting us and other stakeholders to participate as observers in the 36th session of the UN FAO COFI and welcome the opportunity to work with Members and the FAO on topics including but not limited to those above.

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