

The Ocean Conference

United Nations, New York, 5-9 June 2017

FAO's input to the concept paper on theme 4: "Making Fisheries Sustainable" with a focus on SDG target 14.4

I. Status and trends

1. Seafood, whether wild caught or farmed is important for food security and nutrition, providing more than 3.1 billion people with almost 20 percent of their average per capita intake of animal protein (plus omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins, calcium, zinc, and iron). Globally, the market value of these resources is estimated at \$3 trillion per year, or about 5 % of global GDP. Better management of fisheries production and related markets is an important focus (SDG 14.4, 6 and 7), as even though global capture production of fish is relatively stable between 1996 and 2015 (max – min 87 to 95 million tonnes, average \pm SE 92 \pm 0.5 million tonnes). Production from aquaculture continues to grow (currently at 77 million tonnes).
2. According to FAO's State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2016,2 68.6% of stocks were at sustainable levels – both as fully sustainably fished stocks (58.1%) and under fished stocks (10.5%); and 31.4% of fish stocks were estimated as fished at a biologically unsustainable level and therefore overfished. After 1990, the number of stocks fished at unsustainable levels continued to increase, albeit more slowly than in the late 1970s and 1980s. Although many stocks are subject to regulation by coastal States and/or flag States, including through regional fisheries management organizations, there is unevenness in the effectiveness of management and its results.
3. Overfishing persists despite decades of efforts to manage fisheries to successfully conserve stocks at sustainable levels. SDG 14 target 4 specifically recognizes the need to effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and destructive fishing practices and to implement science-based management plans to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield (MSY) as determined by their biological characteristics.
4. Addressing IUU fishing is critical to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular, in SDG 14. IUU fishing threatens food security and sustainable livelihoods of people in many parts of the world.
5. IUU fishing undermines national, regional and international efforts to sustainably manage fisheries. IUU fishing is estimated to account for up to 23.5 billion US dollars-worth of fish annually worldwide, which is equivalent of up to 20 percent of all of the wild marine fish caught globally. The impacts of IUU fishing are not evenly distributed, developing countries and SIDS are most at risk.

6. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), requires States to adopt conservation and management measures to maintain or restore populations of harvested species at levels which can produce the MSY, as qualified by relevant environmental and economic factors, including the economic needs of coastal fishing communities and the special requirements of developing States, and taking into account fishing patterns, the interdependence of stocks and any international minimum standards, whether sub regional, regional or global.
7. The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, adopted by the FAO Conference in 1995 and its related instruments provide a robust framework for national and international efforts, including in the formulation of policies and other legal and institutional frameworks and instruments, to ensure sustainable fishing and use of aquatic living resources in harmony with the environment.

II. Challenges and opportunities

8. Globally there is an opportunity for 'rebuilding' depleted fisheries through a range of cooperative policy shifts and operational interventions, including greater action on preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing, decreasing fishing pressure and increasing environmental safeguards. This is needed to return the lost environmental and social value of overfished stocks, and respond to the growing shortfall in food projected for a growing world population that is expected to reach 9 billion in 2050.
9. There are some 50 Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) worldwide, most acting as advisory bodies to their members and covering specific areas and/or species. Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs), an important subset of RFBs, have the mandate and the capacity to adopt binding conservation and management measures. There are gaps in coverage spatially, over specific species, as well as variability in the mandate of RFBs to make binding measures.
10. One of the most recent and significant achievements in the fight to prevent, deter and eliminate IUU fishing was the entry into force of the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) on 5 June 2016. This marked the first-ever binding international agreement specifically targeting IUU fishing. States that have not already done so may wish to consider committing to become a Party to the PSMA.
11. The effective implementation of the PSMA will reduce the incentive to engage in IUU fishing and block fishery products derived from such activities from entering national and international markets, thereby bolstering international efforts to combat IUU fishing and contributing to strengthening fisheries management and governance at all levels.
12. The PSMA recognizes the need for assistance to developing countries to adopt and implement port State measures – and requires Parties to cooperate to establish appropriate funding mechanisms to assist developing States in the implementation of this Agreement.

III. Existing partnerships

13. Common Oceans Program

The Global Sustainable Fisheries Management and Biodiversity Conservation in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Programme (Common Oceans) is seeking to generate a catalytic change. The Programme was approved by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) under the lead of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in close collaboration with two other GEF agencies, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank. Other partners include, among other, Conservation International, Global Oceans Forum, IUCN and WWF. Additional partners include RFMOs, ISSF, NOAA, BirdLife International, Forum Fisheries Agency, OSPESCA, Parties to the Nauru Agreement.

14. Focusing on tuna and deep-sea fisheries, capacity building and ocean partnerships, in parallel with the conservation of biodiversity, the Common Oceans Program aims to promote efficient and sustainable management of fisheries resources and biodiversity conservation in ABNJ to achieve the global targets agreed in international fora.

15. The five-year ABNJ Program is an innovative, unique and comprehensive initiative working with a variety of partners. It consists of four projects that bring together governments, regional management bodies, civil society, the private sector, academia and industry to work towards ensuring the sustainable use and conservation of ABNJ biodiversity and ecosystem services.

16. The Port State Measures Agreement

The PSMA is based on the fundamental principles of cooperation and collaboration, which are essential to in the fight against IUU fishing. The PSMA requires cooperation at the global, regional and national level.

17. There are currently a number of partnerships supporting the implementation of PSMA, these include States, IGOs, NGOs, RFBs, and others. While there is significant coverage, there are still regions where more work could be done. A non-exhaustive list of on-going partnerships include - Member State Parties to PSMA, FAO Interregional TCP (14 Member States), FAO Regional-TCP for Latin America, OSPESCA-Pew PSMA Capacity Needs Project, FFA-Pew PSMA Gap Analysis Project, FAO global umbrella programme to implement PSMA, among others.

18. Regional Fishery Bodies

There are some 50 Regional Fishery Bodies (RFBs) worldwide, most acting as advisory bodies to their members and covering specific areas and/or species. Each of these RFBs represents a partnership among member States and associated stakeholder groups.

IV. Possible areas for new partnerships

- Partnership with other UN Agencies, NGOs and Civil Society Organizations with complementary and synergic roles working in the marine ecosystems.
- Partnerships with academic institutions and research centers to promote the development of assessment methods and harvest strategies.
- Partnerships with relevant national authorities, UN Agencies, RFMOs, regional organizations and NGOs working to combat IUU fishing.
- Partnership with other organizations would be beneficial, such as UNCTAD's national green export review project and World Bank projects on fisheries value chains.
- Possibility of promoting better links across the EU yellow/red flag system, CITES Appendices and US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) ESA-listed species criteria, to get greater understanding of what comprises a threshold for fisheries sanctions and thresholds for threatened fisheries provisions.
- Enhance collaboration at sub-regional and regional level in terms of making efficient use of resources and also to increase capacities of neighbouring countries through sharing experiences.
- There are existing partnerships arrangements for data formats and data exchange with some regional and international bodies. Dialogues are on-going with regard to the development and updating of global data standards for fisheries and aquaculture.

V. Guiding questions for the dialogue

- A framework of international instruments has been developed that includes a powerful suite of tools which can be used to manage fisheries sustainably and to combat IUU fishing, what are the impediments to full implementation of these instruments and how can they be overcome?
- RFMOs are essential to the management of international fisheries, what are some of their strengths and weaknesses? What changes, if any, might be considered to improve their performance?
- Losses to IUU fishing are considered to be particularly severe for LDCs and SIDS. What responses have proven effective to combatting IUU fishing in situations where capacity is low?
- The 2009 FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA) was developed with the explicit intent to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing. How would implementation of PSMA help to improve fisheries governance generally, and address IUU fishing specifically?