



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Thirty-sixth Session

8-12 July 2024

**OPENING STATEMENT BY DR QU DONGYU
FAO DIRECTOR GENERAL
(8 JULY 2024)**

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

1. The FAO Committee on Fisheries – COFI - is the largest global gathering of policymakers, experts and partners in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.
2. An increasingly expanding global aquaculture sector is driving the supply of fish and fishery products to new records. In 2022 aquaculture overtook capture fisheries as the main supplier of aquatic (animal) foods. Ensuring the expansion of the sustainable aquaculture is of fundamental importance for consumers. And policymakers must ensure that national programmes, legal frameworks, guidelines and standards are conducive to such development, including on biosecurity.
3. The fisheries and aquaculture sector faces many challenges, but also huge opportunities – many of which you will be discussing this week. Challenges include the important of supporting the sustainable growth of aquaculture, especially in food deficit regions, as well as the urgent need for effective fisheries management, and the consequent need to turn around unsustainable practices: for example, too many commercial stocks in capture fisheries are being harvested beyond safe biological levels.
4. But these challenges also provide an enormous opportunity of developing the value chains of aquatic products, and for strengthening implementation of biodiversity agreements, of addressing the issue of plastic pollution, of ensuring integrated water resources management, and for mitigating the impacts of the climate crisis, among others.
5. On the margins of this session, we will also be marking the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Small-Scale Fisheries. This is of particular relevance as the livelihoods

of 600 million people depend on fisheries and aquaculture, most of them in the small-scale sector.

6. We are just six years away from the deadline of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which fisheries and oceans play an important role. We have much work to do, and we must act now.
7. At the 3rd UN Oceans Conference in 2024, SDG14 will be under the spotlight. FAO is custodian of 4 SDG14 indicators. Although progress has been made on some targets, others are lagging behind. To close this gap, we need policies, programmes and investments that ensure future generations can benefit from sustainable and nutritious aquatic foods.
8. We already have a number of important international instruments to support our efforts, including: the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, which will further assist in mobilizing the needed resources and technical expertise, as well as supporting FAO's Blue Transformation Initiative; the FAO Port State Measures Agreement, and the newly established COFI Sub Committee on Fisheries Management, can all further strengthen our work in addressing challenges and turning them into opportunities for the fisheries and aquaculture sector.
9. Finally, I also wish to underline the importance of value chains, trade and markets. International trade is growing, with exports reaching a record USD 195 billion in 2022, up 19 percent from pre-pandemic levels.
10. Exports are particularly important for low- and middle-income countries, for whom net export revenues of aquatic products exceeded that of all other agricultural commodities combined. For this reason, we need agrifood trading systems that are considerate of food security objectives. We need to continue emphasizing the importance of a free, non-destructive and reliable trading system.

Dear colleagues,

11. Let us continue to work together in an efficient, effective and coherent manner to make aquatic food systems a central part of the transformation of global agrifood systems as we progress towards the Four Betters – better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life – leaving no one behind.
12. Thank you