



COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE

Twentieth Session

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Virtual Meeting on Zoom

GLOBAL THEMES AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER FAO BODIES AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Executive Summary

This document outlines the principal themes and collaborative initiatives of FAO in the area of fisheries and aquaculture, emphasizing its involvement in monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 14 (Life Below Water), and its contributions to the 2025 UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice, France. It underscores the importance of the FAO Blue Transformation agenda to enhance aquatic food systems, and collaboration with other FAO entities and international organizations, specifically for sustainably developing aquaculture, ensuring all fisheries are placed under effective management, and upgrading aquatic food value chains, including improvements in trade policies. There is also a distinct focus on the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the supportive role FAO can take concerning its Members to implement the Agreement, and continuation of the negotiation process.

Suggested actions by the Sub-Committee

- Recognize FAO's efforts made in global work areas towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Note recommendations of the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management (COFI:FM) regarding an evidence-based and context-specific approach aligned with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF).
- Recognize the collaborative efforts of FAO with other international organizations in pursuing Blue Transformation and shared objectives related to the sustainable production and trade of fisheries and aquaculture products.

- Note the current development status, observed principles, and collaborative action related to the database of non-traditional provisions in regional trade agreements (RTAs) concerning fisheries and aquaculture products.
- Encourage Members to formally accept the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies in order to have an additional international instrument for fostering the sustainability of fisheries resources and combating illegal practices.
- Identify the technical assistance and capacity development role that FAO can play in specific fisheries areas related to the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies for the benefit of Members, supported by the WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism (the Fund).

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GLOBAL THEMES

Third United Nations Ocean Conference

1. The high-level 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development (the 2025 UN Ocean Conference – UNOC3) was co-hosted by France and Costa Rica, in Nice, France, from 9 to 13 June 2025.
2. UNOC3 primary focus was accelerating action and mobilizing all stakeholders to conserve and sustainably utilize the ocean. The Conference promoted immediate and enhanced measures for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and marine resources to facilitate sustainable development while identifying additional strategies to support the execution of SDG 14.
3. In anticipation of the UNOC3, FAO has diligently assisted the host countries, France and Costa Rica, through various contributions focusing on promoting ocean sustainability and enhancing the role of aquatic food systems. FAO reaffirmed its global leadership in promoting sustainable, inclusive, and science-based ocean solutions through these initiatives.
4. At UNOC3, FAO unveiled the revised *2025 Review of World Marine Fishery Resources* Report,¹ the most comprehensive global assessment of the sustainability status of fish stocks. This research was developed with contributions from over 650 experts from more than 90 countries and 200 entities, providing quantitative assessments for approximately 2 600 fish stocks.
5. FAO's substantial involvement in UNOC 2025 underscored its vision for a "Blue Transformation," accentuating the essential function of aquatic food systems in achieving the Four Betters: better production, better nutrition, a better environment, and a better life, leaving no one behind. The Blue Transformation Initiative, as detailed in FAO's Strategic Framework 2022-31,² recognizes the intrinsic connection between ocean health and food security, and was notably featured in the FAO-UNCTAD Pavilion, "The Ocean that Feeds Us," located in the La Baleine knowledge and exhibition area at UNOC.
6. In June 2024, FAO launched the 2024 edition of the *State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture* (SOFIA)³ report in Costa Rica during the Immersed in Change high-level stakeholder meeting.⁴ During this event, FAO emphasized the significance of aquatic foods in addressing hunger, malnutrition, and poverty.
7. In February 2025, FAO, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Pacific Community (SPC), and the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean co-organized the Honiara Summit on sustainable fisheries in the Solomon Islands.⁵ The Summit brought together 5 heads of state, 10 ministers, and over 300 global representatives of fisheries administrations, regional fisheries agencies, and stakeholders to accelerate SDG 14.4 progress and prepare for UNOC3.

¹ Sharma, R., Barange, M., Agostini, V., Barros, P., Gutierrez, N.L., Vasconcellos, M., Fernandez Reguera, D., Tiffay, C., & Levontin, P., eds. 2025. Review of the state of world marine fishery resources – 2025. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 721. Rome. FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd5538en>

² FAO. 2022. FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31. Rome. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/29404c26-c71d-4982-a899-77bdb2937eef/content>

³ FAO. 2024. *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024 – Blue Transformation in action*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0683en>

⁴ Government of Costa Rica. 2024. *Immersed in Change – High-level event on ocean action*. [Cited 24 April 2025] <https://immersedinchange.gob.go.cr>

⁵ Government of Solomon Islands. 2025. *Honiara Summit on Sustainable Fisheries*. [Cited 25 April 2025] <https://honiarasummit.sig.gov.sb>

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

8. FAO serves as the custodian UN agency for 22 SDG indicators and contributes to five more.⁶ In this role, FAO assists countries in tracking the 2030 Agenda. FAO is directly accountable for four SDG14 indicators. In this capacity, FAO formulates international standards, advocates measuring methodology, aggregates and validates country-reported data, and facilitates capacity building.

9. Countries have made advancements in adopting the SDG 14 monitoring and reporting frameworks, which encompass the biological, social, and economic sustainability elements associated with the four indicators under the custodianship of FAO: proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels (14.4.1), degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing (14.6.1), sustainable fisheries as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP) in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries (14.7.1) and degree of application of a legal/regulatory/ policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries (14.b.1). FAO has effectively contributed to creating these indicators, monitoring and reporting procedures, and associated capacity-building activities. Furthermore, FAO formulates, disseminates, and advocates for the adoption of international guidelines and instruments supportive of SDG 14, including the CCRF, the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA), and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries.

10. Monitoring SDG Indicator 14.4.1 presents technical challenges, as many countries face limited capacity to accurately report on fisheries data and management, along with insufficient coordination among the authorities involved in the reporting process. FAO continuously develops assessment methodologies for data-deficient fisheries and offers a multilingual e-learning course and an online stock-monitoring tool. Two global survey rounds have been conducted, increasing the number of reporting countries from 87 to 99 and enhancing the high-quality assurance scores of submissions by 48 percent. A third questionnaire is underway, with results scheduled for publication at the end of 2025, alongside additional in-country capacity development initiatives to tailor trustworthy procedures for specific national circumstances. The latest data on indicator 14.4.1 confirms a continued deterioration, further away from the 2020 target of restoring stocks to biologically sustainable levels.

11. SDG Indicator 14.6.1 relies on the biennial survey assessing the implementation of the CCRF. Members are evaluated based on their responses regarding the implementation of six international instruments designed to combat IUU fishing. In 2022, countries made significant progress, with over 75 percent demonstrating a high adherence to relevant international instruments, up from 70 percent in 2018.

12. Advancement on SDG Indicator 14.b.1 assesses Members' endeavors to ensure and advocate for access rights for small-scale fisheries. It is derived from the biennial survey of the implementation of the CCRF through three specific CCRF questionnaire items. The global average score decreased from five to four, indicating greater variability in implementation.

13. SDG Indicator 14.7.1 measures the economic contribution of marine resources by representing the value of sustainable fisheries as a percentage of GDP. It facilitates a more equitable allocation of resources to the fisheries sector by highlighting the importance of fisheries to national economies. Although the indicator declined to 0.092 percent of global GDP in 2021, the sector's value added grew by 38 percent from 2011 to 2021. The indicator is calculated biennially, with the 2023 update scheduled for 2026.

FAO Blue Transformation

14. FAO's Blue Transformation agenda is a concerted effort wherein agencies, countries, and partners, including organizations of dependent communities, leverage existing and emerging knowledge, tools, and methodologies to ensure and sustainably enhance the contribution of aquatic food systems to food security, nutrition, affordable healthy diets for all, and livelihoods support.

⁶ FAO. 2024. *Sustainable Development Goals – Data Portal*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Rome. [Cited 29 April 2025] <https://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals-data-portal/data/en>

15. To facilitate implementation of FAO's Blue Transformation, a roadmap⁷ was established, employing a modular framework that allows stakeholders to provide financial or technical support in specific areas aligned with their respective expertise or resource capabilities.

16. The 2024 G20 Agriculture Ministers Declaration⁸ and the 2025 Joint Declaration of the 15th Meeting of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture⁹ both acknowledged FAO's Blue Transformation roadmap as a framework for optimizing the role of aquatic food systems in enhancing food security, nutrition, employment, economic growth, social development, and environmental restoration, thereby facilitating the attainment of the SDGs and affirming the role of FAO in assisting countries to deliver healthy aquatic foods.

17. Blue Transformation is based on three core objectives:

- Sustainable intensification and expansion of aquaculture. To meet the rising global demand for aquatic foods by emphasizing sustainable growth and expansion of aquaculture.
- Effective management of all fisheries. Maintaining healthy stocks and securing equitable livelihoods by ensuring an ecosystem approach to fisheries is consistently and regularly applied to management practices.
- Enhanced value chains. To ensure that aquatic food systems are socially, economically, and environmentally viable by improving the aquatic value chains.

FAO BODIES AND COOPERATION WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management (COFI:FM)

18. The 1st Session of the COFI:FM took place virtually from 15 to 18 January 2024, with 95 Members participating, to examine challenges and opportunities related to fisheries management. The Session stressed the importance of fisheries in ending poverty, hunger, and malnutrition, particularly in small-scale fisheries.¹⁰

19. COFI:FM emphasized the need for evidence-based and context-specific management systems aligned with the ecosystem approach to fisheries and the CCRF. In addition, it highlighted the importance of enhancing data collection and analysis capacities, integrating social, ecological, and economic objectives, and fostering inclusive participatory processes. It also stressed the relevance of this new Sub-Committee as a technical platform for exchanging experiences and addressing pressing challenges in fisheries management.

20. The Sub-Committee called for more decisive actions against IUU fishing and welcomed the support of FAO to Members in developing monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) systems, especially for small-scale fisheries. It acknowledged the impacts of climate change on fisheries and urged alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and FAO's Climate Change Strategy. The Sub-Committee endorsed FAO's efforts to improve the assessment of the status of global fish stocks through its state of stocks index (SoSI) and supported further capacity building and resource mobilization to assist Members in implementing effective fisheries management strategies.

⁷ FAO. 2022. *Blue Transformation - Roadmap 2022–2030: A vision for FAO's work on aquatic food systems*. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc0459en>

⁸ G20. 2024. *G20 Agriculture Ministers' Declaration*. G20 Meeting of Ministers of Agriculture, Chapada dos Guimarães, Brazil, 12–13 September 2024. [Cited 25 April 2025]. <https://g7g20-documents.org/database/document/2024-g20-brazil-sherpa-track-agricultural-ministers-ministers-language-g20-agriculture-ministers-declaration#section-1>

⁹ BRICS 2025. *Joint declaration of the 15th meetings of BRICS Ministers of Agriculture*. [Cited 13 May. 2025]. <https://brics.br/en/news/brics-countries-approve-joint-declaration-with-focus-on-food-security>

¹⁰ FAO. 2024. *Report of the First Session of the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, Virtual Meeting, 15-18 January 2024*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, No. 1437. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0256t>

COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI:AQ)

21. The 12th Session of the COFI:AQ, which took place in Hermosillo, Mexico, from 16 to 19 May 2023, was previously reported to the 19th Session of COFI:FT (COFI:FT/XIX/2023/3) and the corresponding report of the Session is available as COFI:FT/XX/2025/Inf. 6.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

22. FAO and OECD regularly collaborate on activities of mutual interest, including the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook, fisheries and aquaculture statistics, and the Fisheries Support Estimate (FSE) database.¹¹ The annual OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook publication examines supply and demand for selected agricultural commodities over the medium term. Since 2011, it has had a distinct chapter on fish and other aquatic products that outlines the principal results of the fish model developed by FAO. The 2025 issue, released in July, provides an outlook for 2025–2034.¹²

23. FAO and OECD have collaborated extensively to streamline the collection of fisheries and aquaculture statistics to reduce the reporting burden and better harmonize disseminated statistics. For approximately 47 countries, the two organizations jointly collect employment data on the number of fishers, fish farmers, and fish processors. OECD obtains statistics on aquaculture production and trade of aquatic products directly from FAO-published data as the OECD has stopped collecting these data to avoid duplication of effort.

24. In the domain of the FSE database, FAO, in collaboration with the OECD, conducted a Regional Workshop on Understanding Fisheries Support Measures in the Asian Context in Bangkok, Thailand, from 17 to 19 October 2023. The specific session of the workshop introduced the FSE database, examining its potential to enhance understanding, promote efficiency, and facilitate the regional sharing of fisheries support information throughout Asia.

United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)

25. The continued collaboration between UNSD and FAO was strengthened further, including sharing trade statistics and the revision of the Central Product Classification (CPC). FAO played a key role in the last revision (version CPC 2.1) and has presented a new proposal envisaged in the current revision cycle (version CPC 3.0) to improve further the classification's breakdown of fisheries and aquaculture products.

World Customs Organization (WCO)

26. FAO has been regularly working with the WCO to improve the quality and coverage of the trade of aquatic products by enhancing the specification for species and product forms in the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (HS). This partnership mainly consists of attending technical meetings, responding to technical queries presented by the WCO Secretariat, and preventing the deletion of codes on aquatic products with a trade value below USD 50 million by sub-heading. The new HS nomenclature HS 2028 will come into effect on 1 January 2028, with a few revisions covering codes of aquatic products.

27. Furthermore, FAO and WCO developed the second edition of the GLOBEFISH publication "HS Codes for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products."¹³ The first edition was revised, updated, and expanded, including the 2022 nomenclature. This new edition also contains photos of the most commercially important species, relevant information, and species singularities.

¹¹ OECD (2025), *OECD Review of Fisheries 2025*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/560cd8fc-en>.

¹² More information about the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook, including the latest issue of the publication, is available at <https://www.agri-outlook.org/>

¹³ FAO and WCO. 2023. *HS Codes for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products – Harmonized System. Nomenclature 2022*. Second edition updated and expanded. Rome and Brussels. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc6347en>

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

28. The collaboration between FAO and UNCTAD on fisheries and aquaculture trade-related matters continues to expand, especially within FAO's Blue Transformation framework. The Blue Transformation initiative has broadened the collaboration between the two organizations to encompass other sub-sectors, highlighting sustainable and inclusive development within the blue economy. In this regard, FAO and UNCTAD maintain a robust and continuous collaboration, frequently working to organize joint side events centred on sustainable ocean trade and policy.

29. FAO collaborated with UNCTAD at the 5th UN Ocean Forum in Geneva, Switzerland, in March 2025. The three-day forum was an important platform for formulating trade-related ocean policies and discussions to support the United Nations Ocean Conference in Nice, France, in June 2025. FAO also participated in the third edition of the UN Trade Forum (2023 edition), hosted by UNCTAD in Geneva, which examined trade policies to strengthen the resilience of trading systems in developing countries

30. In September 2024, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of FAO GLOBEFISH, FAO and UNCTAD co-organized a *Seaweed Dialogue* that analysed contemporary trends, market dynamics, and future opportunities in seaweed production and trade. The event highlighted the potential of seaweed in both food and non-food sectors and its growing role in sustainable development.

31. In September 2023, at the 19th Session of COFI:FT, UNCTAD organized a side event entitled "*Trade and Environment Review 2023 – Building a Sustainable and Resilient Ocean Economy Beyond 2030.*" The event encouraged discussions about forward-looking strategies for integrating sustainability into ocean-related trade and policy frameworks.

32. UNCTAD has actively engaged as a key stakeholder in the consultation process to develop the FAO Guidance on Social Responsibility in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)

33. FAO is collaborating with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) to develop a dedicated database of non-traditional provisions in RTAs relevant to fisheries and aquaculture products. The database being developed by FAO focuses on non-traditional provisions, particularly the environmental and sustainability requirements applicable to fisheries.

34. During its 19th Session,¹⁴ COFI:FT emphasized that the establishment of such a global database could enhance transparency and knowledge in the international trade of fisheries and aquaculture products, thereby positively influencing economic development, food security, and livelihoods. This would facilitate market access, especially for developing countries and small-scale operators, while mitigating the underutilization of trade preferences and addressing the existing information gap. The discussion on non-traditional clauses of RTAs began at the 17th Session of COFI:FT¹⁵ in 2019, when the growing complexity of navigating their diverse provisions amid the increasing number of RTAs and the importance of adequately analysing them were recognized, particularly given their direct impact on the trade of fisheries and aquaculture products. The 18th Session of COFI:FT¹⁶ supported FAO's development of a proposed database on trade agreements from the angle of fisheries and aquaculture. The Sub-Committee emphasized the database principles of comprehensive

¹⁴ FAO. 2024. *Committee on Fisheries: Report of the 19th Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade*, Bergen, Norway, 11–15 September 2023. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, No. 1429. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd0351t>

¹⁵ FAO. 2020. *Report of the Seventeenth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade of the Committee on Fisheries*. Vigo, Spain, 25–29 November 2019. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report No. R1307. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8665t>

¹⁶ FAO. 2022. *Committee on Fisheries: Report of the Eighteenth Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade* Committee on Fisheries – Virtual meeting, 8 April to 8 May 2022, and 7, 8, 9 and 20 June 2022. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, No. 1384. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc1513t>

coverage, inclusion of both developed and developing countries, neutrality, and reliance solely on factual information.

35. The inclusion of fisheries- and aquaculture-related provisions in RTAs has expanded significantly in recent years. According to FAO's Ag-ERP database,¹⁷ 164 such provisions were identified in 318 agreements signed between 1995 and 2022. While only a few RTAs signed between 1995 and 2001 included these provisions, their inclusion surged nearly ninefold in RTAs signed between 2018 and 2022, becoming more prominent and prevalent. Similarly, the World Bank's Deep Trade Agreement Database¹⁸ recorded 198 provisions relating to fisheries and aquaculture across 400 agreements from 1958 to 2023. Furthermore, the Trade and Environment database (TREND)¹⁹ identified 182 relevant trade provisions in 775 agreements signed between 1947 and 2021. As global trade policies increasingly incorporate sustainability concerns, RTAs are evolving into essential tools for promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture practices.

36. The current database developed by FAO will be available on the UNESCAP Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Adviser (TINA)²⁰ platform under the section on Emerging RTA Issue Areas.²¹ TINA is an online tool designed to assist trade policymakers, researchers, and consultants in performing various analytical tasks related to trade agreements. UNESCAP is a commission of the United Nations, focusing on the Southeast Asia-Pacific region, that fosters collaboration among its members to address sustainable development concerns. Although hosted by UNESCAP, TINA is an entirely global platform regarding data analysis, with partnerships within and outside Asia and the Pacific. Since its inception in late 2018, TINA has undergone a series of upgrades, including introducing trade agreement text and preferences analysis. Additionally, the cooperation with UNESCAP responds to the Sub-Committee's request to collaborate with other international organizations on ongoing efforts and avoid duplication of efforts.

37. Furthermore, in response to a request of the Sub-Committee during its 19th Session, FAO will also collaborate with UNESCAP to improve data distribution and facilitate increased access to the HS Codes for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products publication.²² The comprehensive list of unabridged HS codes for fisheries and aquaculture products will be incorporated into TINA, including online search capabilities and presenting the HS codes in a user-friendly style.

International Maritime Organization (IMO)

38. FAO and the IMO continue to cooperate in various fields, particularly in areas related to working conditions and the fight against IUU fishing – the Joint FAO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on IUU Fishing and Related Matters (JWG) serves as a vital instrument in this context.

39. In February 1999, the 23rd Session of COFI recommended establishing the JWG to address overarching issues concerning the re-flagging of fishing vessels and IUU fishing.²³ In April 1999, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development emphasized concerns regarding flag and port State responsibilities

¹⁷ Avesani, C., Dervisholli, E., Schéré, E. & Solorzano López, J. D. 2024. *Ag-ERPs database: a novel repository of environment-related provisions for agriculture, fisheries and forestry in regional trade agreements*. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc9645en>

¹⁸ World Bank. 2024. *Digital or Deep? Trade Agreements (DTA) Database*. [Cited 29 April 2025] <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/dta/table.html>

¹⁹ Université Laval. 2024. *TReND – Trade, Regulation and Nutrition for Development*. [Cited 29 April 2025] <https://www.chaire-epi.ulaval.ca/en/trend>

²⁰ UNESCAP. 2024. *Legal TINA – Trade Intelligence and Negotiation Adviser (Legal Module)*. [Cited 29 April 2025] <https://legal.tina.trade>

²¹ Emerging RTA Issue Areas refer to the topics that appear in fewer than 30 percent of trade agreements, according to World Bank data

²² FAO and WCO. 2023. *HS Codes for fisheries and aquaculture products – Harmonized System. Nomenclature 2022. Second edition, updated and expanded*. Rome and Brussels. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc6347en>

²³ FAO. Report of the Twenty-third Session of the Committee on Fisheries. Rome, Italy, 15-19 February 1999. FAO Fisheries Report. No. 595. Rome, FAO. 1999. 70p. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/x2930e>

and the necessity for collaboration between FAO and IMO to address issues related to IUU Fishing.²⁴ Consequently, the Secretariats of the IMO and FAO collaborated to establish the JWG. In March 2019, the 335th session of the ILO Governing Body also authorized its inclusion as a full JWG member.²⁵

40. The JWG facilitates coordination among the three international organizations to address IUU fishing and related issues, aligning with each organization's mandate: FAO addresses fisheries broadly, ILO focuses on labour conditions in the fishing industry, and IMO oversees maritime safety, security, and marine environmental protection. The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the JWG were amended and ratified by the 35th session of COFI²⁶ and the respective governing bodies of IMO and ILO in 2021 and 2022, respectively. The fifth meeting of the JWG took place in January 2024, during which 52 recommendations were approved.²⁷ These included enhancing cooperation at international, regional, and national levels, adhering to international instruments addressing IUU fishing and related issues, utilizing existing tools from the three organizations, and recommending environmental and labour aspects frequently associated with IUU fishing.

41. In December 2023, the FAO Global Study on integrating port State measures into the comprehensive framework of port State control was finalized in partnership with the IMO and ILO.²⁸ The fifth meeting of the JWG discussed strategies to enhance the coordinated execution of the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA), the IMO Cape Town Agreement, and ILO C188, along with other relevant international instruments from the three organizations.

42. In collaboration with IMO and ILO, FAO will offer training courses in the second half of 2025 on the coordinated implementation of international instruments related to fisheries, labour, and safety at national and regional levels. This capacity-building initiative will train national officials from fisheries and maritime authorities on the theoretical and practical aspects of the PSMA, the IMO Cape Town Agreement, and ILO C188 while clarifying the similarities and differences among the three instruments to facilitate coordinated implementation. This initiative will emphasize the essential collaboration among agencies for the coordinated execution of the three instruments, as well as for the oversight and regulation of foreign vessels involved in fishing and related activities concerning fisheries, safety, and labour issues; methodologies and tools for risk analysis and assessment; indicators of non-compliance; requirements and methods for information exchange; management of violations, non-compliances, and deficiencies; and the mitigation of risks associated with decision-making.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

43. The collaboration between FAO and ILO remains fruitful, with officials engaging in numerous meetings and discussions to provide technical contributions and data for advancing technical documents, guidelines, and initiatives. Collaboration on decent work in fisheries is continually developing and expanding following relevant global commitments, including SDG 8 and the SSF Guidelines.

44. The 36th Session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) recognized the collaboration between FAO and ILO. COFI urged FAO to enhance its support for developing countries regarding fishing safety issues and to spearhead the creation of a global repository for fisher safety data, as well as accident and mortality information, encouraging its Members, regional fishery bodies (RFBs), and other international organizations to exchange information and experiences on these matters.²⁹

²⁴ UN ECOSOC. 1999. *Commission on Sustainable Development – Report on the seventh session (1 May and 27 July 1998, and 19–30 April 1999)*. Official Records, 1999, Supplement No. 9 (E/1999/29). <https://www.un.org/esa/documents/ecosoc/docs/1999/e1999-29.htm>

²⁵ *Decisions Adopted by the Governing Body at Its 335th Session (March 2019) and Outcomes of the Discussions*. 2019. Geneva: ILO. https://ilo.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/delivery/41ILO_INST:41ILO_V2/1264479150002676

²⁶ FAO. 2023. *Report of the Thirty-fifth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, Rome, 5–9 September 2022*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, No. 1391. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3652en>

²⁷ FAO, ILO and IMO. 2024. *Recommendations Adopted – Joint FAO/ILO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Related Matters, 5th session*. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/07504654-7e31-48cd-800c-338d253cee44/content>

²⁸ FAO. 2023. *FAO Global Study on integrating port State measures into the broader framework of port State control*. Rome. Available at: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/cc9256en>

²⁹ FAO. 2024. *Report of the Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, Rome, 8–12 July 2024*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, No. 1459. Rome. Paragraph 16(f). <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd2423en>

45. In September 2024, FAO and ILO collaboratively convened an expert workshop to deliberate on and validate the completion of the FAO/ILO Updated Guidance concerning the mitigation of child labour in fisheries and aquaculture. Both organizations are committed to maintaining their partnership to implement this critical guideline document.

46. Furthermore, FAO continues to integrate the ILO Decent Work Agenda into fisheries and aquaculture by generating knowledge, advocating in regional and global forums, and providing policy support at the country level to achieve fundamental labour standards, enhance occupational health and safety, and improve access to social protection for fishers, fish workers, and fish farmers. Collaboration on the forthcoming International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) revision is also ongoing. It examines the relevant codes for the fisheries and aquaculture sector and the upcoming update of the ILO-FAO Guidance on child labour in fisheries and aquaculture.

47. Moreover, FAO is committed to organizing an expert workshop on decent working conditions in fisheries management. This workshop, conducted with the ILO and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), will provide national fisheries agencies with guidance to assist in implementing relevant ILO and IMO instruments that regulate fishers and industry workers throughout the supply chain. It follows the recommendation of the 5th session of the Joint FAO/ILO/IMO Ad Hoc Working Group on Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing and Related Matters. It will employ ILO research and tools and the upcoming FAO Scoping Study on Decent Work in Fisheries: Exploring Challenges and Evolving Legal and Policy Avenues for Strengthened Decent Work Standards.

World Trade Organisation (WTO)

The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and FAO's role in its implementation

48. The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (the Agreement),³⁰ adopted at the 12th Ministerial Conference of the WTO (MC12) in June 2022, marks a significant milestone in aligning global trade rules with environmental sustainability goals. The Agreement will come into effect when two-thirds of the WTO membership (111 WTO members) formally accept it.³¹

49. The Agreement focuses on subsidies to marine capture fisheries and introduces three main prohibitions:

- IUU fishing: Prohibits subsidies to vessels or operators engaged in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.
- Overfished stocks: Bans subsidies for fishing activities targeting stocks scientifically determined to be overfished.
- Fishing in the unregulated high seas: It restricts subsidies in areas beyond national jurisdiction not governed by regional fisheries management organizations or arrangements.

50. Furthermore, the Agreement requires WTO members to exercise caution when granting subsidies to vessels not flying their national flag or for fishing activities targeting stocks of unknown status. To enhance accountability, the Agreement mandates comprehensive reporting requirements that include the types and nature of subsidized fishing activities, stock status information, catch data, fisheries management measures, and lists of subsidized vessels and operators, including those involved in IUU fishing.

51. Implementing the Agreement will necessitate internal adjustments for many countries, including integrating fisheries-related elements into subsidy policies and establishing fisheries-related information,

³⁰ WTO. 2022. *Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies*. Adopted at the Twelfth Ministerial Conference, Geneva, 12–17 June 2022.

<https://docs.wto.org/dol2fe/Pages/SS/directdoc.aspx?filename=q:/WT/MIN22/33.pdf&Open=True>

³¹ As of 25 April 2025, 96 WTO members ratified the Agreement.

notification and management systems. The Agreement establishes the Fund to provide targeted technical assistance and capacity building to developing and least developed countries within this context.

52. FAO plays a critical role in advancing sustainable fisheries, aligned with its mission to eradicate hunger, reduce poverty, and promote sustainable resource management.³² Through its initiatives, FAO contributes to global food security, marine biodiversity conservation, and socioeconomic development of coastal communities. The role of FAO in implementing the Agreement can be succinctly described in two aspects: it will assist its Members and provide technical support to the WTO on fish-related matters.

53. The primary support FAO can provide Members, governed by the FAO CCRF are:³³

- Technical Support for Fisheries Management: FAO can provide expertise in data collection, stock assessments, and the creation of management plans to rebuild overfished stocks and improve fisheries governance.
- Implementation of International Agreements: FAO supports Members in implementing agreements, such as the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), to combat IUU fishing.
- Sustainability and Resilience Programmes: FAO promotes initiatives that strengthen aquatic ecosystems, support coastal communities, and ensure the sustainability of fisheries, balancing ecological conservation with economic growth.
- Development of Standards and Good Practices: FAO collaborates with RFMOs, national governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to develop standards and technical guidelines to foster responsible fisheries practices.

54. Additionally, implementation of the Agreement will be supported by several instruments, tools and information systems managed by FAO. These include, *inter alia*, the CCRF, the Compliance Agreement,³⁴ the PSMA,³⁵ the International Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter, and Eliminate IUU Fishing,³⁶ the International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity,³⁷ the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance,³⁸ FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes,³⁹ FAO Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear,⁴⁰ FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment,⁴¹ and the FAO State of Marine Fish Stocks Index.⁴²

55. The Agreement has also established a WTO Committee on Fisheries Subsidies for examining all information submitted by countries concerning subsidies that contribute to IUU fishing, addressing notification and transparency issues, annually evaluating the implementation and functioning of the Agreement, and providing countries with opportunities to consult on any matters related to the Agreement's operation or the advancement of its objectives. The WTO Committee on Fisheries Subsidies is expected to maintain ongoing cooperation and synergies with FAO and other relevant international organizations involved in fisheries management, particularly RFMOs.

³² FAO. 2024. *Fisheries and Aquaculture Division. Sustainable fisheries*. [Cited 29 April 2025] <https://www.fao.org/fishery/en/fisheries>

³³ FAO. Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. Rome, FAO. 1995. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/v9878e>

³⁴ FAO. 2024. *Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas (the Compliance Agreement)*. <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/fao-compliance-agreement/en/>

³⁵ FAO. 2024. *Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (PSMA)*. <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/psma/en/>

³⁶ FAO. International Plan of Action to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Rome, FAO. 2001. 24 p. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/handle/20.500.14283/y1224e>

³⁷ FAO. *International Plan of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/4/i0318e/i0318e03.pdf>

³⁸ FAO. 2015. *Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/voluntary-guidelines-for-flag-state-performance/en/>

³⁹ FAO. 2017. *Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/voluntary-guidelines-for-catch-documentation-schemes/en/>

⁴⁰ FAO. 2019. *Voluntary Guidelines on the Marking of Fishing Gear*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/responsible-fishing/markings-of-fishing-gear/voluntary-guidelines-marking-fishing-gear/en/>

⁴¹ FAO. 2023. *Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment*. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/resources/detail/en/c/1638082/>

⁴² Sharma, R., Barange, M., Agostini, V., Barros, P., Gutierrez, N.L., Vasconcellos, M., Fernandez Reguera, D., Tiffay, C., & Levontin, P., eds. 2025. *Review of the state of world marine fishery resources – 2025*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 721. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cd5538en>

56. FAO is also recognized as a core partner of the Fund in providing technical assistance and capacity building to developing and least developed countries for implementing the Agreement's requirements concerning pertinent fisheries-related elements. Furthermore, FAO is a member of the Technical Sub-Committee of the Steering Committee of the Fish Fund, which will support technical assessments of the grants.

The Second Wave of the Fisheries Subsidies Negotiations at the WTO

57. Upon adopting the Agreement at MC12, WTO members consented to continue negotiations concerning outstanding issues about additional disciplines on subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, as well as special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries. During the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO (MC13), which took place from 26 February to 2 March 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, WTO members were unable to finalize negotiations with a comprehensive agreement involving these topics.

58. FAO continues to provide technical assistance and knowledge resources to support the upcoming round of negotiations in line with earlier phases of WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies. This involves enhancing comprehension of the relevant FAO tools, methodologies, and techniques for sustainable fisheries, including offering the necessary technical inputs for WTO meetings when requested.

59. An example of knowledge dissemination that aligns with the fisheries requirements of the Agreement is the FAO Liaison Office in Geneva initiative, in collaboration with the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, of having a dedicated dialogue series called FAO in Geneva Fisheries Trade Talks. This series aims to enhance understanding of the global fisheries and aquaculture landscape, share existing and emerging FAO knowledge and tools for transforming aquatic food systems, promote their responsible and sustainable utilization and management, and support negotiations through technical capacity-building activities. To date, the sessions of FAO in Geneva Fisheries Trade Talks have focused on various topics, including: "Recent Trends in Fisheries and Aquaculture from a Trade Context," "Fisheries Stock Assessment and Sustainability," "Marine Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction and the Role of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations," "Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and the Role of International Instruments including the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies," and "Highlights from SOFIA 2024: Blue Transformation in Action".⁴³

60. Moreover, as in previous Ministerial Conferences of the WTO, FAO published two trade policy briefs in preparation for MC13, focusing on fish-related issues linked to the WTO's work. The first, "The Importance of International Trade for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products"⁴⁴, highlights the importance of international trade of fisheries and aquaculture products, particularly for developing countries, and notes the significance of small-scale fisheries. The second, "The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the Role of FAO,"⁴⁵ provides an overview of the Agreement and the role of FAO in the main disciplines of the Agreement. FAO will continue to assist Members in publishing fisheries-related Trade Policy Briefs in preparation for MC14.

Other topics relevant to the FAO's engagement with the WTO

61. In December 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between FAO and the WTO during the 28th UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, enhancing collaboration and expanding the partnership across the interconnections of agrifood systems, trade, fisheries, climate, environment, and nutrition. In fisheries, the MoU foresees cooperation in implementing the Agreement, covering projects financed by the Fund and the subsequent phase of fisheries subsidies negotiations.

⁴³ FAO Liaison Office in Geneva. <https://www.fao.org/geneva/our-activities/agriculture-and-fisheries-trade/en/>

⁴⁴ Lem, A., Castro de Souza, M. & Griffin, W. 2023. *The importance of international trade for fisheries and aquaculture products*. Trade policy briefs, No. 52. Rome, FAO <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc9061en>

⁴⁵ Lem, A., Castro de Souza, M., Toussaint, M., Bhakti, A. & Mateos, A. 2023. *The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the role of FAO*. Trade policy briefs, No. 53. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc9063en>

62. In addition, FAO continues to participate actively in WTO outreach events. For instance, FAO participated in the session “Leveraging Global Partnerships to Implement the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies for a Sustainable and Food-Secure Future”⁴⁶ held in the context of WTO’s 9th Global Review for Aid For Trade from 26 to 28 June 2024.

63. WTO also engages in outreach events organized by FAO, including workshops with other international organizations and activities. Additionally, it participates as an observer in the FAO Committee on Fisheries and its related sub-committees while organizing and conducting relevant side events. The WTO attended the most recent meeting of the FAO Committee on Fisheries in July 2024.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ WTO. 2024. *Worldwide push for sustainable fisheries highlighted at Aid for Trade Global Review*. [Cited 29 April 2025] https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news24_e/ffim_27jun24_e.htm

⁴⁷ WTO. 2024. *FAO Committee on Fisheries, Thirty-sixth session (COFI36) – Remarks by DDG Ellard*. [Cited 29 April 2025] https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news24_e/ddgae_10jul24b_e.htm