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INTERGOVERNMENTAL TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP ON AQUATIC GENETIC RESOURCES FOR FOOD AND AGRICULTURE
Fifth Session
Rome, 18–20 September 2024
REPORT OF THE THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

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COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES

Rome, 8–12 July 2024

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FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
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PREPARATION OF THIS DOCUMENT

This is the final version of the report as approved by the Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, held from 8 to 12 July 2024.

ABSTRACT

1. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held its 36th Session in hybrid modality from 8 to 12 July 2024. Significant outcomes of the Committee included:

   a) adoption of the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA) and requests for FAO's technical assistance and support for their implementation;

   b) strong support for Blue Transformation as a Programme Priority Area and roadmap and commendation of the 2024 edition of the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) report;

   c) emphasis on the importance of aquatic foods for food security and nutrition, and the crucial contribution of small-scale and artisanal fishers, fish farmers and fish workers;

   d) recognition of the important role of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and encouragement for Members to accelerate implementation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14;

   e) support for FAO's engagement in international agreements and processes, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, and requested continuation of FAO's technical assistance to Members in those processes;

   f) recognition of the need to continue to address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and requested FAO guidance on preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing;

   g) continued emphasis on the critical role of regional fisheries management organizations/arrangements (RFMO/As) and regional fishery bodies (RFBs) in achieving effective fisheries management, and called on FAO to continue supporting their work;

   h) recognition of the need to address biodiversity loss and climate impacts, and requested FAO to support Members develop adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk management solutions for fisheries and aquaculture;

   i) strong support for FAO's engagement in new and existing global biodiversity frameworks and fora such as the Global Biodiversity Framework and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and requested FAO support for Members in the ratification and implementation of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement);

   j) appreciation for the increasing global commitment to reduce marine plastic pollution, including from fisheries and aquaculture sources, and appreciated the contributions by FAO to the prevention and reduction of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG);

   k) welcomed the FAO fisheries and aquaculture priority actions for 2024–2025 and called for greater consideration of fisheries and aquaculture in the context of integrated water resources management (IWRM) approaches, and welcomed the suggested priority actions on fisheries and aquaculture;

   l) endorsement of the reports of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, and the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management.

2. The Committee on Fisheries brings to the attention of the Council and the Conference its findings and recommendations.

CONTENTS

Preparation of this document III

Abstract III

Opening of the Session 1

Adoption of the agenda and arrangements for the Session 1

Designation of Drafting Committee 1

State of world fisheries and aquaculture and progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and Related Instruments 1

Decisions and recommendations of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, 16–19 May 2023 3

Decisions and recommendations of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, 11–15 September 2023 4

Decisions and recommendations of the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, 15–18 January 2024 4

Combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing 5

Integrated water resources management in fisheries and aquaculture 6

The role of fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition 7

Impact of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture, and aquatic foods as a climate solution 7

The implications for fisheries and aquaculture of global biodiversity frameworks and agreements 8

Marine plastic pollution and fisheries and aquaculture 9

FAO's programme of work in fisheries and aquaculture under the FAO Strategic Framework 9

Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) of the Committee 10

Any other matters 10

Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session of COFI 10

Date and place of the 37th Session of COFI 10

Adoption of the Report 11

Appendix A. Agenda 12

Appendix B. List of delegates and observers 13

Appendix C. List of documents 57

Appendix D. Opening statement by Dr Qu Dongyu. FAO Director-General 59

Appendix E. Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) of the Committee on Fisheries2024–2027 61

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) held its Thirty-sixth Session from 8 to 12 July 2024. The session was convened in hybrid modality. The session was webcast, and the recording would be made available in the webcast archive on the FAO internet site.

2. The session was attended by 110 Members of the Committee, observers from 20 other FAO Members, the Holy See, by representatives from the United Nations and eight specialized agencies of the United Nations and by observers from 39 intergovernmental organizations, and 36 international non-governmental organizations. A list of delegates and observers is available as COFI/2024/INF/3 on the Committee's webpage and in Appendix B.

3. Mr Mohammed Ahmed Alghamdi, Chairperson, Thirty-sixth Session of COFI, opened the session and welcomed the participants.

4. Dr Qu Dongyu, Director-General of FAO, delivered an opening statement via video message. The text of the statement is available as COFI/2024/INF/4 on the Committee's webpage and in Appendix D.

5. Ministers of eight Members[1] and Vice-Ministers of six Members[2] made their statements.

6. The Committee welcomed the COFI High-Level Special Event on the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (VGSSF), commended the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines, and encouraged Members to continue implementing them.

7. The Committee appreciated the information shared on the 2nd Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) Summit, held prior to COFI 36, and encouraged FAO to continue holding SSF Summits prior to future COFI meetings.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SESSION

8. The Committee adopted the Agenda and Timetable for the Session. The adopted Agenda is attached as Appendix A to this Report. The list of documents which were placed before the Committee is shown in Appendix C.

DESIGNATION OF DRAFTING COMMITTEE

9. The following Members were elected to the Drafting Committee:[3] Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Gabon, India, Japan, Kuwait, Marshall Islands, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Russian Federation, Spain, Sudan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northen Ireland. Ms Emma Hatcher, Australia, chaired the Drafting Committee.

STATE OF WORLD FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE AND PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES AND RELATED INSTRUMENTS

10. The Committee:

a) <u>commended</u> FAO for the 2024 edition of the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) publication including its emphasis on Blue Transformation[4] to efficiently support Members, partners and key stakeholders, particularly small-scale fishers, to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

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[1] Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Maldives, Norway, Peru, South Sudan and United Republic of Tanzania.
[2] India, Liberia, Oman, Philippines, Spain and United States of America.
[3] The European Union and its Member States and Ukraine chose to disassociate themselves from the nomination of the Russian Federation as a member to the Drafting Committee, while the Russian Federation chose to disassociate itself from any member that disassociated itself from the nomination of the Russian Federation to the Drafting Committee.
[4] With reference to the 172nd Session of the FAO Council, Blue Transformation as FAO's Programme Priority Area and Roadmap.

b) reiterated that SOFIA is the only high-quality benchmark publication for global status and trends in fisheries and aquaculture, and congratulated FAO on the greater accessibility of SOFIA through a diversification of associated products, and the wide visibility achieved through the public launch of SOFIA at the high-level "Immersed in Change" conference in San Jose, Costa Rica, on 8 June 2024;

c) urged FAO, within its mandate, to continue enhancing the visibility and dissemination of fisheries and aquaculture issues within and outside FAO;

d) acknowledged the challenges faced by FAO in the timely release of the SOFIA publication before COFI meetings, and encouraged Members and FAO to work together to meet the reporting deadlines;

e) stressed that, as highlighted in the 2024 SOFIA report, effective fisheries management leads to stock recovery and increases catches, and encouraged FAO and its Members to continue efforts in this direction, seize every opportunity to make fisheries management more effective;

f) while noting variability between and within regions, expressed concern for the continuously degrading accumulated trends at the global level in the status of marine fish stocks, due to unsustainable practices, challenges from illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overcapacity and overfishing, climate change, loss of biodiversity and aquatic ecosystems degradation, and welcomed the progress made in some regions, emphasizing the need to improve fisheries management measures acknowledging the management challenges concerning fisheries undertaken by small-scale fishers, particularly multi-stock fisheries, including through strengthened collaboration with and within regional fisheries management organizations/arrangements (RFMO/As) and other relevant regional fishery bodies (RFBs), as appropriate;

g) stressed the important technical role of FAO in assessing and addressing, within its mandate, the impact of ongoing conflicts on fisheries and aquaculture sectors, while noting Members' interventions on this matter;

h) appreciated FAO's ongoing innovative methodological improvements to better reflect the regional and subregional status of fish stocks, taking into account the increasing number of stocks with assessments, and encouraged FAO to continue working in this regard;

i) underscored the importance of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in meeting current and future food security and sustainable growth needs, while achieving sustainable and resilient agrifood systems, and welcomed global initiatives to promote sustainable aquatic foods from marine and inland waters, including by addressing food loss and waste;

j) stressed the crucial contribution of small-scale and artisanal fishers, fish farmers and fish workers, and the need to promote gender equity and reduce inequalities in the fisheries and aquaculture sector; recognized the importance of the SSF Summit as a platform for small-scale fisheries actors to exchange views and express needs to secure sustainable small-scale fisheries, and continued to encourage the Summit be held every two years prior to COFI;

k) noted that for the first time, and according to the available statistics, the production of aquatic animals from aquaculture surpassed the production from capture fisheries, highlighting the importance of sustainable aquaculture in meeting food demands particularly in food deficit countries;

l) underscored the importance of capture fisheries and encouraged FAO to continue to provide the necessary technical support for sustainable fisheries management;

m) noted FAO's work regarding the report on institutional and economic perspectives on distant-water fisheries access arrangements and encouraged continued work on that issue;

n) reiterated the value of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (the Code) for achieving sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, and recognized the progress made in its implementation

since its adoption, while noting that further improvements in sustainable fisheries and aquaculture are needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

o) welcomed the record response rate to the questionnaire for monitoring the implementation of the Code and related instruments, the efforts of FAO in re-developing the questionnaire web-application, and called on FAO to continue supporting Members in the implementation of the Code and related instruments, including through the development of additional technical guidelines;

p) reiterated FAO's role in monitoring and reporting on the SDG 14 indicators under its custodianship, commended FAO's role in supporting Members' work to track their progress on SDG 14 indicators, and encouraged FAO to continue its integrated assessment of SDGs under its custodianship and those SDG targets that directly impact small-scale fisheries;

q) encouraged FAO to continue assisting Members in strengthening their capacity to collect, manage, analyse and communicate timely and disaggregated data to support decision-making processes, in close collaboration with RFMO/As and RFBs, where appropriate;

r) encouraged Members to accelerate the implementation of SDG 14 taking ownership in monitoring and reporting processes of the relevant 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development indicators for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture; and

s) called upon Members to increase their funding towards SDG 14, given the low levels of funding currently available in the framework of SDG 17 and other relevant sources of finance.

DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON AQUACULTURE, 16-19 MAY 2023

11. The Committee:

a) endorsed the report of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture (COFI:AQ);

b) highlighted the importance of aquaculture to food security and nutrition, livelihoods, economic development and human health, and its contribution to the SDGs;

c) adopted the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture (GSA) and noted their relevance to the implementation of the Blue Transformation roadmap;[5]

d) encouraged FAO to raise awareness of the GSA, promote good practices and seek funding to provide technical assistance and support in their implementation;

e) requested FAO to prioritize attention to small-scale aquaculture through capacity building, means of commercialization and biosafety practices;

f) appreciated FAO's work on biosecurity, aquatic animal health and antimicrobial resistance (AMR), including the designation of FAO Reference Centres for AMR, and noted continued activities in the context of One Health;

g) called for more prominent actions toward the improvement of gender equality and women's empowerment in aquaculture, and called on FAO to encourage and assist Members in compiling and disseminating disaggregated data;

h) recognized the need to build diversified sustainable agrifood systems and food sources through multiple approaches while noting the opportunities associated with sustainable seaweed aquaculture, and requested FAO to support sustainable seaweed aquaculture with technical assistance and capacity building;

[5] As a PPA and roadmap of FAO.

i) noted the importance of monitoring implementation of the Code and called on FAO to use the results from the FAO Expert Workshop to revise the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries Aquaculture Questionnaire;

j) encouraged the Secretariat to continue work on developing and disseminating case studies in line with the GSA; and

k) welcomed the kind invitation of the Government of Türkiye to host the Thirteenth Session of the COFI:AQ in Antalya, Türkiye (7–11 April 2025).

DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISH TRADE, 11-15 SEPTEMBER 2023

12. The Committee:

a) endorsed the report of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI:FT);

b) emphasized the adverse effects of non-tariff measures on international fish trade, urging Members to promote fair and equitable trade and remove unnecessary barriers to fish trade;

c) encouraged Members to accept the World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to bring it into force and complete further negotiations as soon as possible on outstanding issues to conclude a comprehensive negotiated agreement, and called for increasing technical cooperation between FAO and WTO;

d) stressed the importance of enhancing the efficiency and transparency of fisheries value chains and requested that FAO continue to provide technical expertise and support in this area, particularly regarding food loss and waste, market access, compliance with import requirements, traceability and the specific needs of SSF;

e) recognized the importance of harmonizing catch documentation, and encouraged Members to use the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes;

f) reiterated the importance of the scientific advice provided by FAO to other international instruments and mechanisms, particularly the Codex Alimentarius and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and encouraged FAO to engage with CITES with the aim of increasing harmony in the assessment of CITES listing proposals for aquatic species;

g) recognized the importance of the FAO Blue Ports Initiative in fostering regional cooperation and invited FAO and its Members to strengthen this cooperation;

h) invited FAO to accelerate the development of the FAO Guidance on Social Responsibility in the Fisheries and Aquaculture Value Chains;

i) highlighted the adverse effects of IUU fishing on national economies and the sustainability of fisheries, and valued FAO's work on the economic, trade and market impacts of IUU fishing;

j) requested FAO's assistance to address challenges in market access, fisheries statistics and cross-border trade, especially for SSF in the context of fish trade, including by updating the FAO ecolabeling guidelines to align with global instruments such as the VGSSF.

DECISIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE COFI SUB-COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES MANAGEMENT, 15-18 JANUARY 2024

13. The Committee:

a) endorsed the report of the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management (COFI:FM);

b) reaffirmed the role of COFI:FM as a technical forum to identify priority issues, and advance discussions and future work on how to improve fisheries management in line with the Code and related instruments;

c) encouraged FAO to develop and deliver a capacity development and training programme on data collection systems, stock assessment and fisheries management;

d) noted the need to address SSF management issues in the COFI:FM in support of the Code and of the implementation of the VGSSF;

e) confirmed the importance of considering and addressing IUU fishing, biodiversity loss and climate change impacts in relation to fisheries management actions and processes;

f) highlighted the importance of gender equity in fisheries management and requested the COFI:FM to continue including this approach in its work;

g) encouraged the Sub-Committee to further discuss the issue of distant water fishing vessels that are not subject to sufficient management and control, potentially having negative impacts on SSF especially in developing countries;

h) recalled the role of RFMOs, RFBs and arrangements in achieving effective fisheries management and called on FAO to continue supporting their work, including through the RFBs Secretariats Network;

i) encouraged FAO to facilitate expert work to fill data gaps and share expertise on stock assessment methodologies; and

j) called upon FAO to further increase its support to marine and inland regional and subregional organizations, and continue supporting the establishment of the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden aquaculture and fishery organization.

COMBATING ILLEGAL, UNREPORTED AND UNREGULATED (IUU) FISHING

14. The Committee:

a) noted the progress reported by FAO Members in combating IUU fishing and recognized the value of the information provided through the Code questionnaire to monitor the progress by FAO Members in implementing international instruments to combat IUU fishing;

b) called for enhanced coordination and effective implementation of international instruments, including through RFBs, and encouraged the uptake of internationally agreed practices and standards at national and regional levels;

c) reiterated the importance of vessel tracking in monitoring compliance and surveillance measures and high seas boarding and inspection, and looked forward to receiving the results of the global study on vessel tracking to be conducted by FAO;

d) welcomed the increase in Parties to the Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA), as well as concrete actions by Parties to enhance the implementation and effectiveness of the Agreement, including through the implementation of the Strategy to Improve the Effectiveness of the Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (the 'Bali Strategy') and the operationalization of the PSMA Global Information Exchange System;

e) urged Members and RFMOs to ensure that they have a comprehensive framework for monitoring and control of transshipment operations, taking into account the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, and called on FAO to support their work and monitor progress;

f) welcomed the technical assistance delivered through FAO's PSMA global capacity development programme, and called for its expansion and additional support to ensure effective and coordinated implementation of international instruments;

g) encouraged FAO to start identifying successful initiatives at national and regional levels to promote South-South and Triangular Cooperation in the context of combating IUU fishing;

h) acknowledged the view expressed in the background document that fishing activities of foreign fleets operating in national exclusive economic zones without the benefit of national or bilateral agreements is classified as IUU fishing, and requested COFI:FM to address this concern;

i) noted the recommendations from the fifth session of the FAO-ILO-IMO ad hoc Joint Working Group on IUU fishing and related matters, and requested COFI:FM to consider the outcomes of this session and of future sessions of the Working Group;

j) noted the conclusions of the expert workshop on the Compliance Agreement including identifying pragmatic options for the States Parties to the agreement, stressed the importance of building on the improvements achieved so far and to continue exploring the possibility to strengthen the implementation of the Compliance Agreement, encouraging that future work be based on flag state responsibility more generally, taking into account the provisions of the compliance agreement itself and other relevant instruments such as United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and the Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance as well as work on compliance in RFBs;

k) encouraged Members to design, implement and strengthen Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) regimes and effective accountability frameworks to combat IUU fishing, and to support the establishment of high seas boarding and inspection schemes in RFMOs where they do not currently exist, given their demonstrated contributions to filling gaps in high seas MCS regimes, supporting cooperation against IUU fishing and building MCS capacity in developing countries;

l) recognized the importance and challenges of identifying beneficial ownership of fishing vessels and encouraged COFI and its Sub-Committees to further consider this issue; and

m) highlighted the high priority Members place on combating IUU fishing, and encouraged FAO to source additional resources and funding to be allocated towards preventing, deterring and eliminating IUU fishing.

INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

15. The Committee:

a) recognized the need to consider fisheries and aquaculture in the context of integrated water resources management (IWRM) approaches;

b) welcomed the suggested priority actions on fisheries and aquaculture for IWRM, recommended further refinement of the goals and requested FAO to integrate inland fisheries and aquaculture in related work areas, including in global, regional, basin-level and national development agendas, and invited FAO to enhance partnerships and mobilize resources to design and implement these priority actions;

c) recognized the significant contributions of inland fisheries and aquaculture to food security, nutrition and sustainable livelihoods, and emphasized the importance of taking an ecosystem-based approach to their management including disease management and addressing AMR; and

d) acknowledged the importance of multi-sectoral and participatory management approaches in IWRM that promote sustainable resource use, support biodiversity and advance climate resilience, and encouraged FAO to support Members in enhancing capacities to manage inland fisheries and aquatic environments.

THE ROLE OF FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE IN FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

16. The Committee:

a) acknowledged the importance of aquatic foods as a source of protein as well as essential fatty acids and micronutrients for nutrition, food security and health;

b) underscored the role of aquatic foods to reduce malnutrition in vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons and refugees, among others through school feeding, nutrition and education programmes, and the important contributions of SSF as well as the diversity of gastronomic heritage in this regard;

c) recommended FAO to further study reducing food loss and waste, including post-harvest losses, and the potential of utilizing fish by-products in aquatic value chains to ensure the more sustainable production of aquatic foods;

d) called on FAO to provide technical assistance to Members with a view to integrating the role of aquatic foods in healthy diets and promoting the consumption of sustainable and safe aquatic foods, in alignment with national food-based dietary guidelines, where they exist, and national priorities;

e) recognized the importance of integrating aquatic foods in nutritional strategies, and the need to increase knowledge on the risks and benefits of aquatic foods, as recommended by the FAO/World Health Organization (WHO) expert consultation;

f) emphasized the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to ensuring that capture fisheries and aquaculture are sustainable with science-based management and to support Members, especially developing countries, in improving the collection, analysis, dissemination and use of high-quality, country-specific data on the consumption and nutrient composition, including food safety risk factors of aquatic foods;

g) noted FAO's collaboration with coalitions and networks[6] on sustainable food from the ocean and inland waters for food security and nutrition, and encouraged FAO to continue its technical support in this area; and

h) encouraged FAO to continue discussions on the contribution of SSF and sustainable aquaculture to food security and nutrition.

IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE, AND AQUATIC FOODS AS A CLIMATE SOLUTION

17. The Committee:

a) commended the work carried out by FAO in assessing, projecting and responding to the impacts of climate change on aquatic food systems, and welcomed the publication of the latest projections[7] of exploitable fish biomass up to 2100 under different climate scenarios, and encouraged FAO to disseminate the results of this publication and other scientific work;

b) requested FAO to provide guidance on adaptation, mitigation and disaster risk management in the sector, including aquaculture, recognizing the reference to climate change in the GSA;

c) encouraged FAO, in line with its Strategy on Climate Change 2022–2031, to continue supporting Members in conducting climate change vulnerability assessments, accessing climate finance, developing climate policy and strategies, and implementing suitable climate solutions, especially in developing countries, in particular in Small Island Developing States

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[6] Aquatic Blue Food Coalition, Global Action Network on Sustainable Food from the Oceans and Inland Waters for Food Security and Nutrition, Global Sustainable Aquaculture Advancement Partnership, and Center for Ecological Aquaculture.

[7] Blanchard, J.L. & Novaglio, C., eds. 2024. *Climate change risks to marine ecosystems and fisheries – Projections to 2100 from the Fisheries and Marine Ecosystem Model Intercomparison Project*. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 707. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cd1379en

(SIDS), Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), with due attention to small-scale fishing and farming communities, Indigenous Peoples, and other vulnerable groups;

d) acknowledged the role of RFBs in addressing climate change impacts on fisheries and ecosystems, encouraged Members to advance efforts to fully consider climate change in RFB conservation and management measures, appreciated FAO's engagement with RFBs on these issues, and encouraged FAO to facilitate information exchange and enhance regional cooperation and coordination with and among RFBs;

e) commended the development of a set of FAO actions on climate resilient fisheries and aquaculture, in support of the FAO Strategy on Climate Change for 2022–2031 and aligned with the Blue Transformation roadmap, and called upon FAO to mobilize additional resources to scale up climate change adaptation and mitigation solutions; and

f) welcomed the progressive discussions on aquatic foods under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and requested FAO to continue engaging with the UNFCCC and other relevant global fora, while encouraging Members to include consideration of aquatic foods into their Nationally Determined Contributions and National Adaptation Plans with the support from FAO.

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE OF GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORKS AND AGREEMENTS

18. The Committee:

a) welcomed FAO's progress in the implementation of the FAO Strategy on Mainstreaming Biodiversity across Agricultural Sectors, and related 2024–2027 Action Plan, in particular in relation to fisheries and aquaculture actions;

b) welcomed FAO's proactive work in engaging with new and existing global biodiversity frameworks and fora, including FAO's active participation in Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) meetings, and encouraged FAO to continue this in a well-planned and strategic manner;

c) urged FAO to support effective cooperation between fisheries and aquaculture bodies and environmental bodies at national and regional levels for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the context of fisheries and aquaculture, recognizing the important role of small-scale fishery and aquaculture actors in this regard;

d) called on FAO to integrate sustainable aquatic products into the broader implementation of bioeconomy programmes, especially those related to SSF, Indigenous Peoples and local communities;

e) recognized the role that RFBs play in considering biodiversity in the conservation and sustainable use of aquatic resources, and called on FAO to continue strengthening its support to RFBs, including through the RFBs Secretariats Network;

f) reiterated the important role of FAO in informing CITES parties of the best available scientific data and technical information on fisheries issues, including through the Expert Advisory Panel, and encouraged FAO to strengthen support to Members and RFBs in implementing CITES listings;

g) invited FAO to raise awareness, for all relevant stakeholders including Members and RFBs, on the implications of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (the 'BBNJ Agreement') for the fisheries and aquaculture sector and support Members, as appropriate, in the ratification and implementation of the Agreement;

h) encouraged Members, as appropriate, to actively participate in meetings of MEAs to contribute fisheries expertise to the discussions; and

i) highlighted FAO's contribution to information sharing on aquatic biodiversity in order to support Members' implementation of environmental instruments, including the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation, Sustainable Use and Development of Aquatic Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (GPA).

MARINE PLASTIC POLLUTION AND FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE

19. The Committee:

a) welcomed the increasing recognition of and global commitment to reducing marine plastic pollution, including from fisheries and aquaculture operations, and appreciated the contributions by FAO to the prevention and reduction of abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG);

b) encouraged FAO to further strengthen its activities to better understand the impacts of plastic pollution from fisheries and aquaculture sources, and provide technical guidance on its prevention and reduction;

c) called upon all countries to actively participate in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC) and Sub-Committee on Pollution Prevention and Response (PPR), specifically on discussions on the introduction of mandatory marking of fishing gear, and reporting of gear losses and under Annex V of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL);

d) noted that there are multiple parallel processes and discussions relevant to issues of plastics in the fisheries and aquaculture sector such as on the Voluntary Code of Conduct (VCoC) on sustainable use of plastics in agriculture under the FAO Committee on Agriculture and on a legally binding instrument on plastics under the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) of the UN Environment Programme, and requested coordination by FAO and Members to participate and contribute technical expertise within these processes to prevent contradictory outcomes;

e) appreciated FAO's collaboration with IMO in global and regional projects that prevent and reduce marine plastic litter from shipping and fishing operations, including ALDFG, such as the GloLitter Partnerships and regional projects; and

f) emphasized the need for interdisciplinary research, policy and legislative framework development, and testing and dissemination of fishing gear innovations that prevent and reduce plastic pollution from fishing and aquaculture operations in inland and marine environments.

FAO'S PROGRAMME OF WORK IN FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE UNDER THE FAO STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

20. The Committee:

a) considered FAO's Programme of Work in fisheries and aquaculture under the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31, and appreciated the significant results achieved since COFI 35;

b) welcomed and supported the continued presence of fisheries and aquaculture across the FAO Strategic Framework 2022–31 Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), and its contribution to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

c) highlighted the importance of Blue Transformation as a PPA and roadmap, reflecting FAO's vision to maximize the contribution of sustainable aquatic food systems to food security, nutrition and livelihoods;

d) appreciated the thematic alignment of the three COFI Sub-Committees to the three pillars of the Blue Transformation PPA and roadmap;

e) called upon FAO, including through its relevant Decentralized Offices, to work closely with relevant global, regional and subregional institutions and arrangements in supporting Members to collectively and effectively deliver the proposed programme of work on fisheries and aquaculture;

f) endorsed the specific technical areas of emphasis for 2024–2025 and beyond, along the three pillars of sustainable aquaculture, sustainable fisheries and sustainable value chains, noting the growing importance of the fisheries and aquaculture sector for food security, nutrition and livelihoods; and

g) urged FAO to continue supporting and promoting the importance of aquatic food systems in relevant regional and international fora.

MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK (MYPOW) OF THE COMMITTEE

21. The Committee:

a) approved the progress report of the Multi-Year Programme of Work (MYPOW) 2022–2025;

b) commended the Secretariat for the productive dialogue with Members through the COFI Bureau and the transparency exercised through frequent bureau meetings during the intersessional period;

c) reiterated the importance of the timely distribution of the COFI documents;

d) called on FAO to include in the MYPOW 2024–2027, under subparagraph 18 (b) that as from COFI 37, all the COFI session documents be uploaded on the COFI website as soon as they are available in all language versions and, in any case, at least four weeks before the COFI session;

e) requested the Secretariat to review and apply good practices in the running of the Committee and its Sub-Committees;

f) stressed the importance of ensuring that aquatic food systems, including aquatic food systems transformation in accordance with national contexts, priorities and capacities, as appropriate, are adequately reflected and considered in the FAO's programme of work in relation to its Strategic Framework 2022–31; and

g) approved the proposed MYPOW 2024–2027 (Appendix E), including items discussed as priority areas during the Session of COFI 36 and amended with subparagraphs (d), (e) and (f) above.

ANY OTHER MATTERS

22. No other matters were raised by the Committee.

ELECTION OF THE CHAIRPERSON AND VICE-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE 37TH SESSION OF COFI

23. The Committee elected Mr James Brown (New Zealand) as Chairperson and the representative of the Group of Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC) in the COFI 37 Bureau as First Vice-Chairperson. Canada, Ecuador followed by Chile, France, Lebanon, Philippines and South Africa were elected as Vice-Chairpersons.

DATE AND PLACE OF THE 37TH SESSION OF COFI

24. The Committee agreed that the 37th Session of COFI will be held in Rome in the third quarter of 2026. The exact date would be determined by the Director-General in consultation with the COFI Bureau, for presentation to the next FAO Council, in December 2024, and 44th Session of the FAO Conference in June 2025.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT

25. The Report of the 36th Session of COFI was adopted, after incorporating all changes agreed upon by consensus, on 12 July 2024.

APPENDIX A

Agenda

1. Opening of the Session
2. Adoption of the Agenda and arrangements for the Session
3. Designation of the Drafting Committee
4. State of world fisheries and aquaculture and progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments (*for information and discussion*)
5. Decisions and recommendations of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, 16–19 May 2023 (*for information and endorsement*)
6. Decisions and recommendations of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, 11–15 September 2023 (*for information and endorsement*)
7. Decisions and recommendations of the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, 15–18 January 2024 (*for information and endorsement*)
8. Combatting Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing *(for information and discussion)*
9. Integrated water resources management in fisheries and aquaculture (WCP)[8]
10. The role of fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition (*for information and discussion*)
11. Impact of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture, and aquatic foods as a climate solution (*for information and discussion)*
12. The implications for fisheries and aquaculture of global biodiversity frameworks and agreements (*for information and discussion)*
13. Marine plastic pollution and Fisheries and Aquaculture (*for information and discussion*)
14. FAO's Programme of Work in fisheries and aquaculture under the FAO Strategic Framework (*for information and discussion)*
15. Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) of the Committee (WCP) (*for information and discussion*)
16. Any other matters (*for information*)
17. Election of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairpersons of the 37th Session of COFI
18. Date and place of the 37th Session of COFI
19. Adoption of the Report

[8] Item subject to Written Correspondence Procedure

APPENDIX B

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OFFICERS OF THE COMMITTEE AT THE THIRTY-SIXTH SESSION

Chairperson:	Mr Mohammed Ahmed Alghamdi (Saudi Arabia)
First Vice-Chairperson:	Mr James Brown (New Zealand)
Vice-Chairpersons:	Chile, Malaysia, Norway, Senegal and United States of America

DRAFTING COMMITTEE

The Committee elected Ms Emma Hatcher (Australia) as Chairperson of the Drafting Committee, with the following membership: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Gabon, India, Japan, Kuwait, Marshall Islands, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Russian Federation, Spain, Sudan and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northen Ireland.

FAO FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE DIVISION

Assistant Director-General and Director:	Mr Manuel Barange

SECRETARIAT

Secretary:	Ms Alice McDonald
Drafting Committee:	Mr Matthew Camilleri

APPENDIX C

List of documents

COFI/2024/1/Rev.1	Provisional Agenda
COFI/2024/2	State of the world fisheries and aquaculture, progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 indicators under FAO custodianship
COFI/2024/3	Decisions and recommendations of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, 16-19 May 2023
COFI/2024/4	Decisions and recommendations of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, 11-15 September 2023
COFI/2024/5	Decisions and recommendations of the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, 15-18 January 2024
COFI/2024/6	Integrated water resources management in fisheries and aquaculture (WCP)
COFI/2024/7	The role of fisheries and aquaculture in food security and nutrition
COFI/2024/8	Impact of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture, and aquatic foods as a climate solution
COFI/2024/9	The implications for fisheries and aquaculture of global biodiversity frameworks and agreements
COFI/2024/10/Rev.2	Marine plastic pollution and Fisheries and Aquaculture
COFI/2024/11	FAO's Programme of Work in fisheries and aquaculture under the FAO Strategic Framework
COFI/2024/12	Multi-year Programme of Work (MYPOW) of the Committee on Fisheries: A progress Report of MYPOW 2022-2025 and a Draft MYPOW 2024-2027 (WCP)
COFI/2024/13	Towards coordinated and effective implementation of international instruments, mechanisms and tools to combat IUU fishing
COFI/2024/INF/1/Rev.1	Provisional timetable
COFI/2024/INF/2/Rev.3	Provisional list of documents
COFI/2024/INF/3	Provisional list of participants
COFI/2024/INF/4	Statement by the Director-General

COFI/2024/INF/5/Rev.1	Annotations to the Provisional Agenda
COFI/2024/INF/6	Report of the Thirty-fifth Session of the Committee on Fisheries, 5-9 September 2022
COFI/2024/INF/7	Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture
COFI/2024/INF/8	Report of the Twelfth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, 16-19 May 2023
COFI/2024/INF/9	Report of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, 11-15 September 2023
COFI/2024/INF/10	Report of the First Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, 15-19 January 2024
COFI/2024/INF/11	Statement of Competence and Voting Rights submitted by the European Union and its Member States
COFI/2024/INF/12	Safety at sea in the fishing industry
COFI/2024/INF/13	Stocktaking of the 10th anniversary of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication
COFI/2024/INF/14/Rev.1	Social protection for Blue Transformation
COFI/2024/INF/15	A regional framework among Regional Fishery Bodies: Scaling up cooperation and coordination towards sustainable fisheries
COFI/2024/INF/17	Blue Transformation actions on climate resilient aquatic food systems - Supporting the FAO Strategy on Climate Change
COFI/2024/INF/18	Bioeconomy for sustainable food and agriculture
COFI/2024/INF/19	Progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments
COFI/2024/INF/20	Fisheries and aquaculture within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG 14)

APPENDIX D

Opening statement by Dr Qu Dongyu
FAO Director-General

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The FAO Committee on Fisheries – COFI – is the largest global gathering of policymakers, experts and partners in the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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,

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.

Thank you.

APPENDIX E

MULTI-YEAR PROGRAMME OF WORK (MYPOW) OF THE COMMITTEE ON FISHERIES 2024–2027

I. OVERALL OBJECTIVES FOR THE COMMITTEE

1. The Committee on Fisheries (COFI) shall:[9]

   a) review the programme of work of FAO in the field of fisheries and aquaculture and their implementation;

   b) conduct periodic general reviews of the world situation in fisheries and aquaculture, as well as challenges of an international character, and appraise them and their possible solutions with a view to concerted action by countries, FAO, and other intergovernmental bodies;

   c) review specific matters relating to fisheries and aquaculture referred to the Committee by the FAO Conference, Council, or the Director-General, or placed by the Committee on its agenda at the request of a Member under the Rules of Procedure of the Committee, and make recommendations as appropriate;

   d) consider the importance of preparing and submitting to Members an international convention under Article XIV of the Constitution to ensure effective international cooperation and consultation in fisheries and aquaculture on a global scale; and

   e) report to the Council or advise the Director-General, as appropriate, on matters considered by the Committee.

II. RESULTS FOR 2022–2025

A. Review of the World Situation in Fisheries and Aquaculture

2. Result:

   The FAO Conference, Council, and international community, as appropriate, are provided with updated information and specific guidance on the global situation in fisheries and aquaculture, and in relation to the specific issues of significance addressed during the planned Committee sessions.

3. Indicators and targets:

   Clear, precise, and consensual recommendations based on updated information on the global situation in fisheries and aquaculture are presented to the Conference and Council as a solid basis for its guidance and decision.

4. Output:

   Clear, precise and consensual recommendations are favourably considered by the Conference and the Council for its recommendations and decisions.

5. Activities:

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[9] Rule XXX.6, General Rules of the Organization.

The Committee is informed of the current global state of fisheries and aquaculture, including the report on the State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA).

Specific issues of current importance are also covered during the scheduled Committee sessions.

6. Working methods:

SOFIA and pertinent documents are prepared in advance to provide a solid basis for discussion at the Committee.

B. Strategy and Priority Setting and Budget Planning

7. Result:

The Committee's decisions and recommendations provide a solid basis for the recommendations and decisions of the Conference and Council on strategy, priorities, programmes, and budget for the Organization.

8. Indicators and targets:

a) The Committee promotes the FAO's Questionnaire on the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) to improve response rates.

b) Members respond to the FAO Questionnaire on the implementation of the Code and provide relevant information on fisheries and aquaculture for FAO via the Committee and its Sub-Committees.

c) Clear and specific recommendations are made by the Committee to the Council regarding the strategies, priorities, programmes and budget for fisheries and aquaculture.

d) The Committee's recommendations made on the Strategic Framework, the Medium-Term Plan and the Programme of Work and Budget are reflected in the Council Report.

9. Outputs:

The report of the Committee that provides clear, precise and consensual recommendations for the Council on sectoral strategies, priorities, programmes and budgets.

10. Activities:

a) Review decisions and recommendations from the Sub-Committees on Fish Trade, Aquaculture, and Fisheries Management, statutory bodies and other relevant organs or institutions.

b) Review advice from the Regional Conferences in the field of fisheries and aquaculture.

c) Review the implementation of the Programme of Work and Budget in fisheries and aquaculture.

d) Develop recommendations on the strategies, priorities, programmes and budget in fisheries and aquaculture.

11. Working methods:

a) Close consultation with the Chairperson and other Bureau Members.

b) Close collaboration with relevant FAO Divisions, Centres and Offices.

c) Liaise with the Sub-Committees on Fish Trade, Aquaculture, Fisheries Management, and other statutory bodies.

d) Liaise with the Finance Committee on financial and budgetary matters.

e) Liaise with the Programme Committee on strategy and priority matters.

f) Report the outcome of the Committee on programme and budgetary matters to the Council appropriately.

C. Advice on Global Policy and Regulatory Matters

12. Results:

The Committee's decisions and recommendations provide a solid basis for the Conference's recommendations and decisions on global policy and regulatory matters.

13. Indicators and targets:

a) Members obtain value from the deliberations of the Committee, using the advice and recommendations to guide domestic actions and policies as reported by FAO.

b) Clear and specific recommendations are made by the Committee to the Conference regarding global policy and regulatory matters in its areas of mandate.

c) The Committee’s recommendations made on global policy and regulatory matters are reflected in the Conference Report.

14. Output:

The report of the Committee provides clear, precise and consensual recommendations for the Conference on policy and regulatory frameworks or instruments.

15. Activities:

a) Review the status of relevant international instruments in areas of competence of the Committee.

b) Consider possible solutions with a view to support concerted action by Members themselves or collectively through FAO and other relevant bodies in areas of competence for the Committee.

c) Ensure that aquatic food systems are consistently taken into consideration by other areas in FAO, including other governing bodies.

16. Working methods:

Report the outcomes of the Committee on global policy and regulatory issues to the Conference appropriately.

III. EFFECTIVE WORK PLANNING OF THE COMMITTEE

17. Result:

The Committee works effectively and efficiently in an action-oriented, inclusive way.

18. Indicators and targets:

a) The focused agendas are properly elaborated.

b) The COFI documents, including SOFIA, are to be uploaded on the COFI website as soon as they are available in all FAO languages, and in any case at least four weeks before the session commences.

c) The sessions are conducted in an efficient and effective manner.

d) MYPOW is appropriately implemented.

e) Reports are concise and contain specific action-oriented recommendations to both the Council and the Conference.

19. Outputs:

a) Focused agendas and concise reports containing specific action-oriented recommendations to both the Council and the Conference.

b) Report published only electronically.

c) COFI documents, including SOFIA, made available according to agreed schedules.

d) Progress reports on MYPOW and draft MYPOWs prepared and made available for the following four years.

20. Activities:

a) Review and apply good practices in the running of the Committee and its Sub-Committees.

b) Formulate focused agendas in close consultation with the Bureau in a timely manner

c) Prepare results-oriented COFI documents, including SOFIA, and make them available in a timely manner.

d) Consider ways to improve the conduct of sessions more efficiently and effectively, including more efficient use of the time available, and the elaboration of new intersessional working methods.

e) Recognizing the importance and usefulness of side events facilitates more focused and coordinated side events in line with key issues addressed in the main sessions.

f) Facilitate further coordination and collaboration with Sub-Committees and other Technical Committees.

g) Pay continued attention to effective arrangements for drafting the final reports.

IV. WORKING METHODS

21. The Committee collaborates with statutory and other bodies under FAO auspices, liaises with the Programme Committee on strategy and priority matters, and with the Finance Committee on financial and budgetary matters, as well as other relevant FAO Governing Bodies.

22. The Committee liaises with other international organizations active in the areas of fisheries and aquaculture.

23. The Committee undertakes regular intersessional activities facilitated by the Chairperson and the Bureau with support from the Secretariat. Liaison among the Bureaus of the Committee and the Sub-Committees is also further strengthened.

24. It encourages and facilitates the participation of observers, including civil society organizations.

25. The Chairperson liaises with FAO through the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division.

The Thirty-sixth Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) was held in Rome, Italy, from 8 to 12 July 2024. This is a report of the Session reflecting the discussions which took place and containing all recommendations and decisions taken by the Committee. A synopsis of the outcome of the Session is presented in the abstract and all supplementary information is included in the appendices.

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