



2nd Oceans Forum: Trade-related aspects of SDG 14

Enabling sustainable and integrated seafood and living marine resources, value chains and related services

UNCTAD, FAO, UN Environment, UNECE, Commonwealth, ACP Group, and IOI
Palais des Nations, Room XXVI, 16-17 July 2018

Meeting report

The 2nd Oceans Forum, held on 16-17 July at the Palais des Nations in Geneva was jointly organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE); United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment); the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP); the Commonwealth Secretariat; and the International Ocean Institute (IOI). About 149 people attended, of which 50 were government representatives, 41 were IGOs, 19 were NGOs, 20 academia and 19 private sector representatives.

1. The Forum was a follow-up of the 1st Oceans Forum on trade-related aspects of Sustainable Development Goal 14 held in Geneva in March 2017, which focused on the fight against Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, harmful fisheries subsidies, and access to markets and resources by small-scale fisheries, as well as other negative impacts on oceans and fisheries to overcome, such as plastic pollution¹. Following this 1st Oceans Forum, UNCTAD, FAO and UN Environment jointly issued a voluntary commitment at the UN Conference on Oceans held on 5-9 June 2017 in New York, to support member countries with technical assistance, capacity building and information dissemination on the trade-related aspects of SDG 14². The UN Conference underlined the importance of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as guidance for the work on oceans, and endorsed an ambitious declaration entitled “Our Ocean, Our Future: Call for Action” confirming Member States, civil society, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders’ commitment to support the implementation of SDG 14³.

¹ <http://unctad.org/en/pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=1299>

² http://unctad.org/meetings/en/SessionalDocuments/U14ditc_d16_FishSub_Statement_en.pdf

³ <https://oceanconference.un.org/callforaction>

2. The aim of this 2nd Forum was to identify opportunities and challenges that sustainability and further integration of the seafood value chain and related services may present within the framework of the ocean-based blue economy. It also aimed to review achievements, major actions undertaken, and challenges for the joint voluntary commitment made at the UN Oceans Conference on July 2017, and to share and disseminate good practices and successful experiences encountered by the co-organizers and other relevant stakeholders.
3. The global relevance of SDG 14 was widely acknowledged by participants, including the nutritional and socio-economic importance of fisheries and aquaculture, and the extreme and urgent need to revert the current trend in oceans' health decline. The focus of this year's Forum was placed on sustainable fisheries and seafood trade, bringing attention to the link between seafood value-chains, their related logistical services and the ocean-based blue economy⁴. Forum participants agreed that an opportunity exists to build on the substantial momentum to implement actions towards the achievement of SDG 14 targets.
4. Key SDG 14 targets for trade-related aspects of seafood and living marine resources, value chains and related services, and targets 14.4 and 14.6 in particular, which are due to be achieved by 2020, were highlighted. These targets focus on restoring fish stocks to sustainable levels in the shortest time possible and prohibiting certain forms of harmful fisheries subsidies as well as refraining from introducing new ones that could contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Further trade-related targets to be achieved by 2030 were also discussed including increasing the economic benefits to Small Island Development States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) from the sustainable use of marine resources' (14.7) and 'providing access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets' (14.b).
5. The relevance of this Forum, as a unique platform for discussion of trade-related fisheries topics and sharing of experiences and best-practices between all relevant stakeholders, was highly appreciated by speakers and participants during their interventions. Speakers also looked forward to sharing and hearing about the accomplished results at the 2nd UN Oceans Conference to be held in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2020.
6. The UNCTAD-FAO-UN Environment background note titled "Achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Sustainable fish and seafood value chains and trade" was presented, offering participants a comprehensive and state of the art overview of the status of fish and seafood value chains and discussing the role of trade to support the implementation of SDG 14 targets, along with recent work undertaken by various organizations in this connection.
7. Global trends show that fisheries and aquaculture are of critical nutritional and economic importance: in 2016, worldwide fish production was estimated at 171 million tons, with about 660 to 880 million people's livelihoods dependent on the sector, according to FAO data. Consumption has doubled since 1973, and while capture fish production has stagnated over the years, the demand for fish and seafood continues to rise. Increasing demand has been met by a major growth in aquaculture production over the past years. While in the late 1970s the fish supplied by aquaculture accounted for a mere 7% of total production, it now amounts to over 50%.
8. Although aquaculture may present opportunities to decrease the pressure on fish stocks, panellists highlighted that this rapid growth has been possible in several areas due to unsustainable fisheries and aquaculture management practices, leading to major challenges, such

⁴ <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=1831>

as overfishing and the degradation of fish stocks, habitats, ecosystems and biodiversity. Furthermore, climate change poses serious risks to fishing and fish farming communities. Other issues that need to be addressed with urgency involve IUU fishing, overcapacity of fleets, harmful fisheries subsidies and destructive fishing practices. Although both capture fishing and aquaculture present major concerns regarding the sustainable management of resources and ecosystems, each of them has specific characteristics that should be addressed separately, to ensure the restoration of oceans and aquatic resources and ecosystems.

9. Fish and seafood remain one of the most traded food commodities in the world, with around 38 per cent of world production entering international trade. More than half of this production originates in developing countries, mainly contributing to regional and local economies in SIDS and LDCs. In this context, capacity development, financial and technical assistance, as well as technology transfer is required and of great importance to advance sustainable fisheries and aquaculture management in these countries.
10. Agreements and commitments towards the sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources have been undertaken. The major challenge lies in identifying the most effective ways to accelerate efforts to implement those commitments, and meet the target deadlines, in particular for earlier targets due in 2020. It was additionally stated that there is a compelling urge in the sector to obtain reliable, quantitative data to support decision-making and determine correct thresholds for future actions.
11. Moving forward, FAO-UNCTAD-UN Environment have presented, with the support of Member States, a proposal for an SDG 14 Trade-Related Joint Plan of Action for achieving relevant targets in support of sustainable fish and seafood value chains, in connection with the commitment submitted at the UN Ocean Conference. This Action Plan foresees short-term (by 2020), mid-term (by 2023 to 2025) and long-term (by 2030) implementation periods of concrete activities aimed at building a structured and coherent dialogue on key issues to accelerate and scale up successful experiences and solutions. At the Forum, key issues discussed by panelists included: the state of fish stocks and aquaculture socio-economics; government support measures (subsidies/non-tariff measures) and the fight against IUU fishing; responses to the needs of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture operators, available options and scaling up of good practices for trade in fisheries services and for the creation of fisheries clusters; promoting the uptake of voluntary sustainability standards, Blue BioTrade, eco-labelling, traceability systems and catch documentation schemes. In addition, it was highlighted that a fish to dish sustainability approach is needed to allow consumers to make informed decisions using standards and certification schemes. On a bigger scale, international financing for sustainable fisheries should also be investigated, allowing small-scale fisheries to develop more feasible strategies towards sustainability.
12. Government subsidies had a significant place in the discussions throughout the Forum. Whereas subsidies may also have positive effects by supporting sustainable fisheries management, a large portion of subsidies results in negative, harmful effects contributing to overcapacity and overfishing. Economic, environmental, as well as social impacts of fisheries subsidies are deeply concerning. This has led to a significant decline of fish stocks, overall decline in the health of ecosystems, as well as suboptimal economic returns. However, a lack of transparency in this matter makes it very hard to gain accurate data and does not allow comprehensive understanding on the complete scope of current subsidies and their respective characteristics. Emphasis was placed on the need to adhere to transparency initiatives which may facilitate data analysis to support subsidies negotiation processes, as well as on devising an approach towards defining

which subsidies are considered harmful and which are not. Finally, it was mentioned that special needs and certain flexibilities for developing countries could be considered.

13. Another underlying issue is that fisheries subsidies have been reported to promote unfair competition, fostering greater inequality between large fleets and individual artisanal fishermen. Data presented showed that 84% of all such subsidies benefit large-scale stakeholders. One participant underlined, however, that there is no need to deprecate large-scale or long-distance fleets, as sustainable fisheries management must be enhanced for both small-scale and large-scale fleets to ensure the successful achievement of SDG 14 and its trade-related targets.
14. Although technical work has significantly advanced since the WTO decision on Fisheries Subsidies at the 11th Ministerial Conference, political impetus remains necessary to harness meaningful change to meet the new deadline. Views were expressed on how sustainability of fish, seafood and other aquatic resources value chains could be increased through an ocean-based blue economy approach. According to one speaker, the blue economy is currently worth around 24 trillion US dollars and thus signifies an important economic force. In this context, it was emphasised that trade remains an essential motor to enhance the ocean's sustainable development and trade policy must support and enable the correct implementation of an ocean-based blue economy. For this to be achieved, countries must have the capacity to negotiate and design trade-related agreements, policies and practices at local, national, as well as international levels.
15. Innovative approaches and successful experiences from selected developing countries towards implementing environmental and social sustainability in seafood and algae value chains were presented. Participants were reminded of the importance of these approaches to fight not only unsustainable fisheries management, but in a much broader sense, the current biodiversity crisis, characterized by a massive extinction of species, including marine creatures.
16. Opportunities around the concepts of value addition and creation, and value chain integration were discussed during the meeting. Special focus was placed on the implementation of tools aimed at improving the performance and integration of value chains, including private/public voluntary standards, codes, strategic planning, and criteria adapted to the marine environment. However, one participant remarked that when speaking about developing countries, the implementation of these tools must be articulated with specialized organizations and dedicated programs to trade assistance (AidForTrade) and encouraged the organizers to further collaborate with the International Trade Centre (ITC) at the next Forum to complement on opportunities for technical assistance for commerce.
17. Concerns about the need to change unsustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture have translated into increasing requests for traceability of international fish trade and certification according to sustainability standards. To promote common sustainable solutions, it was noted that higher levels of cooperation, knowledge sharing, and harmonization efforts, with the involvement of major industry players, are necessary. The participants were introduced to multiple initiatives addressing these concerns, such as the UN/CEFACT standard—the UN Fisheries Language for Universal Exchange (UN/FLUX), which constitutes the first communication tool to digitally collect and disseminate fishery catch data for sustainable fishery management and for detecting and combatting IUU. The use of sectoral marks and voluntary codes of conduct to improve the sustainability of the tuna value chains was also introduced as an opportunity to improve the sustainability and traceability of these value chains in several regions, such as the cases presented by Ecuador and Malta. Finally, CITES permits allow certification that a catch was

lawfully obtained, safeguarding the sustainable management of a great variety of species, and protecting the endangered ones.

18. Sharing best practices and innovative solutions was one of the Forum approaches towards accelerating experience dissemination and upscaling of sustainable practices. The UNCTAD BioTrade Initiative offered a promising solution towards promoting sustainable bioprospecting, showing how the promotion of trade and investment in BioTrade products and services can contribute to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. An ecosystem-based management system was also recommended as a holistic approach to species preservation and oceans management. The Maldives showcased best practices for small-scale artisanal fisheries to sustainably manage their fish stocks, in an eco-friendly manner. In the Maldives, fishing is done 99% using pole and line, creating no discards, delimiting protected areas, and providing good reporting to trace the value chain. Net fishing, trawling, blast and poison are prohibited while coral mining is restricted.
19. Innovative business models were also discussed, such as bio products made of cultivated algae, which respect artisan fishery work and provide a potential source of income increase for small-scale fishermen. Such examples also demonstrated that innovative solutions can provide a way to accelerate technology transfer and restoring biodiversity in developing countries. New developments in the identification of alternative sources of marine protein from bycatches and fish discards, as well as innovative uses of jellyfish as a source of collagen, and the development of marine bioactive compounds, are areas which remain to be explored in greater depth.
20. The fish and seafood value chains depend on the actions implemented in services and logistics that support pre-harvesting, capture/harvesting, processing, certification and distribution of seafood products: In terms of destination, 46% percent of fish currently used for direct human consumption is live or chilled, 12% percent is dried or salted, 30% is frozen and another 12% is prepared or preserved. All these services have a direct impact on the levels of competitiveness, value addition, and integration of the value chain.
21. The information presented on the fisheries sector trade map showed that both developing and developed countries have important amounts of imports and exports in the fisheries sector, moving away from the traditional trend that portrayed developing countries as exporters of unprocessed materials and primary products only. Containerization also has led to the possibility of trading at lower costs, facilitating the diversification of destinations, increasing value-added services at ports and providing opportunities for better authority controls.
22. Nevertheless, the substantial role of transport and logistics also presents several challenges towards enabling sustainability throughout seafood value chains. One of the challenges discussed during the Forum was the transshipment of catches at high seas. Although it may provide increased flexibility and logistics-related benefits, it is prohibited in some countries' regulations, and it makes it difficult to gain accurate data in terms of legality, traceability and sustainability of fishing, which is transshipped at high seas. The question remains on the best way to combat illegal fishing and human rights violations when transshipment occurs in high seas.
23. Good practices were showcased for supporting services both in the areas of large-scale, long-distance as well as small-scale coastal fishing. A case study from Spain highlighted the importance of fisheries in areas where all supporting services present linkages and inter-industrial relationships to this sector, therefore generating broader employment opportunities. The cases of the Galicia fisheries-related services cluster and the Blue Growth initiative at the Vigo Port provided good practice examples in this area. The presentation on the Argentinian fisheries sector

showcased some of the country's good practices regarding small-scale fisheries, with the recent opening of a new port in Puerto Madryn exclusively for artisanal fisheries, a national council with binding regulations for fleets in Argentinean waters and the requirement for a legal fishery catch certificate to disembark in any Argentinean port. The Argentinian case highlighted the importance of research and development, and close cooperation with scientific knowledge institutions to support sustainable fisheries and the seafood value chain.

24. To enable the necessary paradigm to pivot towards sustainable and integrated seafood and living marine resources, value chains and related services, the development of a Joint Plan of Action by UNCTAD, FAO and UN Environment was recommended to support the achievement of relevant SDG targets. The achievement of these targets requires an integrated, interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach, alongside stakeholders designing, implementing and streamlining policies, mobilizing finance, and applying innovations that integrate good practices, as the ones presented during this 2nd Oceans Forum. This will undoubtedly require new partnerships and enhanced cooperation.
25. Improving data collection, transparency, analysis and information sharing on the state of fish stocks and aquaculture, as well as capacity building and training in this area, is of utmost importance for addressing overfishing, overcapacity, IUU fishing, and harmful fisheries subsidies. This requires prompt and close collaboration between researchers, fisheries managers, policy makers, and stakeholders to meet the 2020 deadline.
26. Achieving the trade-related targets of SDG 14 requires the appropriate use of policies, investment and innovations to restore the productive capacity of the oceans and to increase economic benefits through sustainable marine-based value chains, particularly for coastal developing countries including SIDS and LDCs. These innovations may include ecosystem and precautionary based approaches, access and benefit sharing, and community and fisher-friendly practices. Traceability and electronic messaging systems such as the UN/CEFACT FLUX standard can help prevent illegally caught fish from entering the marketplace, reduce overfishing, and promote sustainable fisheries management, and were encouraged for adoption.
27. Global value chains in fishing involve a wide range of supporting services such as port, shipping, transport and distribution activities in which developing countries are increasingly participating. Connectivity, sustainable transport, and resilient port infrastructure are essential to bring seafood and other marine products to market competitively. However, several practices such as the transshipment at high seas need to be duly regulated.
28. The 2nd Oceans Forum – jointly held by FAO, UNCTAD, , UN Environment, UNECE, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the ACP Group and the IOI - served as a platform to facilitate trade policy debate and interaction among the convened stakeholders and with governments. It offered the opportunity for countries to share local and national experiences and successful outcomes, and to discuss challenges encountered in implementing SDG 14 targets. The continuation of such dialogue at the annual Oceans Forum, together with country-level capacity building work and knowledge creation will be key to support countries in effectively delivering SDG 14 commitments. Following guidance by governments and other stakeholders, the proposed Joint Plan of Action will outline concrete next steps and provide a means of implementation and a sound basis to effectively support Member States in these efforts. As a concluding remark, the Chair reminded all participants that timely implementation of SDG 14.4 and SDG 14.6 by 2020 is essential not only to advance the 2030 Agenda but to actually improve the health of the oceans. If the international community fails to meet these targets in time, this will affect the achievement of other SDG targets as well.

