



Advice

Thirty-Seventh Session of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries

Brussels, 5 August 2026

1. Background

In 1965, the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) established the Committee on Fisheries¹ as an inter-governmental forum to address issues related to fisheries and aquaculture. The Committee meets every two years in Rome, Italy.

The thirty-seventh session of the Committee on Fisheries will take place from 7 to 11 September 2026. The European Commission will prepare the mandate for the EU's position at the session. The Market Advisory Council (MAC) has requested to be part of the EU delegation, as done on previous occasions. According to information shared by DG MARE, the FAO will launch, at the end of July, a Written Correspondence Procedure to consult the parties on the agenda items.

Last year, the MAC provided advice to the European Commission on the session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade². Under the Work Programme of Year 10 (2025-2026), the MAC committed to providing advice on the EU's mandate for the next session of the FAO's Committee on Fisheries.

2. State of world fisheries and aquaculture and progress in the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related instruments

¹ <https://www.fao.org/cofi/en>

² [MAC Advice on "Twentieth Session of the FAOs Sub Committee on Fish Trade" \(20 August 2025\)](#)

The MAC welcomes the findings of the latest FAO State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) report³, which confirms both the challenges faced by global fisheries as well as the progress achieved through science-based fisheries management. While climate change, biodiversity loss, marine pollution, geopolitical instability and uneven fisheries governance continue to put pressure on marine resources, the report also demonstrates that effective management delivers results. Although 62.4% of assessed marine fish stocks are biologically sustainable, 72,6% of global marine fishery landings originate from biologically sustainable stocks, highlighting that many of the world's most productive fisheries are managed sustainably. These findings reinforce the importance of continuing to strengthen fisheries management based on the best available scientific advice.

Although the SOFIA report highlights traceability as a critical factor for the future of aquatic food systems, the MAC expresses disappointment with the lack of direct references to strengthen end-to-end traceability in fisheries value chains, including the promotion of standardised Critical Tracking Events (CTEs) and Key Data Elements (KDEs). The FAO's 2023 guidance document on advancing end-to-end traceability⁴ highlighted the KDEs and CTEs contained within the GDST Standard, framing them as the benchmark for achieving standardised collection and transfer of data. The FAO's 2022 paper on understanding and implementation of catch documentation schemes⁵ underscored the importance of aligning national monitoring, control and surveillance tools with the GDST Standard to enhance effectiveness. In the 2024 SOFIA report, the FAO used KDEs set out in the GDST Standard as an example of the key data pieces and events that should be identified at the point of harvest in the supply chain to combat IUU fishing.

³ [FAO, The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2026 – Blue Transformation: turning vision into impact \(2026\)](#)

⁴ [Blaha, F., Vincent, A. & Piedrahita, Y., 2023, Guidance document: Advancing end-to-end traceability – Critical tracking events and key data elements along capture fisheries and aquaculture value chains, Rome, FAO](#)

⁵ [FAO, 2022, Understanding and implementing catch documentation schemes – A guide for national authorities. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries No. 14, Rome](#)

At the previous session of the Committee on Fisheries, which took place in 2024, FAO members were encouraged to provide feedback on the methodological review of the SOFIA resources. The FAO expressed interest to expand the focus of the resources to more small-scale fish stocks. Under the proposed tiered evidence framework, stocks lacking data for a traditional stock assessment could instead be considered via a “weight-of-evidence” evaluation. Therefore, the MAC would welcome an update on the mentioned methodological review.

The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries⁶ remains a cornerstone of global fisheries governance. Thirty years after its adoption, its principles continue to provide a comprehensive framework for ensuring the sustainable use of aquatic resources, responsible aquaculture, effective fisheries management and fair trade. Continued implementation of the Code, together with its related international instruments, should remain a priority for all FAO members. Implementation should promote capacity development, market access, social and gender equality, and international trade and food security.

Continued international cooperation is important to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 14⁷ and the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Achieving these objectives requires balanced policies that integrate environmental sustainability with food security, economic development and social well-being. Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture contribute directly not only to SDG 14, but also to ending hunger (SDG 2), promoting decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), supporting responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), and strengthening international partnerships (SDG 17).

The entry into force of the World Trade Organisation’s Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies represents an important milestone in strengthening global fisheries governance. Its

⁶ <https://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/international-framework/code-of-conduct-for-responsible-fisheries/en/>

⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal14>.

implementation should support the elimination of harmful subsidies while safeguarding legitimate fishing activities, resilient seafood supply chains, and global food security.

Fishery and aquaculture products play a vital role in global food security, nutrition and livelihoods. As demand for aquatic food continues to grow, sustainably managed capture fisheries and responsible aquaculture are complementary sectors that will both be essential for meeting future food needs. Therefore, policies should support their continued development, while ensuring the long-term conservation of aquatic resources. For the EU, where the vast majority of the consumption of fishery and aquaculture products depends on external sources, resilient and sustainable global supply chains are of strategic importance. The EU importing and processing sector plays a key role in connecting responsibly managed fisheries and aquaculture producers around the world with EU consumers, while generating employment and economic value throughout the supply chain.

The EU should promote:

- Recognition, under the SOFIA report, of the importance of end-to-end traceability in fisheries value chains, including the promotion of standardised CTEs and KDEs;
- The implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and related international instruments by all FAO members, including through the prioritisation of fisheries management capacity development, market access, social and gender equality, climate change, and international trade and food security;
- Continued international cooperation to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 14 and the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through balanced policies that integrate environmental sustainability with food security, economic development and social well-being;

- Science-based fisheries management, strengthening of Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), capacity development in developing countries, and international cooperation on monitoring, control, traceability, and the fight against IUU fishing;
- Sustainability policies that are practical, proportioned and based on scientific advice, ensuring that international trade and well-functioning global value chains contribute to resilient food systems, including via continued cooperation between governments, international organisations, and stakeholders, for the provision of healthy, affordable and sustainable fishery and aquaculture products to a growing global population.

3. Decisions and recommendations of the Twentieth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade, 8-12 September 2025⁸

The Sub-Committee on Fish Trade (COFI Fish Trade) is a key forum to advance sustainable and regenerative practices in the production, harvest, and trade of aquatic foods. As highlighted by the 2025 session of the Sub-Committee⁹, inadequate transparency, traceability, and IUU fishing practices remain a clear threat to the management and trade in both fisheries and aquaculture. IUU fishing results in an estimated loss of \$10-20 billion USD per year.

The MAC welcomes that the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade recognises the need for harmonisation and standardisation to allow for efficient tracking and tracing along the supply chain. The MAC takes the opportunity to welcome the development by FAO of technical documents and guidance to strengthen end-to-end traceability in fisheries value chains, including the promotion of standardised CTEs and KDEs.

⁸ [MAC Advice on “Twentieth Session of the FAOs Sub Committee on Fish Trade” \(20 August 2025\)](#)

⁹ [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations \(FAO\), Report of the 20th Session of the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade: Virtual meeting, 8–12 September 2025, Rome, FAO \(2026\)](#)

The EU should promote:

- Maintaining open, transparent and rules-based international trade, recognising its essential contribution to global food security, resilience fisheries and aquaculture value chains, consumer choice, and the competitiveness of the sector;
- Continuing strengthening of international cooperation through the FAO, the World Trade Organisation, RFMOs, and other relevant international organisations to promote sustainable fisheries, combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and improve fisheries governance;
- Supporting the implementation of the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, accompanied by adequate technical assistance and capacity development, particularly for developing countries, to ensure effective implementation, while safeguarding legitimate fisheries, supply chains, and food security;
- Promoting practical, interoperable, and risk-based traceability and catch documentation systems, consistent with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes, ensuring that digitalisation facilitates trade, improves transparency and avoid unnecessary administrative burdens, particularly for small-scale operators and developing countries;
- Strengthening of capacity development and technical assistance to enable all actors in the value chain to comply with international standards and improve market access.
- Efforts to promote fishery and aquaculture products as a healthy, nutritious and sustainable food through evidence-based consumer information and awareness initiatives, while addressing the decline in consumption in the EU¹⁰;

¹⁰ [European Market Observatory for Fisheries and Aquaculture Products \(EUMOFA\), Consumption of fishery and aquaculture products in the EU, European Commission \(2026\)](#)

- Preservation of predictable international trading conditions, as international cooperation should continue to support transparent, non-discriminatory and predictable trade – rising tariffs, increasingly complex non-tariff measures and diverging regulatory requirements risk disrupting global value chains, increasing costs and reducing consumer access to fishery and aquaculture products;
- Sustainability and competitiveness as mutually reinforcing objectives – future international initiatives should continue to balance environmental sustainability, food security and economic competitiveness, ensuring that new measures are science-based, proportionate and practical for operators through the value chain;
- Strengthening of climate resilience through adaptive fisheries management – as climate change increasingly affects fish stocks and supply chains, greater international cooperation, science-based management and knowledge sharing will be essential to maintain resilience fisheries and markets;
- Continued uptake of tools and technologies, including electronic monitoring in national and regional bodies, including RFMOs, to promote on-the-water monitoring and transparency, advance traceability of fishery and aquaculture products, address fishers' safety, and combat IUU fishing;
- Respect and inclusion in dialogues and legislation for the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, and other fishers engaging in small-scale fisheries for nutrition and livelihoods, while considering how international trade dynamics can impact local and national accessibility to aquatic foods.

4. Progress in addressing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing through international, regional and national actions

The MAC welcomes the progress achieved, in recent years, in addressing IUU fishing through international, regional, and national initiatives. The FAO Agreement on Port State Measures Agreement¹¹ remains a fundamental instrument to prevent IUU-caught fish from entering international markets. The MAC welcomes the growing adoption of the Agreement.

Digitalisation of catch documentation and traceability systems can play an important role in improving transparency and combating IUU fishing. However, the implementation of the EU CATCH IT system has shown the importance of ensuring that digital platforms are fully operational, interoperable and supported by appropriate guidance and technical assistance before becoming mandatory. Challenges identified, including limited readiness in some third countries, interoperability issues, technical problems and additional administrative burdens for operators, highlight the need for close cooperation between authorities and industry across the supply chain.

The lack of on-the-water data remains a major obstacle to sustainably managing global fisheries. On-the-water monitoring technology, including electronic monitoring, is ready to scale today. There are cases of successful implementation, for example in the Chilean industrial hake fishery, providing for a drastic reduction in discards and improvements in bycatch-safe handling and release.

The EU should promote:

- Further ratification and effective implementation of the Port State Measures Agreement;
- Continued cooperation between the FAO, RFMOs, World Trade Organisation Members, and national authorities to strengthen monitoring, control and surveillance, improve

¹¹ <https://www.fao.org/port-state-measures/en/>

information exchange and ensure the effective implementation of fisheries management measures;

- Capacity development and technical assistance, particularly for developing countries, to strengthen fisheries governance, inspection capacity, digitalisation and traceability systems;
- Uptake of the CATCH IT system by third countries, including through interoperability and capacity development;
- Internationally recognised standards, including through a simple, interoperable, and proportional risk-based approach, in line with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes, under future digital traceability initiatives – digitalisation should support compliance and facilitate legitimate trade, while avoiding unnecessary obstacles for compliant operators, in particular small-scale producers and developing countries.
- Science-based, targeted and proportionate measures to combat IUU fishing, focusing enforcement efforts where the risk of illegal activities is highest, while ensuring that sustainable and legal trade is not unnecessarily restricted;
- Greater harmonisation and interoperability between national and regional traceability systems, to contribute to an improvement in compliance and a reduction in unnecessary burdens across global value chains;
- The efforts made under the revised Fisheries Control Regulation towards fully documented fisheries;
- Data collection for the unreported and unregulated small-scale sector, so that assessments of the conditions of the stocks are possible, facilitating the science-based management of these fisheries;
- The undertaking of a study to explore how standardised digital data from the industry, such as that of GDST, could contribute to Global Information Exchange System processes.

5. The role of FAO and regional fisheries bodies in supporting implementation of International Agreements relevant to fisheries and aquaculture, including the BBNJ Agreement, the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, and CITES decisions on aquatic species

The MAC considers that the FAO and regional fisheries bodies play an important role in supporting the implantation of international agreements relevant to fisheries and aquaculture, including the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the BBNJ Agreement and CITES decisions concerning aquatic species. Strengthened coordination between the FAO, the World Trade Organisation, RFMOs and other relevant international bodies is essential to ensure a coherent and effective implementation.

The EU should promote:

- The role of the FAO in providing technical assistance, promoting knowledge exchange and supporting capacity development, particularly for developing countries, in the context of the World Trade Organisation's Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies;
- Acknowledgement for the different realities and capacities of countries and regions in the implementation of international commitments, to avoid disproportionate impacts on legitimate fishing activities and supply chain;
- Capacity development focused on improving governance, data collection, scientific capacity and compliance systems, while also ensuring that adopted measures contribute effectively to the fight against IUU fishing and the sustainable management of marine resources;

- Science-based decision making and effective cooperation with RFMOs, as these play a key role in the conservation and management of shared fish stocks and in ensuring that international rules are applied consistently;
- In the context of the BBNJ Agreement, international cooperation aimed at ensuring that conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction, while also promoting a balanced and science-based approach, ensuring that conservation measures do not result in disproportionate restrictions on sustainable fishing activities or unjustified exclusion of fisheries from traditional fishing grounds;
- Continued cooperation between the FAO and RFMOs in the preparation for the implementation of the BBNJ Agreement, including through (a) dedicated time in RFMO meetings agendas to discuss BBNJ, (b) increased capacity to RFMO Secretariats and Scientific Committees to properly engage, (c) discussions on the current timelines and decision-making of RFMOs and effective exchanges with BBNJ bodies, and (d) discussions on cooperation mechanisms with other RFMOs and regional fisheries bodies to ensure a whole-of-government ecosystem approach to high seas management;
- Regarding CITES decisions on aquatic species, measures that are based on robust scientific evidence and that contribute to the sustainable management of marine resources, while ensuring that trade restrictions are proportionate, effective and do not undermine sustainable production of fishery and aquaculture products and supply chains;
- Acknowledgement for the growing importance of digital documentation and automatic verification of credentials, including through standardised digital data.

6. Supporting small-scale fisheries and aquaculture, including inland fisheries, and elevating their contributions to food security, nutrition and livelihood support

The MAC recognises the important contribution of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture to food security, nutrition, employment and the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. Small-scale producers, particularly in developing countries, play an important role in local and regional economics and contribute to the supply of fishery and aquaculture products traded internationally.

The EU should promote:

- The objectives of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and the Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, including the promotion of sustainable practices, improved governance, capacity development and fair participation of small-scale operators in value chains;
- Consideration for the specific circumstances and capacities of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture operators when introducing new regulatory requirements, including those related to traceability, data collection, and sustainability reporting – many small-scale producers face significant challenges in complying with increasingly complex digital and administrative requirements, which may create barriers to their participation in formal markets and international supply chains;
- The development of practical, proportionate and accessible solutions, supported by adequate capacity development and technical assistance, to ensure that small-scale producers can progressively meet new requirements without being excluded from markets - traceability systems should improve transparency and sustainability while remaining workable throughout the value chain, including at the point of origin;
- A balanced approach to ensure that sustainability objectives are achieved while maintaining the diversity and resilience of global supply chains, which rely on products originating from a wide range of fisheries and aquaculture systems;

- Increased attention as well as increased science and management resources for small-scale fisheries, to avoid capacity and data limitations that perpetuate overfishing and ecosystem degradation, including due consideration for traditional harvest strategies and their unique characteristics in terms of geographical setting, size, diversity, and variability of operation.
- Acknowledgement of the limitations faced by small-scale fisheries in the ongoing move in supply chains towards digital data and traceability;
- Increased attention for the stewardship of fragile inland fisheries and ecosystems, including support of community-based co-management and more tools and training, as Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women fishers and fish processors, often have the capacity and resources to effectively manage fisheries and freshwater ecosystems.

7. FAO's Programme of Work in fisheries and aquaculture under the FAO Strategic Framework

The MAC recognises the important role of the FAO in supporting the sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture and welcomes the objectives of the FAO Strategic Framework 2022-2031 and of the Blue Transformation Roadmap. These initiatives provide an important framework for addressing key global challenges, including sustainable resource management, food security, climate change adaptation and the promotion of responsible aquaculture development. The MAC acknowledges the progress made by the FAO in strengthening global cooperation, improving scientific knowledge, supporting capacity development and promoting sustainable fisheries and aquaculture practices. Continued work on data collection, innovation, technology transfer and knowledge sharing remains essential to support evidence-based decision-making and effective implementation of international commitments.

The MAC welcomes that the FAO Strategic Framework Programme Priority Areas focus on digital agriculture as a means of providing transparent markets and trade. As there are clear synergies with the fisheries and aquaculture sector, when it comes to the development of digital solutions, the FAO should not operate in silos. Digital solutions can be applied across commodities, facilitating uptake by the retail sector.

The EU should promote:

- A balance approach that recognises the essential contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to global food security, nutrition and livelihoods – sustainability must remain central, while policies and programmes should also consider the importance of ensuring stable supplies, supporting the resilience and competitiveness of the value chain, and facilitate access to sustainable fishery and aquaculture products for consumers;
- Strengthened cooperation between the FAO, governments, regional fisheries bodies and stakeholders across the value chain, including processors and traders – a comprehensive value-chain approach is essential to ensure that sustainability initiatives are practical, effective and contribute to a resilient global fisheries and aquaculture sector;
- Innovation, responsible aquaculture growth, improved traceability systems and capacity development, under the future actions of the Blue Transformation Roadmap, while ensuring that the new requirements are proportionate and adapted to the different realities of the fisheries and aquaculture systems worldwide;
- Greater discussions on country progress in the adoption and implementation of the FAO Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, to facilitate a better understanding of the successes, challenges, and lessons learned.