

FAO COFI-34: February 1-5, 2021

## **Canada's Introductory Statement**

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Thank you Chair, honorable delegates, and colleagues.

I am pleased to participate in this exceptional and important virtual session of COFI on behalf of Canada, and I would like to thank the Food and Agriculture Organization for organizing this meeting, and for making efforts to adapt it to a virtual format. We look forward to discussing the challenges and opportunities on the agenda and ways forward to address them, including the many and varied impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the fisheries and aquaculture sector.

We thank the FAO for its early and ongoing analysis of the breadth and depth of this global crisis. We continue to identify new ways in which the pandemic is impacting the sector, and will need more than ever to work together towards sustainable, global economic recovery, ensuring that we build back better.

On a positive note, we have been looking forward to celebrating with all of our colleagues this week the 25th Anniversary of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, a seminal document in establishing global standards and best practices for sustainable management and conservation. In this same regard, we are happy to have helped facilitate the development of the Declaration for Sustainable Fisheries and Aquaculture. With the support of the Secretariat and the commitment of delegations we have worked hard to ensure this is a document that could achieve consensus, and we look forward to its endorsement at COFI's High-Level Special Event.

We appreciate the work that has been done on an intersessional basis since the last session of COFI to explore how we can better address the need for dedicated discussions of fisheries management issues, such as the challenges faced by both large and small-scale fisheries. Given the breadth of the COFI agenda, we feel it is crucial to devote the appropriate time and space needed for deeper consideration of capture fisheries within the COFI structure.

Canada will continue to support this ongoing exploration and analysis, and we hope that it will lead to concrete options being presented to COFI-35 on a way forward.

Since we last met in 2018, the Government of Canada has taken further strides to make conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources a top priority. Our Minister of Fisheries, Oceans, and the Canadian Coast Guard recently introduced changes to Canada's *Fisheries Act* to prioritize the maintenance of healthy fish stocks and the rebuilding of depleted fish stocks that are prescribed by regulation.

Bordered by three oceans, many of Canada's coastal communities depend upon fisheries for livelihoods, as well as for social and cultural value. The changes to our Fisheries Act further incorporate modern safeguards so that fish and fish habitats are protected for future generations. Canada's fisheries will be a key part of a blue economy that encompasses protection and prosperity, and the benefits of which will be realized by our coastal and Indigenous communities.

Combatting IUU fishing remains a priority for Canada, and we see the need to redouble our global efforts to eradicate the problem. It is evident that global food security, and economic recovery and stability depend directly on healthy and productive ecosystems, and the sustainable management of fish stocks. IUU fishing is antithetical to those values. We take note of the progress made on the Global Record of Fishing Vessels, as well as the

ongoing global progress to implement the Port State Measures Agreement. Having ratified the Agreement, Canada is in an even stronger position to push for its implementation. We need to work together to ensure there is no safe haven for these products or for those who take part in IUU activity. We look forward to working with all of you in this endeavor.

Canada would like to thank the FAO for the SOFIA 2020 Report, and for its timely release in July 2020. We note the worrying trend of stocks that are fished beyond biologically sustainable levels, and that, disappointingly, 2020 came and went without the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14.4 to end the overfishing of marine fisheries. However, as SOFIA rightfully points out, this outcome leads us more than ever to the conclusion that improving fisheries management measures – measures that are based on the best available science advice and adherence to the precautionary approach – is the key to increasing the viability and sustainability of the world’s fish stocks. As supported by the positive rebuilding trends – effective management is conservation. Canada will continue to actively advance these efforts for sustainable fisheries as a member of several regional fisheries management organizations.

Canada also recognizes that other stressors on the world's oceans, including from the impacts of climate change, make it even more challenging to achieve sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. To achieve long-term food security for the planet and environmental sustainability, the FAO and its members must do more to tackle these broader areas of work.

As a maritime nation with active fisheries and aquaculture sectors, Canada is committed more than ever to improving our understanding of the impacts of climate change on fisheries, and in particular, on fisheries management.

We see changes in our marine ecosystems as never before: changes in migration patterns of fish stocks and marine mammals; significant declines due to water temperature changes; and, in the Arctic, we are seeing record high temperatures with melting ice presenting a wide range of impacts. I cannot overstate the challenges these changes are having on Canada's coastal communities. They underscore the importance of sharing our knowledge and best practices to learn and adapt as we go.

We look forward to the release by the FAO of a technical report, which has been developed in follow up to an expert workshop that Canada co-hosted with the FAO in 2019. The goals of the workshop and subsequent report were to identify best practices and guidance for adapting fisheries

management regimes to be more flexible and responsive to unforeseen environmental and ecosystem changes that result from climate change. We see a clear need for more practical guidance on mainstreaming climate change considerations in fisheries management. As such, Canada would like to see the FAO take steps towards the development of technical guidelines for adapting fisheries management plans to climate change. Canada recognizes that there are data gaps yet to be addressed before guidelines can be produced. To this end, further field work needs to be conducted in order to ensure tools and mechanisms can be adapted to individual contexts. Given this complexity, we propose that the FAO take an iterative approach in further identifying and carrying out the work that needs to be undertaken as a basis for the future development of technical guidelines on adaptive management of fisheries in response to climate change.

To support this approach, Canada is prepared to work with the FAO and interested COFI members to establish a roadmap towards the development of guidelines, and to help to build on the momentum of this critical work being done by the FAO.

Chair, COFI is the forum to make progress on all the priorities I have highlighted here. We look forward to working with you, and all delegations on these issues over the coming week and intersessionally.

Thank you.

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