

Economic Commission for Europe
UNECE Executive Committee
Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries
Third session
Geneva, 4 February 2020

**Report of the Third Session of the UNECE Team of
Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries**

I. Introduction and attendance

1. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Team of Specialists (ToS) on Sustainable Fisheries held its third session on 4 February 2020. The session was attended by 29 delegates and experts representing national government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The following UNECE member States were represented: Albania, Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal. The following Non-UNECE member States participated in the meeting: Thailand and Mongolia. The following United Nations (UN) Bodies and Organs participated in the meeting: UNECE, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Representatives of the following intergovernmental organizations participated: the European Commission Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE). The North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Representatives of the following non-governmental organizations and private sector participated: Fondazione Acquario di Genova, the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of wild flora and Fauna (CITES) and World Wildlife Federation (WWF).

II. Opening

2. The Chair of the Team of Specialists of Sustainable Fisheries recounted the development process of the UN/FLUX standard, whose objective is to promote and improve information exchange, develop and manage data and support scientific research on fisheries. He highlighted the need to do more work to further develop and implement the standard and to assist all interested countries and relevant partners with its implementation. The ToS has an important role in the further implementation of UN/FLUX as it is a platform to develop information and promotion materials, to exchange experiences in the implementation and to discuss the role of UN/FLUX to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14, which commits humanity to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources. UN/FLUX is also an important instrument to support measures which are currently discussed at the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies as it supports the fight to combat illegal, unreported and undocumented (IUU) fishing, preserves local fish stocks and supports coastal communities that rely on fisheries.
3. During his keynote introducing speech, the Ambassador of Portugal underscored that electronic information exchange was paramount to manage sustainably trade information and systems to tackle IUU fishing. In that regard, the UN Ocean Conference (2nd – 6th June 2020), co-hosted by the Governments of Kenya and Portugal, intends to go a step further by drawing synergies and pursuing

joint efforts to conserve and sustainably use the ocean resources. Delegations will be invited to set out action plans to take stock of actions taken and priority issues to address at a key momentum in the achievement of SDG 14 by 2030. Since the work of the UN/FLUX standard highly facilitates international forces to prevent, mitigate and address unsustainable fishing, there will be opportunities for collaboration and interaction between the ToSSF and participants of the 2020 Ocean Conference.

4. On behalf of the Director of the Trade Division, the Chief of the Trade Facilitation Section further opened the meeting by stressing the important role of the Team of Specialists to support the implementation of sustainable fisheries management and control practices through exchange and sharing of standards based and electronic fisheries information among all stakeholders.
5. To this end the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) has developed the UN Fisheries Language for Universal exchange (UN/FLUX), a global standard, which helps improve fisheries information management, and plays a key role in preventing overfishing and the collapse of global fish stocks. With this standard, Fishery Management Organizations around the world have, for the first time, a common language for the collection and dissemination of the fishery catch data needed for sustainable fishery management and for detecting and combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Additionally, the development of reliable, up-to-date data on fish catches will improve research in science-based fishery management. UN/FLUX, which is a global UN standard, has already come under the spotlight for its high acceptance rate among fishers and traders. It is currently used in all European Union (EU) member States, while other countries across the globe are working towards its implementation, including Thailand and Brazil.

IV. Progress on Programme of work

6. The Chair introduced document ToSSF/2020/INF.3 which reports on the progress in the implementation of the programme of work. He recalled that the overall objective of the ToS is to contribute to integrated maritime governance by promoting, facilitating and supporting the implementation of fishery data standards on a global scale, including UN/FLUX. Finally, he provided an overview of activities undertaken under Work Area 1: Policy dialogue and advice; Work Area 2: Technical monitoring, assessment and guidance; Work Area 3: Communication and outreach; and Work Area 4: Capacity building, to achieve such objectives. Within the Programme of Work, he noted the team had made significant progress. The Chair invited missions to submit nominations for the vacant position of Vice Chairs to the Secretariat.
7. The Chair reported that the Fisheries Open Source solution community (FOCUS) which was working on the development of an open source software solution for UN/FLUX message exchanges had decided to terminate their work. That spurs the need to find alternative ways to make low cost solutions for UN/FLUX implementation available.
8. He reported on the progress in the development of promotional materials. In November 2019 the latest draft of the UN/FLUX FAQ document, the brochure and the leaflet were circulated to the ToSSF for final comments. The documents had since been sent to the EU contractor for proposals on layout and design.
9. The last deliverable planned would be a short promotional video, using a narrative with infographics. Its purpose would be to explain UN/FLUX and its advantages to a lay audience. It would be shareable on social media and used during conferences and fora to raise awareness of UN/FLUX and its benefits. In the ToSSF conference call on 5 December 2019 participants resolved to organise in 2020 a face to face meeting with the contractor in Brussels to provide the input required by the contractor to produce the promotion video.

10. He also noted that in December 2018 a template for collection of case studies on UN/FLUX in UN Member States had been developed by the UNECE secretariat in consultation with the ToSSF to facilitate the sharing of countries' experiences and lessons learned on the challenges and opportunities related to implementing UN/FLUX. The first case study had been prepared by the Government of Thailand. A second case study has now been received by the Government of Spain and is available at the ToSSF website¹.
11. The Chair also reported that the Secretariat contributed to the organization of the 3rd Oceans Forum on Oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies. The Forum was held on 10th September 2019 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva and was jointly organized by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment), the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP), the International Ocean Institute (IOI), and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)².
12. The objective of the Forum was to identify the relation between the oceans, economy, climate change and harmful fisheries subsidies and to take stock on the final phase of negotiations of fish subsidies currently discussed under the WTO Negotiating Group on Rules. The Forum discussed efforts to prevent the subsidizing of IUU and overfishing and the need of fishing authorities to have access to reliable data about fishing equipment, fishing activities, catches, fish sales and fisheries inspections. The role of UN/FLUX in this context was highlighted.
13. The Chair also reported that participants of the second meeting of the ToSSF in 2019 noted the importance to extend the mandate of the ToSSF beyond July 2019 to complete the remaining tasks of the Programme of Work 2018-2019 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22). The UNECE Executive Committee at its 105th meeting in May 2019 extended the mandate of the ToSSF for another two-year period (ECE/EX/2019/L6) on request of the UN/CEFACT Plenary. Based on the 2018-2019 Programme of Work, the secretariat jointly with the Chair of the ToSSF prepared a Programme of Work for 2020-2021 (ToSSF/2020/INF.2).
14. The Chair introduced the Programme of Work 2020 – 2021 (ToSSF/2020/INF.2). The programme of work was approved by the meeting participants.

V. Implementation and documentation

15. The expert from the European Commission provided an update on the current state of development of documents and promotion materials and noted the completion of the policy brief (ToSSF/2020/INF.6). The group requested the European Commission and the Secretariat to follow up on the outstanding documents (FAQ, leaflet and brochure) with the view to finalise them, and to organise a meeting with the contractor to define the content of the promotion video. All activities must be completed by November 2020.
16. The Chair underlined that the outstanding promotion document and materials can be further completed with contributions from other UN entities (c.f. ILO) and link up to CITES.
17. The Secretariat will compile all promotion and information-related materials into one single website.
18. The Chief of the Trade Facilitation Section posited that it could be helpful to link the UN/FLUX standard with UN/CEFACT standards and guides for traceability in the agriculture and fisheries domain.

¹<https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/SustainableFisheriesTeamOfSpecialists/CaseStudies/Spain.pdf>

² For more information about the third Oceans Forum, see: <https://unctad.org/en/pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=2093>

VI. Reports from experts

19. Experts from the ToSSF presented and discussed current and future activities, along with proposals to widen membership and collaborations with other bodies.
20. The expert from the WTO explained the state of play regarding the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies to reach an agreement by the WTO Ministerial Conference scheduled in June 2020. At present there is no agreement on the fisheries subsidies and different proposals are discussed. The exact ins and outs of the fisheries subsidies have yet to be defined taking a science and legal-based approach and cross-cutting issues need also to be considered (c.f. dispute settlement, grants, remedy mechanisms). In order to achieve that purpose, six negotiators were appointed to facilitate the reaching of a consensus.
21. The expert from UNCTAD reported on recent developments in the multilateral trade system, the launching of the draft inter-agency plan of action on SDG14 (UNCTAD-FAO-UNEP) and the FAO Sub Committee on Fisheries meeting in Vigo, Spain. UNCTAD together with partner agencies had organised the 3rd Oceans Forum which focussed on the Oceans Economy and the negotiations on the WTO agreement on fish subsidies. In the meeting participants recommended that an agreement should be ambitious, and support transparency, accountability and enforceability. The Inter Agency Plan of Action for SDG 14 (IAPoA), developed by UNCTAD, FAO and UN Environment, could be a valuable instrument in the implementation of an agreement.
22. The expert from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reported on work areas relating to UN/CEFACT and FLUX and pointed out FAO activities in the fight against IUU fishing by using global fisheries information exchange, in particular through the Global Record of fishing vessels — a voluntary tool to increase transparency, and a single access point for information about vessels and its activities. She particularly highlighted the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) which draws a minimum binding set of rules to preserve maritime resources for volunteering states. The contribution of FLUX for fisheries information exchange will be further promoted during FAO events in 2020.
23. The delegate from the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of wild Flora and Fauna (CITES) presented the role of the CITES permits to ensure sustainability and legality of CITES trade. CITES uses the UN/CEFACT eCERT standard for electronic permit information exchange. CITES includes provisions that apply to the introduction of fishery products from the high seas. The use of electronic information on fish catches, the electronic information exchange along the fisheries supply chain and traceability can greatly improve control of CITES related fish products and contribute to better, science-based decisions on the harvest of CITES listed maritime species.
24. The expert from the European Commission presented the EU internal context where decision for the Common Fisheries policy are taken by all EU Member States. He posited that since vessels fish all over the world and fisheries is controlled by many authorities (RFMOs, flag state authorities, coastal state authorities), there is a critical need for electronic data exchange and standards such as UN/FLUX to allow connectivity. In terms of operations, the EU is already using UN/FLUX standard in exchanging data on vessel positions, aggregated catches, fishing activities, sales and vessel data. The focus is now on exchanging data related to authorisations, inspection reports and catch certificates with UN/FLUX. UN/FLUX is the single standard for all data, which underpins why EU has set out FLUX as a priority for EU fisheries data management strategy.
25. The expert from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) gave an overview of import market control schemes and a comparison between US and EU import requirements based on the newly released report³. Requirements for Key Data Elements (KDE) for different import schemes of markets and RFMOs were compared. Import control schemes are of high importance to prevent IUU fishing products to enter markets and traceability can be an important instrument to increase transparency in the industry. Both

³ A comparative study of key data elements in import control schemes aimed at tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the top three seafood markets: EU, US, Japan (January 2020)

measures require availability of data and global alignment of this data for efficient information exchange. Participants were asking questions relating to the comparison of different import control schemes.

26. The expert from the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) reported on the NEAFC's experience in the implementation of the UN/FLUX standard. Since the year 2000 NEAFC has been using a standardised format – The North Atlantic Format (NAF), for fishing activity information. In 2016, a Working Group on Electronic Reporting System (ERS) began to explore the feasibility to use UN/FLUX for exchange of fishing information. UN/FLUX allows stakeholders to develop its own system as long as the systems are able to communicate in the same language, using a common standard. The use of a global data exchange standard for fisheries information is also important to implement NEAFCs Port State Control System, for advance vessel information exchange for the port state evaluation before the vessel enters the port and for risk-based management of inspections.
27. The expert from the ILO gave an overview of the work underway to advance labour conditions in fisheries and to address inter alia labour intensive and long working hours, hazardous occupations, lack of written work agreements and human rights violations (child, forced and migrant labour). Joint work could be foreseen on linking labour conditions information with information from the Global Record on fishing vessels and existing databases. Lately, the ILO has released two Guideline on flag state and port state and has paid attention on labour condition in the fishing industries in South East Asia. Recently, the FAO, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) joined forces in an ad hoc working group on IUU fishing and related matters. The ToSSF and the ILO may explore how UN/FLUX standard could exchange and integrate electronic information from different domains and sources to address decent work issues in the fishing industry.

VII. Planning future activities

28. The expert from the European Commission outlined on the need to analyse existing catch certification schemes / catch documentation schemes (CCS / CDS) in connection with the UN/FLUX standard work underway (c.f. reusing the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library elements). An electronic system for catch certificates (CATCH) is now available for EU stakeholders to track international trade of fishery products from landing to the final market. The CATCH system requires currently manual data entry and there is a growing need for a system to system integration for automated exchanges between stakeholders. A new UN/FLUX domain for catch certificate and catch documentation schemes is required.

VIII. Other Business

29. The Secretariat plans participate in and to provide information on the work of the ToS in upcoming policy meetings, in particular to the 2020 UN Ocean Forum (Lisbon, Portugal, 2 – 6 June 2020), the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 8 - 11 June 2020) and the 15th UNCTAD quadrennial conference (Bridgetown, Barbados from 18 - 23 October 2020) and the 4th meeting of the UNCTAD Oceans Forum in 2021. Members of the ToS that attend these meetings are asked to contact the Secretariat in view of organising side events.
30. The Members of the Team of Specialists are encouraged to participate in RFMOs meetings.

X Adoption of decisions and the report of the third session

31. Delegates and participants approved Decisions 1 to 9 and will receive the complete session report (ToSSF/2020/INF.4) for comments by 7 February; submission of comments to the secretariat is requested by 10 February 2020.