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Team of Specialist on Sustainable Fisheries

Report of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries on its Third Session

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 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), and the International Labour Organization (ILO). 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 the private sector participated: Fondazione Acquario di Genova, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

II. Opening

2. The Chair of the ToS of Sustainable Fisheries recounted the development process of the UN/FLUX standard, the objective of which is to promote and improve information exchange, develop and manage data, and support scientific research on fisheries. He

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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 to play in the further implementation of UN/FLUX as its role is to develop information and promotion materials, to exchange experiences in implementation and to discuss the role of UN/FLUX in helping to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 14, which commits humanity to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources. The UN/FLUX standard is also an important instrument in supporting measures, which are currently being discussed at the WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies, as it supports the fight to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, preserves local fish stocks and supports coastal communities that rely on fisheries.

3. During the keynote introductory speech, the Ambassador of Portugal underscored that electronic information exchange is paramount in sustainably managing trade information and systems in tackling IUU fishing. To this end, the United Nations Ocean Conference (2-6 June 2020), to be 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 ocean resources. Delegations will be invited to establish an action plans to take stock of actions taken and priority issues to implement SDG 14 by 2030. Since use of the UN/FLUX standard significantly facilitates international forces to prevent, mitigate and address unsustainable fishing, there will be opportunities for collaboration and interaction between the ToS and participants of the 2020 Ocean Conference.

4. On behalf of the Director of the Trade Division, the Chief of the Trade Facilitation Section opened the meeting by stressing the important role of the ToS to support the implementation of sustainable fisheries management and control practices, through exchange and sharing of electronic, standards-based fisheries information among all stakeholders.

5. To this end the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) has developed the United Nations 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 IUU fishing. Additionally, the availability of reliable, up-to-date data on fish catches will improve research in science-based fishery management. UN/FLUX, which is a global United Nations standard, has already come under the spotlight for its high acceptance rate among fishers and traders. It is currently used by all European Union Member States, while other countries across the globe are working towards its implementation, including Thailand and Brazil.

III. Progress on the 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 to the Secretariat for the vacant positions of Vice Chairs.

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. This has spurred the need to find alternative ways to make low-cost solutions available for UN/FLUX implementation.
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 ToS for final comments. The documents have since been sent to the European Union contractor for proposals on layout and design.
9. The last deliverable planned will be a short promotional video, using a narrative with infographics. Its purpose will be to explain UN/FLUX and its advantages to a lay audience. It will be shareable on social media and used during conferences and fora to raise awareness of UN/FLUX and its benefits. On the 5 December 2019 ToS conference call, participants resolved to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the contractor in Brussels in 2020 to provide the input required to produce the promotion video.
10. The Chair also noted that in December 2018 a template for the collection of case studies on UN/FLUX from United Nations member States had been developed by the UNECE Secretariat in consultation with the ToS to facilitate the sharing of countries' experiences and lessons learned on the challenges and opportunities related to implementing UN/FLUX. The first case study has been prepared by the Government of Thailand. A second case study has now been received by the Government of Spain and is available on the ToS website ¹.
11. The Chair also reported that the Secretariat contributed to the organization of the Third Oceans Forum² on oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies. The Forum was held on 10 September 2019 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva and was jointly organized by UNCTAD, the FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Group of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP), the International Ocean Institute (IOI), and UNECE.
12. The objective of the Forum was to identify the relationship between the oceans, economy, climate change and harmful fisheries subsidies and to take stock of 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 ToS in 2019 noted the importance of extending the mandate of the ToS beyond July 2019 to complete the remaining tasks in 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 ToS for another two-year period (ECE/EX/2019/L6) on the request of the UN/CEFACT Plenary. Based on the 2018-2019 Programme of Work, the Secretariat, jointly with the Chair of the ToS, prepared a Programme of Work for 2020-2021 (ToSSF/2020/INF.2).
14. The Chair introduced the Programme of Work for 2020-2021 (ToSSF/2020/INF.2), which was subsequently approved by the meeting participants.

¹ See as of February 2020:

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

² For more information about the third Oceans Forum, see as of February 2020:

<https://unctad.org/en/pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=2093>

IV. Implementation and documentation

15. The expert from the European Commission provided an update on the current state of the development of documents and promotion materials and noted the completion of the policy brief (ToSSF/2020/INF.6). The group requested that the European Commission and the Secretariat follow up on the outstanding documents (FAQ, leaflet and brochure) to finalize them and to organize a meeting with the contractor to define the content of the promotional video. All activities must be completed by November 2020.

16. The Chair suggested that the outstanding promotional document and materials could be completed with contributions from other United Nations entities (i.e. ILO and CITES).

17. The Secretariat will compile all promotional and information-related materials in a single website.

18. The Chief of the Trade Facilitation Section suggested that it could be helpful to link the UN/FLUX standard to the UN/CEFACT standards and guides for traceability in the agriculture and fisheries domain.

V. Reports from experts

19. Experts from the ToS 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 being 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 also need to be considered (i.e. 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 SDG 14 (UNCTAD-FAO-UNEP) and the FAO Subcommittee on Fisheries meeting in Vigo, Spain. UNCTAD, together with partner agencies, had organized the Third Oceans Forum, which focused on the Oceans Economy and the negotiations on the WTO agreement on fish subsidies. In the meeting participants recommended that any agreement should be ambitious, and support transparency, accountability and enforceability. The Inter-Agency Plan of Action for SDG 14, developed by UNCTAD, the FAO and UNEP, could be a valuable instrument in the implementation of an agreement.

22. The expert from the FAO reported on work areas relating to UN/CEFACT and UN/FLUX and highlighted FAO activities in the fight against IUU fishing 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 their activities. They specifically highlighted the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) which defines a minimum, binding set of rules to preserve maritime resources for volunteering states. The contribution of UN/FLUX for fisheries information exchange will be further promoted during FAO events in 2020.

23. The delegate from CITES presented the role of 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 over CITES-related fish products and contribute to better, science-based decisions in the harvest of CITES-listed maritime species.

24. The expert from the European Commission presented the European Union internal context, where decisions related to the Common Fisheries policy are made by all European Union Member States. They suggested that since vessels fish all over the world and fisheries are controlled by many authorities (Regional Fishery Management Organizations, 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 European Union is already using the UN/FLUX standard in the exchange of data on vessel positions, aggregated catches, fishing activities, sales and vessel data. The focus is now on exchanging data related to authorizations, inspection reports and catch certificates with UN/FLUX. UN/FLUX is the single standard for all data, which is why the European Union has selected UN/FLUX as a priority for their European Union fisheries data management strategy.

25. The expert from WWF gave an overview of import market control schemes and a comparison between the United States and European Union import requirements based on a newly released report³. Requirements for Key Data Elements (KDE) for different import schemes of markets and Regional Fishery Management Organizations (RFMOs) were compared. Import control schemes are very important to prevent IUU fishing products from entering markets, and traceability can be an important instrument to increase transparency in the industry. Both measures require availability of data and global alignment of this data for efficient information exchange. Participants asked questions relating to the comparison of different import control schemes.

26. The expert from NEAFC reported on the NEAFC experience in the implementation of the UN/FLUX standard. Since the year 2000 NEAFC has been using a standardized 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 of using UN/FLUX for the exchange of fishing information. UN/FLUX allows stakeholders to develop their own systems as long as the systems can communicate in the same language using a common standard. The use of a global data exchange standard for fisheries information is also important for implementation of the NEAFC Port-State Control System, for advanced 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, among other things, 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 in linking labour conditions information with information from the Global Record on fishing vessels and existing databases. Lately, the ILO has released two guidelines on flag state and port state and has paid attention to labour conditions in the fishing industries in South East Asia. Recently, the FAO and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) joined forces in an ad hoc working group on IUU fishing and related matters. The ToS and the ILO may explore how the UN/FLUX standard could exchange and integrate electronic information from different domains and sources to address decent work issues in the fishing industry.

³ The Environmental Justice Foundation, Oceana, The Nature Conservancy, The Pew Charitable Trusts and WWF, *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: European Union, US, Japan* (January 2020). Available at: <http://www.iuuwatch.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CDS-Study-WEB.pdf>. (Accessed 20 February 2020)

VI. Planning future activities

28. The expert from the European Commission highlighted the need to analyse existing catch certification schemes/catch documentation schemes (CCS/CDS) in connection with the UN/FLUX standard work underway (i.e. reusing the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library elements). An electronic system for catch certificates (CATCH) is now available for European Union stakeholders to track the international trade of fishery products from landing to the final market. The CATCH system currently requires 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.

VII. Other business

29. The Secretariat plans to participate in and to provide information on the work of the ToS in upcoming policy meetings, in particular to the 2020 United Nations Ocean Forum (Lisbon, Portugal, 2-6 June 2020); the twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 8-11 June 2020); 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 when organizing side events.

30. The Members of the ToS are encouraged to participate in RFMO meetings.

VIII. Adoption of decisions and the report of the third session

31. The report was circulated to experts and delegates for comments that were integrated into this document. Delegates and experts approved Decisions 1 to 9.
