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Team of Specialist on Sustainable Fisheries

Overview of activities to the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries

Summary

The Chair of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Team of Specialists (ToS) on Sustainable Fisheries will report on the activities relating to the Programme of Work (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22), implemented since the twenty-fifth Plenary of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and e-Business (UN/CEFACT), in April 2019.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2020/INF.9 is submitted by the UN/CEFACT Bureau to the twenty-sixth session of the Plenary for information.

I. Introduction

1. Overfishing, destructive fishing practices, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing are depleting world fish stocks. These activities threaten not only fish stocks but also the coastal communities which rely on fisheries resources for economic survival and as a reliable source of protein. The international community recognizes the importance of protecting fishery resources through Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
2. An essential step to attain effective and sustainable management of fishery resources is timely acquisition and exchange of information on fishing location, gear used, species and quantity caught, etc. Until now, fishing vessels have mainly used paper-based logbooks to record and exchange such information. To improve information acquisition and management, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) has developed an open and global standard which allows the electronic exchange of fishery data.
3. The Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange (UN/FLUX) provides a harmonized message standard which allows Fishery Management Organizations (FMOs) to automatically access electronic data from fishing vessels, such as vessel and trip identification, fishing operations (daily catch or haul-by-haul) and fishing data (catch area, species and quantity, date and time, and gear used). With this standard, FMOs around the world have, for the first time, a tool which automates the collection and dissemination of operational fishery data needed for sustainable fishery management and for detecting and combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Additionally, the development of a reliable and up-to-date database on fish catch will improve the knowledge base for scientific fisheries management.
4. The UN/FLUX standard was presented at the twenty-seventh UN/CEFACT Forum in Geneva, where experts from government, regional and international organizations, regional FMOs, industry, research, and control and enforcement authorities agreed on its importance as a standardized tool to exchange fisheries information in an effective, transparent and efficient manner. At this forum, it was proposed that a community should be established to promote and support the implementation of the UN/FLUX standard.
5. The Agricultural, Agri-Food and Fisheries Domain of UN/CEFACT supported this proposal to create a Group of Experts from this community. The establishment of the Group of Experts, now referred to as the Team of Specialists (ToS) on Sustainable Fisheries, was endorsed by the 23rd UN/CEFACT Plenary, and was approved by the Executive Committee (EXCOM) of the UNECE in June 2017.
6. The Programme of Work 2018-2019 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22) was discussed and adopted at the first session of the ToS in January 2018, and subsequently endorsed at the 24th UN/CEFACT Plenary in May 2018 (Decision 18-3). It is organized in the following four work areas: WA1: Policy dialogue and guidance; WA2: Technical monitoring, assessment and guidance; WA3: Communication and outreach; and WA4: Capacity building.
7. 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) was stressed at the second meeting of the ToSSF. 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). Upon the

approval by the ToSSF the Programme of work will be submitted for approval to the UN/CEFACT Plenary.

8. As of December 2019, the membership of the ToS consists of sixty-four experts from the following United Nations Member States and organizations: Australia, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, China, Estonia, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Italy, Luxembourg, Malaysia, The Netherlands, Singapore, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, Uruguay, the China Certification & Inspection Group (CCIC), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Coletivo Nacional da Pesca e Aquicultura (Conepe), CSEND, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), Fondazione Acquario di Genova ONLUS (FADG), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Global Ghost Gear Initiative, International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), INTERPOL, Marine Stewardship Council, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), South Centre, Ukrainian Fish Industry Workers, United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

9. The present document provides an overview of the activities undertaken by the Team of Specialists (ToS) to implement the Programme of Work since the twenty-fifth UN/CEFACT Plenary. It is submitted to the twenty-sixth UN/CEFACT Plenary for information.

II. Meeting during the 33rd UN/CEFACT Forum

10. The ToS on Sustainable Fisheries held a meeting at the 33rd UN/CEFACT Forum in Geneva, Switzerland on 2 April 2019. Experts from national government agencies, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector attended the meeting.

11. The Chair presented the progress on the implementation of the ToS Programme of Work for 2018-2019 (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2018/22). Within the Programme of Work, he noted the team had made significant progress, and had still much to accomplish. Of note were several ongoing developments of outputs for use in awareness building and for sharing at international fora, including a presentation to promote and introduce UN/FLUX, which was created by the ToS and the UNECE Secretariat. The ToS also created a draft document addressing frequently asked questions, and a draft template for UN/FLUX Implementation Documents.

12. The Chair also noted that a template for collection of case studies on UN/FLUX in UN Member States was developed by the UNECE secretariat in consultation with the ToS in December 2018. Its aim being 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 and was available for consultation. Case studies from Spain and Brazil are under development, and proposals from other countries are welcome.

13. The Chair provided a brief overview of ongoing activities with a more technical and policy guidance focus, which included the UN/FLUX leaflet, brochure and policy brief content, under development by the ToS members and UNECE Secretariat, in coordination with the communications contractor supported by the European Commission DG MARE funding. These were planned to be finalised following the policy brief. Finally, 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.

14. The Chair provided an overview of the updates to the briefing note to the WTO on the use of UN/FLUX in combatting IUU fishing, and the relationship between UN/FLUX and fisheries subsidies. He noted differences were still present regarding capacity-related subsidies. He also noted the potential to include additional vessel information in UN/FLUX messages, which would necessitate further development of the standard, and FAO's use of UN/FLUX in their Global Vessel Registry.

15. The team of specialist has made a request to the UN/CEFACT expert group on the agriculture domain to prepare an update of some UN/FLUX message standard schemas. These requests were based on experiences of the NEAFC related to their implementation of the UN/FLUX messages. The update will support a more efficient information exchange in the reporting about vessels and their catches.

III. Meeting during the 34th UN/CEFACT Forum

16. The ToS on Sustainable Fisheries held a meeting at the 34th UN/CEFACT Forum in London, United Kingdom, on 29 October 2019. Experts from national government agencies, international organizations and non-governmental organizations attended the meeting.

17. The expert from the European Commission, DG Mare provided an update on the development of promotional materials. The draft for the visual identity, rollup stands, and posters have been developed. The briefing note on the benefits of implementing UNFLUX and addressing FAQs (ToSSF/2019/INF.4) and the briefing note on the use of UNFLUX in combatting IUU and the relationship between UNFLUX and fisheries subsidies (ToSSF/2019/INF.5) are available on the website of the ToS. The FLUX brochure and the leaflet have been given to the EU contractor for improvement and publication. The current work on the policy brief is on hold, awaiting the outcomes of WTO negotiations on fisheries subsidies. Following this the policy brief and the promotion video will be developed. The target audience for the promotion videos are policy makers of countries that are potentially interested in FLUX implementation. Participants of the ToS are invited to send suggestions for the video.

18. The Expert from FAO gave an update on the FAO Global Record. The Global Record is an initiative to gather and disseminate information about vessels directly involved in fishing activities or in support of fishing activities. The objective is to combat IUU fishing and to strengthen the fisheries' sector through enhanced transparency and traceability. All information to the Global Record is provided by flag states. Currently 11000 vessels are registered in the database. Reporting is currently done by online data entry or upload from spreadsheets. In the future it is planned to upload data through interfaces with UNFLUX and other electronic systems which will increase quality and timeliness of the Global Record. UNFLUX could also be used to upload inspection reports for the implementation of the agreement on Post State Measures (PSMA).

19. The Expert from the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) reported on the current status of the UNFLUX implementation and NEAFC's experience. Since the year 2000 NEAFC has been using a standardized format – The North Atlantic Format (NAF), for fishing activity information. In 2016, an Ad Hoc Working Group on Electronic Reporting System (ERS) began to explore the feasibility to use the UNFLUX standard for exchange of fishing activity information as a harmonized message standard allows RFMO's such as NEAFC to automatically access the electronic data from the E-Logbooks from the fishing vessels. UNFLUX allows stakeholders to develop their own system as long as the systems are able to communicate in the same language. The use of a global data exchange format for

fisheries information is also important to implement the FAO PSMA as well as NEAFCs Port State Control system, in particular for advance vessel information exchange for the port State evaluation before the vessel enters the port and for risk-based management of inspections.

20. The ToS Programme of Work detailing the scope, objectives, activities, work areas, and governance was discussed, and specific activities were planned. It was concluded that efforts must be made to finalize promotional material describing UN/FLUX in 2020. The Group further discussed possibilities to collect lessons learned from countries preparing the implementation of UN/FLUX. The group also decided to hold a conference call in December 2019 to prepare the agenda of the ToSSF in January 2020.

IV. Third Oceans Forum: Oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies

21. In connection with policy dialogue and guidance activities under WA1, and communication and outreach activities under WA3 of the Programme of Work, the Team contributed to the organization of the 3rd Ocean Forum on Oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies.

22. The third Oceans Forum, held on 10 September 2019 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva was jointly organized 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)¹. The objective of the Third Oceans 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 World Trade Organization (WTO) Negotiating Group on Rules. The Forum also offered an opportunity for countries to take review and discuss experiences made by developing countries, in particular Pacific Small Island Development States (SIDS).

23. The relevance of this Forum, as a unique platform for discussion of trade-related fisheries topics including implications of climate change on fisheries 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 Second UN Oceans Conference to be held in Lisbon, Portugal, in 2020.

24. The UNCTAD Background Note for the Third Oceans Forum on trade related aspects of SDG 14 titled “Advancing Sustainable Development Goal 14: Sustainable fish and seafood value chains, trade and climate” was presented, offering a comprehensive summary on the importance of fisheries and aquaculture, the challenges faced by the industry, potential and innovative approaches for the blue economy and approaches to address overfishing and harmful fishing practices, to improve fisheries management and to provide access of small scale fishers to resources and markets, including the UNCTAD, FAO and UN Environment IAPoA.

25. Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture can provide important environmental, social and economic benefits: marine habitats protect coastal areas, prevent land erosion and provide recreation and cultural services. Fisheries make an important contribution to food and nutrition security, providing over 153 million tons of fisheries and aquaculture products for

¹ For more about the third Oceans Forum, see: <https://unctad.org/en/pages/MeetingDetails.aspx?meetingid=2093>

human consumption. Global fish production in 2017 is estimated at 172.6 million tons supplying around 21 kg/capita per year. Fish and seafood consumption accounts for 20% of animal protein intake for 3.2 billion people, of which about 26% in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), 19% in other developing countries, and about 16% in Low Income Food Deficit countries (LIFDCs)

26. Around 59.6 million people are employed in fisheries and aquaculture in 2016 which makes fish and seafood among the most traded commodities. 35% to 38% of the production is exchanged through international supply chains, generating USD 152 billion in 2017. For LDCs as a group, fish and seafood is the seventh largest export group overall and the largest food item exported. Over 50% of trade in fisheries and aquaculture originates in developing countries whose net trade income is valued at USD 37 billion, greater than net trade income of most other agricultural commodities combined. Since the 1960s the share of fish production for human consumption has increased significantly to 88% and currently more than 200 countries report exports and imports of fish or fishery products.

27. The global demand for fish has led to increasing pressure on the existing fish stocks and some areas such as the Mediterranean and Black Sea have seen significant drops in capture. Projections over the next decade indicate that world capture will fluctuate between 91.3 and 93.7 million tons. The share of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels decreased from 90% in 1974 to 66.9% in 2015 and most of the most-productive species are fully fished with no potential for increases in volume.

28. One of the critical issues intensifying overfishing is Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing which has seen rapid increases and has a detrimental effect on global fisheries. Rough calculations indicate that global IUU fishing accounts for 11 to 26 million tons of fish every year with a value of USD 26 to 35 billion annually. IUU fishing can lead to the collapse of valuable fisheries, exploits the resources of developing countries, prevents assessment of existing stock and the development of science-based quotas for sustainable exploitation, and leads to criminal activities conducted by highly organized and international networks.

29. To fight IUU and to prevent the subsidizing of IUU and overfishing, fishing authorities need reliable data about fishing equipment, fishing activities, catches, fish sales and fisheries inspections. To help address such growing concerns about the grave problem of overfishing by today's modern fishing fleets UNECE through its UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and e-Business (UN/CEFACT) has developed a global data exchange standard, which helps improve fisheries information management, and plays a key role in preventing overfishing and the collapse of global fish stocks. This standard, the UN Fisheries Language for Universal eXchange (UN/FLUX), allows Fishery Management Organizations (FMOs) to automatically collect fishery catch data in electronic format from fishing vessels, including a vessel identification, catch area, species and quantity of fish, date and time.

30. The link between climate and the oceans was also addressed by the panelists at the Forum. Oceans and wetlands produce half of the oxygen we breathe and absorb around 30% of anthropogenic emissions of CO₂ and around 93% of the heat arising from human-driven changes to the atmosphere. But this absorptive capacity has reached its limits and rising temperature and increasing acidity of the oceans are severely affecting many ecosystems. Climate change is also having an impact on the oceans-based economic sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, coastal infrastructure, and tourism. According to FAO, climate change will lead to significant changes in the availability and trade of fish products, with potentially important economic and food security consequences, especially for those countries most dependent on the sector such as SIDS.

31. Climate change has also an impact on fisheries which is likely to lead to significant changes in the availability and trade of fish products. Model projections in 13 maritime

regions suggest decreases in maximum catch potential between 2.5% and 12.1% by 2050 with the biggest decreases expected in the South Pacific regions. Climate change can also impact food safety, for example through increased incidents of parasites and foodborne viruses. A key concern in fisheries and aquaculture is the ingestion of microplastics by fish and its impact on the fauna and human food safety. It is estimated that the ocean will contain 1 ton of plastic for every 3 tons of fish by 2025, if nothing is done to reduce the 8 million tons of plastics dumped into the oceans every year. In a world rapidly approaching 9 billion people, where agriculture already uses 40% of the Earth's land surface, increased utilization of the ocean as a human food provider seems inevitable. When over 30% of fish stocks are exploited above sustainable levels, and when climate change is expected to have significant consequences for marine ecosystems, status quo is not the solution. Political commitment, technological innovation and behavioral change are needed to foster effective and adaptation mechanisms that go beyond the "simple" protection solution. This is particularly needed to address the challenges of SDG 2 to end hunger and achieve food security.

32. The participants discussed the great challenges that exist to reaching an agreement in fisheries – negotiations on which started two decades ago – including the significant divergences in views on issues such as the geographical scope, the scope of prohibitions, the policy flexibility, Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) (that should incorporate capacity building support), and the disciplines subject to Dispute Settlement procedures. Although there is currently a political momentum as SDG targets 14.4 and 14.6 the participants stressed the need to accelerate the pace of the negotiations to reach an ambitious WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies with WTO disciplines that are transparent, practical, flexible and enforceable. The outcome of these negotiations will also have important implications on the future of the WTO.

33. Furthermore, it was stressed by participants that negotiations on this agreement should continue to the greatest extent possible in all areas and particularly on cross-cutting issues such as overfishing, overcapacity including consideration to adopt a cap-based approach, IUU fishing, and harmful fisheries subsidies. Additionally, while the negotiations should remain ambitious, alternative arrangements for developing countries should be considered, as well as support mechanisms for fishers during transition periods and cross-country assistance and capacity-building. Any agreement and commitments negotiated at the WTO 12th Ministerial should also be subject to a review mechanism, to ensure that they are fit for purpose and fulfil their intended effect.

V. Promotion and Capacity-Building for the UN/FLUX Sustainable Fisheries Standard project

34. To promote its UN/FLUX, the ToS has been engaging in outreach activities and has participating in several meetings of key partners. On 1 March 2019, it has jointly organized with CITES, UNCTAD, UN Environment, and the Geneva Environment Network, the World Wildlife Day 2019 under the theme "Life below water: for people and planet". The first World Wildlife Day to focus on life below water, aligned with SDG 14, has provided the opportunity to raise awareness on the diversity of marine life, the crucial importance of marine species to human development, and the role that standards for sustainable fisheries management play to continue to provide these services for future generations. On 15 May, the ToS has been invited to brief the participants of the WTO Committee on Trade and the Environment on its work and discuss possible interlinkages with its Database of Environment-related Notifications and Measures, particularly those related the monitoring, control and surveillance of fisheries activities aimed at combatting IUU and improving fisheries management, as well as with the ongoing negotiations on fisheries subsidies.

35. The Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries, in cooperation with the European Commission's Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DG MARE), is producing promotional materials to enhance the capacity of national regulatory bodies for data collection, monitoring, and evidence-based policy formulation to support sustainable fishery management. DG MARE is contributing €100,000 to develop these promotional materials. This work is a key contributor to WA3: Communication and outreach, and additionally includes deliverables from WA2: Technical monitoring, assessment and advice.

36. In November 2019 the latest draft of the FAQ document, the brochure and the UN/FLUX leaflet were circulated to the ToSSF for final comments and were then sent to the contractor. 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. Its purpose is 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.

VI. Preparations for the third session of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries

37. On 5 December 2019 a conference call was organized to prepare the third session of the Team of Specialists on Sustainable Fisheries. The meeting will take place on 4 February 2020 in Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting participants approved a revised agenda and drew up an initial draft list of speakers and participating organizations. The Secretariat and the Chair have since worked together to organise this meeting.
