

## 2021 High-level Political Forum Session "*Looking at the 2020 targets: implementation and review*"

### FAO inputs on the 2020 SDG 14 targets

While inter-related, the following document covers in section one inputs on to the sustainability of fish stocks, while section two covers inputs on the subject of combating illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

#### Section 1: Sustainability of fish stocks

##### SDG 14.4

by 2020, effectively regulate harvesting, end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

Indicator 14.4.1 - proportion of biologically sustainable fish stocks, which measures progress against SDG Target 14.4

- **What is the current status of the Goal or target, in terms of actual measured progress and trends?**
  - The proportion of biologically sustainable fish stocks in the world's marine fisheries was 90 per cent in 1974 but declined to 65.8 per cent in 2017<sup>1</sup>.
  - Despite the continuous decrease in the proportion, the rate of decline has slowed down in the most recent years.
  - Fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels contributed 78.7 percent of the global marine fish landings in 2017.
- **What has changed since the last time this Goal was reviewed at the HLPF?**
  - *Any deviations in progress from what was expected (including due to COVID-19)?*

The status and trends of global marine fish stocks have been assessed every other year. So, no new assessment has been done yet after the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. Its effects on stock status seem not obvious, at least in the short term.

- **Additional obstacles or opportunities in implementation including through interlinkages with other Goals, and connections to related processes?**

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/1441/en/>

Implementing SDG 14.4 requires stock assessment, which is technically challenging and data demanding. Most developing economies lack sufficient fishery data and technical capacity to support stock assessment. At present, only about 25% of the world's marine landings come from formally assessed stocks and the majority of fish stocks are unassessed and therefore, their status is unknown. The international community and member states need to work together to overcome the two major issues: data insufficiency and technical capacity shortage in many developing countries.

- **New/promising openings for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?**

The FAO just started a country-level questionnaire survey in 2019 to collect information on the status and trends of SDG Indicator 14.4.1. The biggest challenge of such an effort is that most developing economies lack sufficient data and have very few stocks formally assessed. Therefore, capacity development is the priority to achieve a global success in such an initiative.

- **What are promising strategies to accelerate action (by UN and partners) and to mobilize other stakeholders to advance implementation?**

Indicator 14.4.1 is making progress towards its set target in areas with sufficient capacity of assessment, management and governance, but critical challenges remain in countries with limited data and poor capacity in assessment and management. Scientific studies<sup>2</sup> found that improved regulations and effective monitoring and surveillance have proven successful in reverting overfished stocks to biologically sustainable levels. However, the adoption of sustainable fisheries has generally been slow, particularly in many developing countries. It is also proved that rebuilding plans are the most important factor enabling overfished populations to recover and that ratification of international fishing agreements helps to reduce overfishing and rebuild biomass<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, to advance the implementation of SDG indicator 14.4.1, the international community needs to promote the development of rebuilding plans for overfished stocks and campaign the ratification of international and regional fishing agreements.

- **How would one monitor action for implementing these?**

Marine fishery management is largely carried out by coastal countries as required by the United Nations Law of the Sea, except for migratory and shared species and in the high seas. Therefore, monitoring of the implementation actions of SDG 14.4 also needs to rely on coastal states and regional and international fishery organizations or agencies as well. Therefore, country-level monitoring and reporting, supplemented by RFMOs, seem to be the most feasible and valuable approach.

---

<sup>2</sup> PNAS January 28, 2020 117 (4) 2218-2224; first published January 13, 2020; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1909726116>

<sup>3</sup> Melnychuk, M.C., Kurota, H., Mace, P.M. *et al.* Identifying management actions that promote sustainable fisheries. *Nat Sustain* 4, 440–449 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-020-00668-1>

## **Section 2: Combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing**

*The inputs in this section are provided in the context of ending IUU fishing by 2020 as reflected in SDG target 14.4 and the implementation of relevant international instruments as measured by SDG indicator 14.6.1.*

- **What is the current status of the target, in terms of actual measured progress and trends?**

IUU fishing remains a reality as one of the greatest threats to aquatic ecosystems and to fishers and populations who rely on its resources for their nutrition and livelihoods. This is due to its potent ability to undermine national and regional efforts to manage fisheries sustainably as well as endeavours to conserve marine biodiversity

One of the keys to combatting IUU fishing is through the implementation of international instruments aimed at combatting IUU fishing. SDG indicator 14.6.1, a composite measure of the degree of implementation by States of the five main instruments, recorded an increase in implementation of these instruments globally from 3/5 in 2018 to 4/5 in 2020.

- **What has changed since the last time this target was reviewed at the HLPF (i.e. 2020)?**

The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA), the first binding international Agreement that specifically targets IUU fishing and which lays down a minimum set of standard measures for Parties to apply when foreign vessels seek entry into their ports or while they are in their ports, has continued to gain ground. In June 2016, the PSMA came into force and as at May 2021, 69 Parties have become Party to the Agreement, including the European Union as one Party. A remarkable rate of adherence reflecting the importance placed by States in combatting IUU fishing which now covers over 50 percent of port States. Furthermore, during the third Meeting of the Parties to the Agreement (MoP3) which took place on the 31 May - 4 June 2021, representatives from a further ten countries stated their countries' intention to become Party to the Agreement.

Major advancements are being made in the field of information exchange, a key requirement for the effective implementation of international instruments aimed at combatting IUU fishing, such as the ongoing development of the PSMA Global Information Exchange System. The system which will allow countries to exchange information on the compliance of vessels, such as port inspections, was presented to countries during MoP3 and a pilot phase for this key tool in the fight against IUU fishing has been approved to be initiated in the coming weeks.

Furthermore, States in response to concerns by the international community of the risk that transshipment may contribute to IUU fishing have called on FAO to draft voluntary guidelines of the management of these operations. After an initial drafting phase, these guidelines will undergo a negotiation process between States and once adopted will become another key tool within the framework of international instruments to support States in the fight to end IUU fishing.

- **Any deviations in progress from what was expected (including due to COVID-19)?**

The COVID-19 pandemic has had negative consequences with regard to certain measures in place to combat IUU fishing. This mainly concerns monitoring, control and surveillance measures of States, whereby certain observer programmes on board industrial fishing vessels and inspections both at port and at sea have had to be either suspended or reduced due to risks caused by the potential spreading of the virus.

- **Additional obstacles or opportunities in implementation including through interlinkages with other Goals, and connections to related processes?**

Ending IUU fishing would allow for advancements to be made in reaching several other Goals, most evidently SDG 1 and 2 on ending poverty and hunger, respectively, due to its negative impacts on those persons relying on resources from aquatic ecosystems for their nutrition and livelihoods.

There are also clear linkages with SDG 9, as highlighted by the FAO Committee on Fisheries, there are clear linkages between IUU fishing and decent work. As an example, vessels operating in contravention of fisheries management measures are often found to have poor working conditions, a particular concern for crews on-board fishing vessels operating on the high seas, with dangerous equipment and often working extremely long hours in hazardous conditions without basic safety equipment or protocols. In response to these linkages the Joint FAO/IMO ad-hoc Working Group on IUU fishing and related matters was established in October 2000, and since its fourth session in October 2019, also counts the ILO as a Partner Organization. A process is now underway between the Secretariats of the three UN agencies to update the Terms of Reference of this working group, an important opportunity to maximize its potential towards achieving these common goals.

Among other, clear linkages also lie with SDG 16, as strong institutions need to be in place in order to tackle IUU fishing, as well as SDG 14, whereby partnerships and coordination are needed at all levels, from national, regional to international, in order to successfully tackle IUU fishing.

- **New/promising openings for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?**

With information exchange between coastal, flag and port States as well as other relevant actors being essential to the effective implementation of the PSMA, it is expected that the PSMA Global information Exchange System (GIES), once operationalised, will provide a clear indication of the level to which countries are implementing the Agreement and therefore their efforts taken in combatting IUU fishing. This information exchange may also shed some further light on transshipment operations and may play an important role for the implementation of the future voluntary guidelines being developed on transshipment.

The FAO Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels (Global Record) is also expected to play an ever increasing role in the context of information exchange, as a source of flag State validated information on fishing vessels. Linkages between this system and the GIES will provide States with important tools towards achieving the goal of ending IUU fishing, and monitoring of activity in these tools will provide a strong indicator for tracking progress.

Furthermore, the first questionnaire for the review and assessment of the effectiveness of the Agreement was carried out and the results of which can be found here:

<http://www.fao.org/3/nf561en/nf561en.pdf>

- **What are promising strategies to accelerate action (by UN and partners) and to mobilize other stakeholders to advance implementation? How would one monitor action for implementing these?**

The FAO has recently developed the [Capacity Development Portal](#), a tool intended to facilitate the sharing of knowledge and information in respect to activities implemented around the world, with the aim of supporting States to improve their capacity to combat IUU fishing. In doing so, the objective is to promote synergies, complementarities and exchanges among relevant programmes, projects, and institutions, whilst avoiding overlapping and the duplication of capacity development interventions.

**Additional materials and resources of relevance:**

- Video “FAO PSMA as a tool to combat IUU fishing”:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szX5T1e7TqQ&ab\\_channel=FoodandAgricultureOrganizationoftheUnitedNations](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=szX5T1e7TqQ&ab_channel=FoodandAgricultureOrganizationoftheUnitedNations)
- IUU fishing website: <http://www.fao.org/iuu-fishing/en/>
- PSMA website: <http://www.fao.org/port-state-measures/en/>
- PSMA MoP3 Documents: <http://www.fao.org/port-state-measures/meetings/meetings-parties/mop3/en/>
- Global Record of Fishing Vessels, Refrigerated Transport Vessels and Supply Vessels website: <http://www.fao.org/global-record/en/>
- Recent in depth study on transshipment “Transshipment: a closer look”:  
<http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb2339en>
- Transshipment informative brochure: <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cb0987en>