

**Panel remarks by UNSG's Special  
Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador  
Peter Thomson, UNFSS Pre-Summit,  
'Session Approaches to Follow-up and  
Review', Red Room, FAO, Rome, 27  
July 2021**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Warm greetings to you all.

To ensure a food-secure future for  
humanity, the aquatic foods sector is  
key.

When people think of aquatic foods,  
so-called Blue Foods, they often think  
just in terms of finned-fish harvested

from the Ocean. But aquatic foods are much more than that. They include algae, notably seaweed, shellfish, crustaceans, molluscs and fish sourced from ponds, rivers and lakes.

They are captured, but are increasingly cultivated; in fact between 1990 and 2018 the rise in global capture fisheries production was only 14%, whereas the rise in global aquaculture production over the same period was 527%. Note the importance of freshwater in this global phenomenon, for in 2018 inland aquaculture produced 62.5% of the world's farmed fish production.

Three billion people rely on Blue Foods for food and nutrition security. The

place of aquatic foods in humanity's battle against malnutrition is literally vital, for many Blue Foods are "superfoods" rich in vital micronutrients like Omega 3s, vitamin A, and zinc that help prevent maternal and infant mortality, stunting and cognitive deficits. They possess healthy fats that help reduce obesity and metabolic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, and Blue Foods can be produced with much lower greenhouse gas emissions and less demand on land and water resources than terrestrial livestock.

But despite their unique value and interconnections with terrestrial food systems, aquatic foods are often left

out of food system analyses, decisions, resource allocations and solutions. They are managed as a natural resource, not as a critical contributor to food security and a necessary component of strategies to deliver healthy sustainable and equitable food systems operating within planetary boundaries. That has to change for the betterment of all, and the UN Food Systems Summit in New York this September presents the best ever opportunity to make that so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It would be remiss of me to sit here and not put my words into the context of our times, a context that has been

described by the UN Secretary-General as one of humanity waging a suicidal war against Nature; a context that demands of us all a peace-making mindset.

It would also be remiss of me to sit in this building and not recognise the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and its beneficial influence in guiding the fisheries sector towards a more sustainable future. The Code emphasises the role of fisheries and aquaculture in supporting countries to achieve sustainable development, particularly in the fight against poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.

Celebrating the Code's anniversary this year, FAO Member States adopted a declaration acknowledging that in order to scale up fisheries sustainability, we need to implement and improve fisheries assessment and management systems in all regions, particularly in those where fish-stock status is declining or unknown.

We are over-fishing 34.2% of the world's marine fish stocks monitored by FAO, representing a threefold increase since monitoring began in 1974. This is an unacceptable situation, if indeed we are to make peace with Nature.

We know that where fisheries are effectively managed, stocks are above target levels or rebuilding, and that where fisheries management is less effective, stock status and trends are worsening. Therefore, part of the peace-making process to which I have referred, must be greatly enhanced assistance to under-performing Regional Fisheries Management Organisations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a world in which so many are afflicted by hunger and malnutrition, it is widely acknowledged that wastage is a shameful aspect of our global food production and consumption. The

same can be said for fisheries and aquaculture production in which 35% of the global harvest is either lost or wasted.

Thus wastage is a follow-up and review for the UN Food System Summit that must be treated with diligence, honesty and innovation. Through appropriate policies, regulatory frameworks, capacity building services, infrastructure and market access we can correct this critical flaw in the relationship between people, planet and prosperity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



We are all bound in commitment to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. The Agenda was intricately negotiated and created by all Member States of the United Nations, and it is not an agenda that tolerates cherry-picking, for all 17 Sustainable Development Goals are intimately interlinked. As we create dietary guidelines and school feeding programs, we have to work out how to best deliver the nutrient riches of Blue Foods to our children.

And as we consider their health, we must also consider the health of our environment, including the health of the Ocean. Everything is connected. So for example, when we call upon

Member States negotiating an end to harmful fisheries subsidies to deliver on the promise of SDG14.6 and do the necessary at the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Geneva this year, they should understand the connection of their negotiations to the health of their children; for harmful fisheries subsidies have been one of humanity's most environmentally-damaging habits.

And when we consider SDG14.5 and the call to establish marine protected areas covering just 10% of the Ocean, again they should consider the health of their children; for marine protected areas have been scientifically proven to be the most powerful tool we have to conserve and sustainably use the

Ocean's resources, thereby ensuring our children live on a planet with a healthy Ocean. Must I repeat, no healthy planet without a healthy Ocean? The Member States of CCAMLR have it in their power to meet that 10% target by declaring the long-considered East Antarctica, Weddell Sea and Antarctica Peninsula marine protected areas this year. Everything is connected.

And when we correctly move our financial resources in the direction of innovation, we must exponentially increase the share received by aquatic foods. The majority of life on this planet exists in the Ocean and the potential of its breadth and depth to

provide new forms of food and nutrition is hugely under-explored and under-invested.

I leave you today with one proposal for transformational international action. 90% of aquaculture is based in East Asia, while only 3% is based in Africa; and yet Africa is a continent with an abundance of rivers, lakes and coastlines. Through science-based planning, technical cooperation and massive investment in enabling infrastructure, in particular for small-holder operations, bringing aquacultural systems from East Asia to Africa at scale, could represent a paradigm shift in food and nutrition for a whole continent.

Ladies and Gentlemen, to conclude my remarks, it is vital that Blue Foods be an integral part of the UN Food Systems Summit in New York in September. Couched within an Alliance for Blue Foods, the community of interests representing aquatic foods, from governments, multilateral, regional and national, to science and academia, from NGOs to the business sector, our community is ready, as am I, to play a meaningful role in delivering on transformative follow-up results from the UN Food System Summit.

I thank you for your attention.

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