

**Closing Remarks by Ambassador Peter Thomson, UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, at FAO's special event: Blue Transformation: advancing aquatic food systems for people, planet and prosperity, at UN Food Systems Summit+2 Stocktaking Moment, 25 July 2023, Rome Italy**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

All courtesies observed. Warm greetings and gratitude for the opportunity of addressing you all today.

For me there are four take-home thoughts arising from this morning's dialogue. The first is that climate change, pollution and ecosystem degradation are posing serious threats to aquatic life and the ocean's well-being. The magnitude and rate at which these threats are manifesting, means they require urgent action, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation. You've heard the mantra, there can be no healthy planet without a healthy ocean, and the ocean's health is currently in decline. Intergenerational justice demands we dedicate ourselves to reversing that decline.

The second thought is that in a world today in which 3 billion people cannot afford a healthy diet, in the cause of nutritional well-being for humankind, we must transform our aquatic food systems. This is essential if we want to nourish the world's growing population in a sustainable and equitable manner, and the right way to do that lies in faithful implementation of FAO's Blue Transformation strategy.

The third thought is that while fish consumption is growing at twice the rate of population growth, many countries have not yet included aquatic foods in their food security and nutrition strategies. In the interests of sustainability of management and supply, these governance gaps need to be filled and international assistance is readily available to assist. Thus this governance shortfall should be eminently fixable in the short term.

My fourth take-home thought is that aquatic food production is more environmentally efficient than land-based animal production systems, resulting in lower greenhouse gas emissions and less impact on the environment. In the same breath, developing sustainable, equitable and inclusive aquatic food systems will improve the rights and incomes of fishing and fish-farming communities.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Aquaculture accounts for over half the aquatic foods we eat and holds great potential for feeding and sustainably nourishing the world's growing population. I've been preoccupied for some time with the knowledge that while aquaculture enjoys great success in Asia, the African continent currently accounts for less than 3% of the world's aquaculture production. Done right, the potential exists to transform a whole continent's food and nutrition security.

To do it the right way requires proactive investment policies, technological innovation, and adequate biosecurity and disease controls. FAO and others can readily provide the technical assistance required for this, while the opportunities for Asian-African South-South cooperation are rich.

When it comes to wild-catch fisheries, effective management has proven to be the most effective approach to conserving aquatic resources, with evidence showing that stocks under intensive management are exceeding target levels and successfully rebuilding. It thus goes without saying, that effective management, along with its errant twin ineffective management, hold important keys to our achievement of SDG14.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Let us leave Rome this week with heightened awareness of FAO's Blue Transformation strategy and with determination to follow it with renewed resolve. The strategy represents our best aquatic response to the international community's call for transformation of our food systems and a sustainable future.

And so, in conclusion, I will add three more take-home thoughts derived from the Blue Transformation strategy.

Firstly, growth. Sustainable aquaculture has the potential to grow by at least 35 percent by 2030, thereby meeting the global demand for aquatic food and enabling equitable distribution of benefits.

Secondly, management. It is a demonstrated fact that more effective management leads to healthier fish stocks and greater security of equitable livelihoods.

And lastly, value chains. Upgraded value chains can play highly significant roles in increasing and sustaining per capita fish consumption, especially in areas where it is needed, while at the same time safeguarding the social, economic and environmental sustainability of aquatic food systems.

FAO presented these three points strongly at the Second UN Ocean Conference in Lisbon last year, and I am sure they will be prominent at the Fourth International Conference of Small Island Developing States to be held in Antigua next May.

Now as we build towards the Third UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, in June 2025, we must ensure we're all fronting up.

We must ensure we're moving positively on the Global Biodiversity Framework's aspiration to conserve 30% of the ocean. That we're on top of IUU fishing through fealty to the PSMA Agreement. That we've ratified and have begun implementing the provisions of the High Seas Treaty and WTO's Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. That we have successfully concluded the Plastic Pollution Treaty. And that around the world, we're making Blue Transformation a reality for the betterment of aquatic food systems for people and planet.

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