FAO INPUTS

UNOC III Declaration

A healthy and sustainable Ocean is not a want, but an essential need for the future of our planet. The Ocean holds great potential to address global food security and poverty, serving as a source of nourishment, livelihoods, and economic growth, while also regulating the climate and acting as a reservoir of biodiversity.

Yet, the ocean's capacity to ensure these essential services is under significant threat. Climate change, habitat destruction, pollution, and unsustainable practices are compromising its resilience and threatening its ability to meet the needs of current and future generations.

To harness the full potential of the Ocean we must rethink the way we manage and interact with it. This means a blue transformation for aquatic food systems – ensuring that aquatic foods are produced, processed, and consumed in a way that balances growth with resilience, equitability, and efforts to conserve and restore biodiversity. FAO's Blue Transformation offers a clear, actionable roadmap to assist Governments in these efforts.

Blue transformation must be grounded in an ecosystem approach and guided by science-based management practices informed by relevant international instruments such as the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. To ensure aquatic food systems contribute to food security, poverty reduction, economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability, the following are key elements to be considered for inclusion in the UNOC III political declaration.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT: THE BEST CONSERVATION STRATEGY

1. An ecosystem approach to fisheries and aquaculture must be implemented to rebuild stocks, conserve biodiversity, and promote sustainable production. Comprehensive resource assessments, particularly in areas where fish stocks are declining or unknown, must underpin this approach, guide effective management, and secure long-term sustainability in coastal and high-seas areas.
2. Global action must integrate aquatic food systems into national planning and conservation strategies while enforcing binding international agreements. Instruments like the **FAO Port State Measures Agreement** to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, the **World Trade Organization Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies** to curb overfishing, the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity**, and the **Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction** to conserve biodiversity, are critical to scaling-up sustainable management practices across all marine resources.
3. The capacity of Regional Fisheries Advisory Bodies and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations needs to be enhanced to strengthen governance and ensure effective resource management, ecosystem preservation, and global food security.
4. The responsible development of aquaculture is also crucial to satisfy the global demand for aquatic foods. Sustainable aquaculture provides a transformative opportunity to meet global

nutritional needs, reduce environmental impacts and build resilience in aquatic food systems. Applying the **FAO Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture** enables the sector to grow sustainably while addressing food insecurity and poverty, especially in food-deficit countries.

PRODUCING MORE WITH LESS

5. Strengthen the scientific basis for management decisions, by integrating technological advancements and innovative tools to enhance production, support biodiversity conservation, and enable more informed, effective decision-making.
6. Minimize emissions across aquatic value chains by improving vessel and gear design, adopting renewable energy, reducing fish loss and waste, and promoting low-carbon aquaculture practices, such as using of carbon-efficient feeds and farming low-trophic species.
7. Increase financing and investment to support capacity building, research, technology and innovation, foster transformative change, and unlock the full potential of the sector, with particular attention to small island developing States and least developed countries.

EMPOWERING SMALL-SCALE PRODUCERS

8. Promote the implementation of **FAO's voluntary guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication** to empower small-scale operators and indigenous communities. Ensure their voices are heard in decision-making processes and their contributions to global food security, biodiversity conservation, and social development are recognized and supported.
9. Enhance the safety and working conditions of small-scale producers and improve their access to resources, climate finance, technology, and markets to boost their productivity and resilience. Promote inclusive policies and partnerships that address barriers to participation, particularly for women and youth.

RESILIENCE AND INCLUSIVITY IN VALUE CHAINS

10. Strengthen sustainable aquatic value chains through international trade and asymmetric access to market information, and cooperation on food safety standards, labeling, and customs.
11. Recognize the interconnectedness of aquatic food systems with other sectors, including water, energy, and climate. Foster cross-sector collaboration to unlock synergies across industries, communities, and ecosystems, including scaling-up solutions like other effective conservation measures (OECMs), applying robust spatial management, and pollution reduction initiatives.
12. Ensure that aquatic food systems are safe, sustainable, resilient, and accessible to all, guaranteeing that no one is left behind in the pursuit of better production, better nutrition, better environment, and better life.

AQUATIC FOOD SYSTEMS: A POWERFUL SOLUTION

Aquatic foods hold great potential to feed and nourish millions of people, particularly those in vulnerable situations. Since 1961, the global apparent consumption of aquatic animal foods has grown at nearly twice the annual rate of the global population, highlighting their critical role in feeding the world. For hundreds of millions of people, aquatic foods are the primary source of animal protein and essential micronutrients, including calcium, iron, vitamin A, B-12, and omega-3 fatty acids, a combination of nutrients rarely found in land-based foods. Aquatic foods are vital in combating malnutrition and stunting and provide at least 20 percent of the per capita animal protein supply to over 3.2 billion people–more than 40 percent of the global population.

Beyond nutrition, aquatic foods deliver proven health benefits. They improve birth outcomes, enhance cognitive development in children, and reduce risks of cardiovascular and neurological diseases.

Aquatic foods are drivers of economic growth, livelihoods and social development. Globally, aquatic food systems directly or indirectly sustain the livelihoods of around 600 million people, with nearly 500 million of these engaged in small-scale activities, most of them in the global South. Aquatic foods are among the most traded food commodities, generating income for economically challenged regions.

Despite their vital contributions, barriers persist, particularly for women in the sector. Ensuring equitable opportunities for all stakeholders, especially women and small-scale operators who contribute nearly 68 percent of marine catches and 90 percent of capture fisheries employment, is essential for long-term sustainability and inclusivity in the aquatic food sector.

Aquatic food systems can be nature-positive solutions. Aquatic food systems are supported by unparalleled biodiversity. Over 730 species of aquatic animals and plants are farmed, and over 3,400 are caught from the wild, yet these represent only a fraction of the biodiversity in aquatic ecosystems. This biodiversity underpins the adaptability and resilience of aquatic food systems in addressing global challenges.

In 2022, global marine production of aquatic animals and plants reached 152.7 million tonnes, with 53 percent coming from capture fisheries. While 38 percent of exploited fish stocks were unsustainably fished —a continued decline from previous years, when considering production volumes, 77 percent of total landings came from sustainable stocks in 2021. This proves the positive impact of effective fisheries management in supporting stock recovery. When managed sustainably fisheries can nourish the world, and stimulate economies, all while maintaining biodiversity, and improving climate resilience.

When sustainable, aquatic food systems are also energy efficient and produce a small fraction of the global greenhouse gas emissions generated by other food sectors. These characteristics make them a robust, nature-positive solution for boosting food security, improving nutrition, and supporting resilient livelihoods, while contributing to global biodiversity goals.