

**Statement to FAO's Committee on Fisheries (COFI)**

**by UNSG's Special Envoy for the Ocean, Ambassador Peter Thomson,**

**Rome, 9 July 2018**

Director-General da Silva,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All courtesies observed as I speak to you this morning. In my capacity as the Special Envoy for the Ocean, I acknowledge it as a singular honour to have been given this opportunity to address you today, and I give thanks to FAO and COFI for making this so. Meeting biennially, the FAO's Committee on Fisheries is uniquely placed to influence the success or failure of many of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14, SDG14, the Ocean goal. Thus, I am here to rally your support for the implementation of SDG14 and its noble aim of conserving and sustainably using the Ocean's resources for sustainable development.

In my weekly addresses to Ocean meetings around the world, the central message is that the health of the Ocean is in deep trouble. Thanks to the effects of Climate Change and accumulating human activities such as marine plastic pollution, we find ourselves fighting a global battle to reverse the cycle of decline into which the Ocean has been placed. We are currently losing that battle on every front, but the good news is that since 2015 we have had in place a universally adopted plan to fight back, to reverse that cycle of decline, and to fulfil our Ocean stewardship responsibilities in the best interests of our children, our grandchildren, and those still to be born into the wonder of life on this planet.

Put simply, our plan is one of fidelity to the Paris Climate Agreement and to the Sustainable Development Goals adopted at the United Nations in 2015. And of course for the Ocean, the plan's focus is on SDG14, the Ocean goal, in support of which the United Nations convened The Ocean Conference in New York in June, 2017. We saw at that conference how SDG14 touched the interests of all the SDGs, from health and nutrition to decent work, sustainable infrastructure and environmental resilience. In the year that has passed since the New York conference, it has been fortifying to our cause to witness the massive wave of Ocean action that has moved around the globe.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Key commercial fisheries have been in decline over the last 50 years, with decades of overfishing taking a toll not just on the health of the Ocean, but also on human livelihoods and global food security. For the good of people and planet, we need to make global fisheries

management the best it can be, in conformity with what our leaders demanded of us when, three years ago, they adopted SDG14. Here at COFI we have the technical expertise and political authority in the fisheries sector to make that so. This is where fisheries and associated Ocean issues come together for effective decisions on guidance and policy; thus COFI has a high calling and never more so than in these challenging times.

From this biennial gathering in Rome, with additional support from FAO and other stakeholders, Member States are empowered to improve their national and regional management of fisheries and the socio-economic conditions of their people and their industries at home.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Migratory fish and marine currents do not pay heed to the boundaries and borders of humankind. Thus our regional endeavours are crucial to good governance of the Ocean and its resources. It is thus that the RFMO system is such an essential element of our stewardship responsibilities, and I pay homage to those who have worked tirelessly towards helping the RFMOs fulfil their mandates. It is therefore a concern that some RFMOs remain handicapped by limited resources, seriously undermining their effectiveness in important areas. This handicap needs to be rectified, perhaps through the establishment of a joint financial mechanism, for we cannot be satisfied with RFMO success in some quarters of the Ocean, while others are failing. In some cases, RFMOs may need to be reorganized to increase their productivity and effectiveness.

When it comes to the Ocean, we are all connected. So joint action is the answer, and in that regard I'm confident FAO is the right place, with the right leadership, to enable the establishment of a proposed joint financial mechanism and rationalization of the RFMO system as a whole.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As already mentioned, COFI has a key role to play in the achievement of SDG 14's high purpose of conserving and sustainably using the resources of the Ocean for sustainable development. I bring to your attention the fact that in relation to fisheries and aquaculture, the FAO has custodianship of four indicators of SDG14's progress, and that all of these firmly address the three legs of the sustainability stool - ecological, social and economic . Having looked at COFI's agenda, I see them as intrinsic to your discussions over the next few days, so bear with me, in a spirit of global sustainability as I spell them out.

The four indicators in question are as follows:

14.4.1: Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels. FAO's analysis show that we still have a third of fish stocks subject to unsustainable exploitation. While the rate of overfishing has declined, current indications are that the tide has not turned sufficiently to achieve this target. I put it to you that we need to be honest with ourselves in assessing this

global target of no overfishing by 2020, and without delay, to put in place the policies and action required. We have less than two years to do so.

14.6.1 Progress by countries in the degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. We know that IUU fishing lies at the heart of the matter, undermining fisheries management all over the world, and cheating legitimate fishermen. The key to beating it is to improve fisheries management and control through better governance, transparency and international cooperation. Therefore, on behalf of a grateful Ocean community, I give thanks for the progress made to address this problem through FAO's Port State Measures Agreement and complementary instruments. I also commend the work being done with WTO and UNCTAD in the direction of removing fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing and harmful fisheries practices.

However, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is still occurring on a grand scale, with some estimates giving a figure of \$23 billion's worth per annum. This shameful phenomenon undermines national, regional and global efforts to manage fisheries sustainably, and in this day and age should not be countenanced. These are the times for all Member States to ratify the PSMA, to strengthen their fisheries laws and regulations, and to take effective action against non-compliance perpetrators. On the battlefronts to which I earlier referred, if we hold firm in favour of rule of law and good governance, powered by international political will, this is one front where we can win sooner rather than later.

14.7.1 Sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in Small Island Developing States, least developed countries and all countries. This indicator is tied to the economic leg of the sustainability stool, particularly relevant to the most Ocean-dependent nations where other economic alternatives are limited. Coming from one of the SIDS, I thank COFI for its focus on fisheries and aquaculture as a provider of food security and sustainable livelihoods.

As we move into the Anthropocene, protecting the livelihoods of vulnerable communities will require vision, innovation and investment, and in that regard, aquaculture must surely be a key priority for humanity.

I also thank the FAO for its active role in the work of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and I note that tomorrow there will be a side-event to launch a significant publication on the impacts of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture.

14.b.1: Progress by countries in the degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries. This indicator relates closely with the social leg of the sustainability stool and it too needs COFI's help. We must ensure the rights of small operators are recognized, that they are valued and given appropriate access to resources as well as markets. COFI can do much to make that so.

Before concluding my reference to the various SDG14 indicators, allow me to highlight one more that would greatly benefit from the attention of the national delegations assembled in Rome today. I refer to:

Target 14.5: By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information. With less than two years to go, achieving the 10% target is a mighty challenge; but it is one that is definitely achievable if we double-down on efforts. We need for partnerships between governments, communities, philanthropies, NGOs, the private sector and the scientific community to deliver nearshore conservation with greater urgency. As well as no-take reserves for spawning grounds, we will all benefit from collaborative fisheries management areas, and better managed coastal and marine areas.

I applaud those countries that have recently declared MPAs, and call on others to come to the party if we are going to hit the SDG14.5 target by 2020. Thereafter we can work to ensure the Ocean's MPAs have adequate monitoring and enforcement, while at the same time supporting Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures. We look to COFI and FAO for energy and commitment in hitting the 10% target by 2020.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Four of SDG14's ten targets mature in 2020. It is for this reason that a 2nd UN Ocean Conference is being proposed for 2020, co-hosted by the Governments of Kenya and Portugal in Lisbon. It will be deeply important for all the Sustainable Development Goals that in 2020 we are able to demonstrate success in hitting SDG14's four targets, thereby boding well for the progress of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda as a whole. Here at COFI, over the next few days, I ask you all to keep the integrity of implementation of those four targets in the forefront of your considerations.

These are busy times for the Ocean action agenda as we march towards 2020. I urge you all to be familiar with and be part of the Communities of Ocean Action set up by the United Nations and accessible through the [oceanconference.un.org](http://oceanconference.un.org) website. We have international conferences of direct relevance to you all coming up this year in the shape of the Our Ocean Conference in Bali, Indonesia, at the end of October, and the Sustainable Blue Economy Conference in Nairobi at the end of November. At the IOC-UNESCO the content of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development is being designed while in New York preparations are underway for the September commencement of the BBNJ conference. Meanwhile in Jamaica the Mining Code of the International Seabed Authority is taking shape. This is no time for those concerned with the well-being of the Ocean to take their eye off the ball and I will follow with much interest the deliberations and outcomes of the 2018 COFI.

I thank you for your consideration.