



Towards 2021 UN Food Systems Summit: The role of Fisheries & Aquaculture



24 March 2021, 16:00 – 18:00 CET Online Event

Hosted by MEP Pierre Karleskind

Chair of the Committee on Fisheries (PECH), European Parliament

Speakers:

- **MEP Pierre Karleskind**
- **Martina Fleckenstein**, UNFSS Action Track 3
- **Dr. Manuel Barange**, Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Resources Division, FAO
- **Veronika Veits**, Director on International Ocean Governance and Sustainable Fisheries, DG MARE, European Commission
- **Javier Garat**, President, Europêche
- **Javier Ojeda**, Interim Secretary General, Federation of European Aquaculture Producers
- **Bruno Guillaumie**, Deputy Director General, CNC France (French Shellfish Farming Interbranch) and Secretary General at EMPA (the European Mollusc Producers' Association)
- **Dr. Antonia Leroy**, Head of Ocean Policy, WWF European Policy Office
- **MEP Isabel Carvalhais**
- **MEP Petros Kokkalis**
- **Ricardo Serrão Santos**, Minister of Maritime Affairs, Portugal, Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Welcome remarks

MEP Pierre Karleskind, PECH Committee Chair

“With a fast-growing world population, ensuring food resilience and security has become a great concern and a top priority worldwide. We need to produce more sustainably, waste less, and to take action to achieve more equality in food distribution.”

In his opening remarks, Mr. Karleskind reflected on the interdependencies between food production and consumption and the interaction between stakeholders along the value chain. With a growing world population, **food resilience and security are top global priorities**. Therefore, ensuring their availability will **require more sustainable food production, reduced food waste and more equal food distribution**. Mr. Karleskind highlighted the role that fisheries and aquaculture already play in maintaining local livelihoods and contributing to the socio-economic wellbeing of coastal populations worldwide. Therefore, **the sustainable management of fisheries and aquaculture is key to address concurrent environmental, social and economic challenges**. This is reflected in the transversal nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mr. Karleskind pleaded for **European leadership** in demonstrating the viability of such an approach and ensuring sustainable food systems for its citizens and partners. In Mr. Karleskind’s view, European policy initiatives such as the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy, or the New Consumer Agenda need to **better acknowledge the importance of fisheries and aquaculture in achieving sustainable and resilient food systems**.

Keynote address

Martina Fleckenstein, UNFSS Action Track 3

“The UN Food Systems Summit will focus on building robust, game-changing and systemic solutions, that should tackle the challenges to healthier, more sustainable and more equitable food systems”.

On behalf of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) organizing team, Ms. Martina Fleckenstein presented the Summit’s structure and objectives. The UNFSS aims to **define game-changing solutions**, known as areas of collective action. Action Track 3 on boosting nature-positive production seeks to **protect and restore natural ecosystems while sustainably**

managing existing food production. Final ideas and proposals are the result of an iterative and open process of collaboration with scientists, practitioners and civil society and private sector associations. While celebrating the support and involvement of UN Member States, Ms. Fleckenstein highlighted the **need to increase the geographic diversity of participants.** In the leadup to the Summit, contributions will continue to be clustered and integrated, with a **view to establishing broad multi-stakeholder coalitions around specific themes.** Among them, Ms. Fleckenstein expressed hopes that a strong coalition for action on fisheries and agriculture will be built, and encouraged all participants to join the consultation process.

Dr. Manuel Barange, Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Resources Division, FAO

“If there is one ecosystem on Earth where food production can expand in an efficient but sustainable manner, this is the aquatic ecosystem.”

On behalf of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Dr. Manuel Barange reminded the importance of understanding **food as a basic Human Right.** Despite this, the number of undernourished people around the world is high and it has been rising over the last 5 years. Ensuring this right involves complex issues of adequacy, availability, accessibility and sustainability. However, rising population numbers mean that **by 2030 the world will need to produce 50% more food,** Dr. Barange stated. **Ocean environments offer the possibility to increase food production in an efficient way,** as they have been increasingly doing over the last 50 years. To harness the potential of fisheries and aquaculture, Dr. Barange advocated for a **Blue Transformation in policymaking,** comprising transformational fisheries management, the sustainable intensification of aquaculture, and the upgrading and innovation of value chains. To conclude, Dr. Barange presented the information and evidence-production work FAO is doing to ensure that fisheries and aquaculture considerations are taken up at the UNFSS.

Veronika Veits, Director on International Ocean Governance and Sustainable Fisheries, DG MARE, European Commission

“Over 3 billion people in the world rely on wild-caught or farmed seafood as their primary source of protein. We therefore call on the UNFSS to recognize the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture to global sustainable food and nutrition and promote sustainable food from the oceans.”

Representing the European Commission, Ms. Veronika Veits started by providing some key facts

relative to the current situation of the global food system. A rising number of people affected by hunger globally and the **persistence of several forms of malnutrition will prevent meeting global nutrition targets by 2030 if no action is taken**. At the same time, obesity and over-weight are also increasing, with attending health and economic costs. Both issues coexist with environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. The Sustainable Development agenda for 2030 sets out an ambitious vision that calls for the provision of sufficient quantities of safe, nutritious, and affordable food while creating growth and employment, sustaining biodiversity and the natural environment, and adapting to climate change. In Ms. Veits' view, the **UNFSS provides a unique opportunity to forge a common agenda for action to drive resilience and sustainability in the world's food systems**. Ms. Veits recalled the importance of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture for decreasing the carbon footprint of food, optimizing water usage, and freeing land for reforestation and preservation purposes. Furthermore, **some forms of aquaculture provide important ecosystem services**, contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The sustainability and profitability of European fisheries show that the Common Fisheries Policy has the right targets and tools. As capture fish alone cannot provide all the blue food needed, **efforts to boost sustainable aquaculture and algae production will be undertaken**, Ms. Veits said. She however added that it is of the utmost importance that the rapid growth of global aquaculture necessary to meet increased demands does not come at the expenses of the environment, of the economic development or of social conditions. Given that one cannot look at the food system in isolation, the EU will also pursue the transition to sustainable food systems abroad, and the **establishment of a global level playing field** in line with the SDGs and in a partnership approach.

Reactions from stakeholders:

Javier Garat, President, Européche

"We need a clear balance between biodiversity conservation, the sustainable use of natural resources and food security. The balance of these three issues is key for the Summit".

Mr. Javier Garat, President of Européche, highlighted the **health and environmental benefits of wild-caught fish**. Moreover, decreasing CO₂ emissions and energy consumption from fishing vessels – together with the increasing sustainability of EU-managed stocks – **means that the industry is becoming cleaner and more sustainable**. Therefore, Mr. Garat argued for a **sustainable management approach** that strikes a **balance between biodiversity conservation,**

the sustainable use of resources and food security. Such an approach must be mindful of the **need for an international level playing field** that preserves the competitiveness of European fishers. Mr. Garat concluded by expressing his belief that the fishing industry bears **the potential to lead in the transition to more sustainable practices**, encouraging other industries to follow suit. This will require guaranteeing clear and transparent competition, building trust among all actors, increasing the recognition of fishermen, and promoting frontrunner and digital solutions.

Javier Ojeda, Interim Secretary General, Federation of European Aquaculture Producers

“Let’s make the EU a frontrunner in farmed finfish production in order to give a competitive edge to a more sustainable and resilient food system which is able to contribute to the green recovery and tackle current challenges.”

On behalf of the Federation of European Aquaculture Producers (FEAP), Mr. Javier Ojeda agreed on the need to adapt to current challenges and fulfill the SDGs. Mr. Ojeda celebrated the example set by the Farm to Fork Strategy and the European Green Deal in acknowledging the **importance of primary producers**. Demonstrating the capacity to improve food production and consumption patterns will require not leaving any social sectors behind. In the words of Mr. Ojeda, the **growing dependence of the EU on blue food imports** highlights the **need to boost domestic aquaculture production**. Given the strong environmental and legal framework in place, **imports of food with lower standards as those required from European companies should not be allowed**. Mr. Ojeda concluded his intervention by pointing to the importance of the sustainable intensification of aquaculture production. Also the synergies between aquaculture, circularity and the efficient use of resources, which can be further exploited through high quality research.

Bruno Guillaumie, Deputy Director General, CNC France (French Shellfish Farming Interbranch) and Secretary General at EMPA (the European Mollusc Producers’ Association (EMPA))

“If only we could stimulate more people to adopt a shellfish and sea plants-based diet, we could contribute to reducing greenhouse gases emissions up to 70%.”

Speaking on behalf of CNC France and EMPA, Mr. Guillaumie first described the French-specific context of shellfish farming, arguing that **shellfish farmers have limited space to produce**

aquaculture stocks, only covering 0,24 % of the whole maritime public domain, including French territorial sea. As explained by Mr. Guillaumie, **eating shellfish-based food brings indisputable benefits to health and food balance**, while generating a risible environmental footprint, being carbon-neutral at production level. Against this background, Mr. Guillaumie disclosed that the **spreading of shellfish-based diets could contribute to a sheer 70% reduction of greenhouse gases**. Despite its glaring benefits, in the last two decades, shellfish farming has steadily decline in France, where the number of farmers has plummeted and so did the available space and the production potential. Deteriorated water quality and rising competition for space, in Mr. Guillaumie's view, are responsible for that downward spiral. To reverse the trend, CNC 2020/2050 vision prioritizes the increase of available farming sites and their production capacity. The idea is to move production sites away from the shore and to develop offshore Multi Trophic marine cultivations while supporting wind farming.

Dr. Antonia Leroy, Head of Ocean Policy, WWF European Policy Office

“If we truly aim at meeting SDG 14 on food security, we need to understand that a global vision on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture cannot be separated from one on ocean health.”

To begin with, WWF Europe's Head of Ocean Policy Mrs. Leroy observed that **38 % of all SDGs are dependent on the accomplishment of SDG 14 “Life Below Water”**, adding that **seafood is essential to achieve SDG 2 on food security**, as it contains essential nutrients for a healthy diet. Subsequently, while addressing SDG 14, Mrs. Leroy maintained that a **global vision on sustainable fisheries and aquaculture cannot be separated from one on ocean health**. Crucially, fostering sustainable blue food practices is the cornerstone of both. In this respect, to tap into the opportunities that arise from blue food in terms of sustainability, world governments should act on multiple fronts, Mrs. Leroy remarked.

On the economic side, decision-makers should **consider removing harmful subsidies to fishing**, allegedly distorting the economy and creating barriers to access for coastal communities. Governments should also focus on **addressing climate change implications on blue food chains**, provided that global fish stocks are projected to decline by 24% by the end of the century and that in all likelihood, in 2050 nearly 40% of today's catch potential in Economic Exclusive Zones will be lost. Efforts to mitigate climate change effects, from Mrs. Leroy viewpoint, will require **the launch of the next generation of sustainable aquaculture**, in which aquaculture farming halls can produce sustainable food while mitigating environmental degradation. Furthermore, it is

utterly important to **enhance the protection and regeneration of natural coastal infrastructure** in light of extreme weather events. In closing, Mrs. Leroy expressed her satisfaction with the EU Farm to Fork Strategy, highlighting its potential in terms of preservation of biodiversity and efficient use of food resources. On the other hand, the speaker pointed to concerns about the phasing out of harming fisheries subsidies - yet to be identified - and the issue of free-documented fish products, which may open the door to human right abuses along the supply chain.

Reactions by MEPs

MEP Isabel Carvalhais

“In order to fight malnutrition, the EU needs an integrated vision of action for aquaculture and fish food products whereby its acceptability, availability and affordability are enhanced”.

European Parliament MEP Ms. Carvalhais, from S&D, started by remarking that fisheries and aquaculture products are key components of the EU’s agenda on sustainable food production. While food is abundant in the EU, Ms. Carvalhais reprimanded, many citizens are denied access to affordable food on a regular basis. On top of that, Ms. Carvalhais specified that an **estimated 20% of all food produced gets lost or wasted in the EU each year**, with households being the biggest contributor in that regard. Paradoxically, while large strands of the EU society dismiss food scarcity as not a concern, **the EU is largely dependent on food imports**, this being especially true for fishing and aquaculture food products, 60% of which are imported from outside the EU. In Ms. Carvalhais’ opinion, the EU should follow a three-pronged strategy that counts on **improving the acceptability, availability, and accessibility of healthy food**, and in the same footsteps of what the Farm to Fork Strategy did for land-based products, brings to the policy realm an **integrated vision of action** with regards to **aquaculture** and **fish food products**.

MEP Petros Kokkalis

“We should stop considering fish and land-based products as separated policy domains. A comprehensive approach to food entails a Farm to Fork Strategy together with a Sea to Fork Strategy”.

In his intervention, Mr. Kokkalis expressed confidence that the **UN Food Systems Summit** slated for November 2021 will bring to the forefront systemic and game-changing solutions for worldwide food systems. Speaking of EU's approach to food, Mr. Kokkalis conceded that the **EU policy instruments usually do not frame the food system as a whole**, and rather treat fish food products and land-based products as pertaining to separated policy areas. In this direction, the speaker propelled panellists' attention on an enlightening opinion released by the European Parliament PECH Committee on the Farm to Fork Strategy, which calls on the European Commission to couple it with a "Sea to Fork Strategy".

Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Ricardo Serrão Santos, Minister of Maritime Affairs, Portugal

"Despite the challenges related to it, the ocean has many answers to humankind feeding problems. To preserve it, the future seafood system should be based on a blue circular economy, green technologies, blue bio-tech and thorough ocean knowledge."

Representing the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Mr. Serrão Santos, started off by recognizing that the forthcoming UN Food Systems Summit will have a key role for humankind. Against the background of 11% of world population still suffering from acute malnutrition, Mr. Serrão Santos highlighted that **nowadays more people die from non-communicable diseases related to poor diets than from hunger. Seafood**, the main feeding source for 3.3 billion people globally, is unequivocally important in the global food system and **can help resolving issues of chronic malnutrition worldwide**. Clearly, granting global access to a seafood-based, balanced and healthy diet requires greater efforts to preserve marine ecosystems. Pointing fingers at existing hindrances, Mr. Serrão Santos mentioned **overfishing practices and illegal fishing (IUU)**, reportedly **responsible for the depletion of wild fish stocks** and considerable economic **losses for legal fisheries**. Moving to sustainable aquaculture activities, Mr. Serrão Santos noted that the thorny issue of chemical contamination still lies ahead and that, akin to what happens in the fishery domain, overexploitation of resources and competition for space persist. Despite the magnitude of the foresaid challenges, Mr. Serrão Santos contended that, compared to the past, decision-makers can now foster sustainable fishing activities based on scientific knowledge and that, concurrently, new technologies enable greater surveillance and lower the enforcement costs of monitoring illegal fishing. Likewise, we hear that

the aquaculture industry has made strides in terms of implementing engineering innovation, finding new solutions for feeding and fine-tuning disease control and remediation. Shifting the focus on EU commitments towards sustainable food production, Mr. Serrão Santos **stressed the need to incentivize sustainable and profitable aquaculture and fisheries initiative in line with UN SDGs**, recognizing that the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy of 2030 and the EU Circular Economy Action Plan are concrete steps in that regard. Accordingly, the EU should act as a trailblazer in the remit of global environmental action and simultaneously support initiatives and investments in sustainable food production.

Q&As with the audience

Moderated by Ernesto Peñas Lado, Member, IUCN/CEM/FEG

During the Q&A session, Mr. Barange answered a question from a member of Seas at Risk focusing on the negative climate impact of bottom trawling and the possibility to ban this fishing practice in 30% of the seas through managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in order to protect the ocean's food productivity, biodiversity and contribution to climate resilience. Mr. Barange answered mentioning that empirical evidence shows that **sustainable management of fishing activities allows ecosystems to recover from overfishing**. According to FAO, only one-third of the species is over-fished, this meaning that two-thirds are not. Therefore, having a sustainable management of resources is the key to positively change the trend and ensure the protection of marine ecosystems.

Concerning the point on bottom trawling and MPAs, Mr. Barange observed that **there is no scientific evidence that having 30% of MPAs will make a significant change in the protection of the marine environment**. Mr. Barange also expressed his disappointment in a research published on Nature and cited in an [article of the Guardian](#), focusing on the link between bottom trawling and climate change. According to Mr. Barange, the article is based on **incorrect assumptions**; as an example, the paper assumes that when creating a protected area, all the fishing efforts previously conducted in that area disappear. However, Mr. Barange stressed that scientific evidence shows that fishing efforts tend to be relocated in areas that are open and not regulated. To conclude his answer, Mr. Barange argued that FAO recommends **sustainable management of fishing activities and that all seascapes should be managed according to the ecosystem-based approach**.

Closing remarks and take-away messages

Ernesto Peñas Lado, Member, IUCN/CEM/FEG

On a personal basis, Mr. Penas noted that although the production of sea food is lower as compared with land-based produced food worldwide, increasing seafood's presence with respect to the worldwide food supply comes with wide-ranging benefits. First, it is **extremely healthy**, as recognized by experts from every corner of the planet. In the meantime, **seafood tends to have a lower carbon** footprint than land-based food. By way of conclusion, Mr. Penas argued that seafood should have more strategical importance and relevance in the world's food consumption.