FAO contributions to the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea on the theme "Marine ecosystem restoration"

Aquatic food systems are directly dependent on healthy marine ecosystems, and effective management of these systems can contribute to marine ecosystems restoration.

FAO views marine ecosystem restoration as essential because aquatic food systems (including fisheries, aquaculture and aquatic value chains) depend on healthy marine ecosystems and the services they provide for food security, nutrition and livelihoods (FAO, 2024, 2025).

The importance of marine ecosystems restoration for FAO is captured in FAO's Strategic Framework 2022-2031, under the better environment programme priority area (PPA). Further support of this position is found in various FAO instruments and frameworks, such as the World Restoration Flagship awards of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration which highlight projects geared to ecosystem restoration (FAO, 2025).

FAO's Blue Transformation roadmap emphasizes implementing the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF) and the ecosystem approach to aquaculture (EAA); strengthening aquatic value chains; rebuilding overexploited stocks; and improving governance as key pathways to restore marine ecosystems. FAO recognizes that climate shocks, pollution, environmental degradation, overfishing and poor management are taking a heavy toll on aquatic systems; consequently, transformation is needed to build resilience and sustainability (FAO, 2022).

Restoration requires addressing the drivers of degradation through governance and management, alongside on-the-ground actions. Restoration must be measurable and accountable. FAO emphasizes that monitoring and reporting are fundamental to credible restoration, including through standardized frameworks and interoperable datasets to document where restoration is happening and how progress is tracked over time (FAO, 2021).

The principles that guide FAO's view centre on the EAF, EAA; adaptive, risk-informed and participatory governance; coherence across sectors and instruments. FAO considers the EAF to be a practical means to advance recovery of marine ecosystems by ensuring that fisheries are managed in an ecosystem context, supported by systematic planning and implementation processes.(FAO, 2022) Furthermore, EAF highlights the need for adaptive management mechanisms, stakeholder participation, and explicit incorporation of risk and uncertainty into decision making.(GESAMP, 2021)

Effective restoration therefore requires a coordinated approach, that brings together sustainable and responsible fisheries management, trade-related governance, and monitoring systems, supported by cooperation across instruments, frameworks, and bodies in the fisheries and environmental domains because the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of marine ecosystems are essential pillars in the strategic path towards the Sustainable Development Goals (FAO, 2021). This coordinated approach takes many forms. To implement this coordinated approach, the FAO collaborates with relevant organizations.

Examples of relevant work with instruments, frameworks, and bodies on marine ecosystems restoration are provided below.

FAO relevant work with CITES

In recent years, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) has expanded the number and taxonomic breadth of proposals of marine species for inclusion in CITES Appendices. For example, at the latest CITES Conference of Parties (CoP20 in 2025), marine species accounted for the largest share of animals being considered for addition or uplisting (representing about 62 percent of new animal listings proposals). Between 2022 and 2025, the CITES Conference of Parties added over 200 commercially exploited aquatic species (CEAS) to Appendices I and II, indicating a changing focus of the Convention towards greater consideration of aquatic species.

The FAO Committee on Fisheries has also noted long-standing and growing challenges regarding the application of CITES to fish taxa, including the need for greater cooperation between intergovernmental organizations with overlapping mandates, such as FAO and Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Additional technical challenges are being experienced in implementing CITES provisions for higher-level ("family") listings of CEAS.

FAO, through its Fisheries and Aquaculture Division (NFI), supports Members by providing scientific and technical advice to improve coherence between biodiversity conservation measures, sustainable fisheries management arrangements, and trade regulation. Through these expert advisory processes, FAO evaluates CITES listing proposals for aquatic species, assessing biological status, management frameworks, and potential socio-economic impacts. This work supports evidence-based decision-making and promotes compatibility between multiple objectives.

Through the Development Law Service of its Legal Office, FAO cooperates with the CITES Secretariat by supporting its Members (which may be Parties or non-Parties to CITES) to enhance their technical capacity in respect of the legal matters of implementation of the Convention, including in the making of legal acquisition findings (LAFs). In addition to launching CITES-LEX, a database of national policy and legal instruments relevant to CITES implementation, FAO continues to collect, update and maintain country profiles, in the database, based on Parties' (who are also Member of FAO) inputs. FAO has also contributed legal advice to certain countries on matters relating to international trade in CEAS, regulation of introduction from the sea (IFS), and guidance on the implementation of CITES through national fisheries legal frameworks.

In delivery of CITES responsibilities, capacity development remains a priority for implementation of both fisheries management and multilateral environmental agreements. Many CEAS listings involve taxonomically complex groups where biological and fisheries data remain limited. FAO is supporting Members in their implementation of the Conventions provisions through development of species identification tools, genetic reference databases, and strengthened monitoring, control and surveillance systems.

FAO relevant work with CBD

FAO's work is closely aligned with the objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), particularly the targets related to sustainable use of biodiversity, restoration of marine ecosystems, and spatial management approaches to conserve harvested aquatic species. FAO supports Members in operationalizing the GBF targets through ecosystem-based fisheries management, improved data collection, and integration of biodiversity considerations into fisheries policies, including stock rebuilding strategies which supports GBF ecosystem restoration targets. FAO also supports Members through the use the various tools developed to guide the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries (EAF), including small scale fisheries, e.g., Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). FAO also contributes technical guidance on monitoring progress towards GBF targets, including as a custodian of headline indicators of the GBF, especially those related to promotion of sustainable fisheries and aquatic biodiversity.

To increase the understanding of FAO Members engagement on the main pillars of the Convention, FAO has and will continue to publish information on the consideration of aquatic ecosystems in national biodiversity conservation planning, through text analysis, and is currently assessing the focus of aquatic ecosystem restoration across published literature to examine strengths weaknesses and gaps in delivery of GBF Target 2.

Other relevant work

FAO supports implementation of the international instruments that contribute directly to marine ecosystem restoration, including the *Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries;* the *Guidelines for Sustainable Aquaculture, Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing* and the *Voluntary Guidelines for Catch Documentation Schemes,* amongst others. These instruments strengthen sustainable management, traceability, improve compliance, combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and support stock rebuilding and ecosystem recovery.

Through its Blue Transformation, FAO promotes sustainable aquatic food systems as a driver of marine ecosystem restoration by improving management effectiveness, supporting responsible aquaculture development, reducing pressure on wild stocks, and strengthening equitable aquatic value chains. These actions support the recovery and long-term resilience of marine ecosystems while maintaining their contribution to food security, nutrition and livelihoods.

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