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[1466 words](#)

Malta calls for grassroots involvement in action to mitigate climate

Third Oceans Forum: oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies

Malta's Ambassador for Climate Change action, Ms Simone Borg, urged the international community to "listen more to the grassroots" in working out how to take steps to mitigate the impact of climate change, despite the complexities. "Having them on board can lead us to come up with ideas and options that lead to a just transition" and maintain support for the measures required, she declared.

At the local level, institutions "need to listen to all sectors," she told the first UN Trade Forum, during a debate on the oceans economy, climate and harmful fish subsidies.

This should include academia, Ms Borg insisted. She also underlined "the need to be friends with the press", so that the measures to take are understood by the general public.

"Working in silos will not get us anywhere," she said, blaming the lack of progress in the past 30 years on all the communities working separately. Bringing all groups together to plan for climate mitigation "really changed the momentum" at the domestic level in Malta.

[SIDS are large coastal states](#)

The British Commonwealth Secretary-General, Baroness Patricia Scotland, told the meeting convened by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), that the Commonwealth nations had warned of the current situation 30 years ago. The small island developing states (SIDS), 23 of them in the Commonwealth, could in fact be described as "large coastal states", she pointed out.

[Oceans essential for food](#)

The Deputy Director of Fisheries Policy in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Vera Agostini, noted that with so much of land already taken up for agriculture while world population continues to grow, "we are going to have to turn to the ocean as a human food provider". Yet 30% of current seafood fishing is above a sustainable level.

[Feeding the UN climate summit](#)

The one-week UN Trade Forum organized by UNCTAD is designed to feed into the UN climate summit in New York on 23 September. It is discussing overfishing, biotrade, and ocean plastics as well as trade in climate mitigation efforts.

[Fish trade and food security](#)

Does international fish trade damage local and national food security? A background paper prepared for UNCTAD with officials of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and

the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) said an FAO-commissioned study with 11 country case studies in 2005 concluded that mostly international fish trade had a positive effect on local food security but resulted in increased pressure on fish stocks.

Study found need for effective fisheries management

It concluded that “preserving fish resources through effective fisheries management was necessary to increase food security and sustain international trade in fisheries resources in the long term” (page 8).

Sustainable resource management needed

The UNCTAD paper points out: “This supports the notion that market demand needs to be coupled with a sustainable resource management policy” (8).

The special place of aquaculture

“This situation can be different for aquaculture,” it adds. “Production is often planned for export markets. Fish imports can increase domestic food supply and may keep prices stable. Thus, countries can equally be major exporters and importers of fish, as is the case for Thailand, China, Viet Nam, Nigeria or Egypt” (8-9). But this has led to concerns about degradation of natural coastal habitats.

Few species in LDC trade

Fish and seafood represent the top five exports for 14 of the world’s 47 Least Developed Countries (LDCs). But most involve just a few products. “The three most exported fish products account for roughly half of all fish exports from LDCs” (9). These account for 71% of Uganda’s exports and 98% of the Comoros’.

LDCs must take steps to increase exports

But to increase their fisheries export potential, LDCs must meet market requirements of importing countries, reduce trade costs and improve sustainability and aquaculture resources. “There are successful LDCs whose experiences can be duplicated and upscaled in other countries [...] – such as ports, processing plant and cold stores” (10).

Bangladesh and Tanzania examples

It added: “Countries such as Bangladesh and the United Republic of Tanzania have shown that investments aimed at raising and enforcing norms and standards, particularly in relation to fish exports, can significantly boost export earnings” (10).

Fish and protein intake

The paper reported that fish production accounts for 17 per cent of global animal proteins and essential micronutrients with fish harvests at around 21 kg per capita per year (vi). “Fish and seafood consumption accounted for 20 per cent of animal protein intake for 3.2 billion people. About 26 per cent live in LDCs, 19 per cent in developing countries, and about 16 per cent in Low Income Food Deficit countries (LIFDCs)(5).

Reducing 93% of heat from human activities

“Oceans and wetlands produce half the oxygen we breathe, absorb around 30 per cent of the anthropogenic emissions of CO₂ and around 93 per cent of the heat arising from human-driven changes to the atmosphere.” (4)

Consumption has more than doubled

Fish and seafood “consumption has more than doubled since 1973,” met largely by an increase in aquaculture (growing 6 per cent on average during 2001-2015) (5).

No potential for increase in most productive fish

The ten most productive species of fish account for about 27 per cent of harvests. “However, most of their stocks are fully fished with no potential for increases in volume,” the paper declares. “The remainder are overfished with increases in their volume only possible after successful stock restoration” (12).

'Alarming' state of Mediterranean and Black Sea

It describes the situation in the Mediterranean and Black Sea as “alarming” (12). “Catches have dropped by one third since 2007.”

Fish and jobs

“Around 59.6 million people were employed in fisheries and aquaculture in 2016 and some 200 million direct and indirect employment opportunities. [...] In developing countries [...] they often represent the only opportunity for livelihoods, earning an income and improving the quality of life for the family” (6).

Over 50% increase potential

“The value of fish harvest from marine fisheries and aquaculture is estimated at over \$150 billion. FAO and the World Bank estimate that an additional US\$83 billion could be extracted from the oceans if the productive capacity of currently overfished stocks was restored” (6).

Among most traded food: a third of fish harvest enters world trade

“Fish and seafood are among the most traded food commodities: [...] 35-38 per cent of world production enters international trade.[...] Over 50 per cent of this trade originates in developing countries whose net trade income (export – import), valued at \$37 billion in 2016, is greater than their net trade income [in] most other agricultural commodities combined” (6).

Over 1000 species consumed, more than 200 countries trade

“Over 1000 fish species are consumed worldwide and more than 200 countries have reported trade in fish and seafood” (7).

Nearly 90% of production destined for human consumption

“The share of world fish production destined for human consumption has increased and diversified significantly, up from 67 per cent in the 1960s to 88 per cent currently” (7). “In 2016, more than 200 countries reported exports and imports of fish and fishery products” (7). “About 78 per cent of seafood products were exposed to international trade” (7).

China major producer, and importer

“China is the main fish producer and the largest exporter of fish and seafood. It is also a major importer due to outsourcing of processing from other countries as well as growing domestic consumption of species not produced locally.

Norway no2 exporter, Viet Nam now third

“Norway, the second major exporter, recorded high export values in 2015. In 2014, Viet Nam became the third major exporter, overtaking Thailand, which has experienced a decline in exports since 2013, mainly linked to reduced aquaculture shrimp production due to disease problems.

EU biggest importer

The European Union is still by far the largest single market for fish and seafood imports, followed by the United States of America and Japan. These three markets accounted in 2016 for approximately 64 per cent of the total value of world imports of fish and fish products” (7-8). Internal EU trade accounted for 8 per cent of this.

Fishing accounts for up to 80% of exports from fish

In the Pacific, small island states earn 30-80% of their exports earning from fishing, particularly for high-value tuna. In West Africa, fish can account for 5-12% of GDP. Fishing licence fees and “an important source of government revenue and foreign exchange earnings for several developing countries” (6).

Available online

The paper, produced by UNCTAD and FAO Senior Fisheries Consultant Lahsen Ababouch, legal officer David Vivas Egui and Assistant Economic Officer Lorenzo Formenti, is [available online](#).