

DOSI Participation Report: UN Bottom Fishing Workshop 2022

A report on the August 2022 United Nations Workshop to discuss the implementation of paragraphs 113, 117 and 119 to 124 of resolution 64/72, paragraphs 121, 126, 129, 130 and 132 to 134 of resolution 66/68 and paragraphs 156, 171, 175, 177 to 188 and 219 of resolution 71/123 on sustainable fisheries, addressing the impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks.

Outcomes

The FAO showed interest in DOSI's work, and there may be potential for collaboration. Some delegations agreed that standardizing Impact Assessments, which was a major theme that we raised, would be beneficial. Some delegations also supported creating an IA template using the questionnaire that the DOSI Fisheries Working Group has developed. DOSI's publication, "[A review of impact assessments for deep-sea fisheries on the high seas against the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries Guidelines](#)," is referenced in the [report of the workshop](#) (Paragraph 39) and we responded to questions from both FAO and delegations on how our review could be used most effectively moving forward.

Overview

DOSI participated in the UN Bottom Fishing Workshop in New York, 2 to 3 August 2022 and was represented by Fisheries Working Group co-leads Lissette Victorero, Matt Gianni, and Laura Kaikkonen. The focus of this workshop was discussing the implementation of paragraphs 113, 117, and 119 to 124 of resolution 64/72, paragraphs 121, 126, 129, 130 and 132 to 134 of resolution 66/68, and paragraphs 156, 171, 175, 177 to 188, and 219 of resolution 71/123 on sustainable fisheries, addressing the impacts of bottom fishing on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fishstocks. **This multi-stakeholder Workshop, together with a report from the Secretary-General, will work to inform the UNGA review on bottom fisheries which will take place in November.** The event was attended mostly by the major trawling nations with noticeable absences from island states.

The key topics discussed in the workshop were divided into five segments:

- Segment 1: Impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks
- Segment 2: Progress made by States in addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks, in particular through the implementation of relevant paragraphs of resolutions 64/72, 66/68, and 71/123
- Segment 3: Focus on the experience and the special requirements of developing States in addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks, in particular through the implementation of relevant paragraphs of resolutions 64/72, 66/68, and 71/12
- Segment 4: Progress made by regional fisheries management organisations and arrangements in addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term

sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks, in particular through the implementation of relevant paragraphs of resolutions 64/72, 66/68, and 71/12

- Segment 5: Opportunities and challenges in further addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks

DOSI actions

Over the past year, in light of this workshop and the upcoming review on bottom fishing, Laura Kaikkonen together with 30 members from the Fisheries WG prepared a report titled "[A review of impact assessments for deep-sea fisheries on the high seas against the FAO Deep-sea Fisheries Guidelines.](#)" The main aim of this work was to evaluate the content and consistency of the selected IAs against the science-based criteria established in the FAO Guidelines to assess the implementation of the relevant UN resolutions. The DOSI report was well received by the workshop and is referenced in the [report of the workshop](#). (Paragraph 39).

DOSI Fisheries co-lead Lissette Victorero presented the main findings from the report in relation to this workshop on the Segment 5 panel ([presentation](#)). The main findings presented in this forum were the lack of baseline data and VME identification and the lack of data and evidence for assessing impacts in the nine impact assessments that were reviewed. **The presentation concluded that the majority of the FAO criteria are only addressed partially or are not addressed at all in the impact assessments, showing that the implementation of the relevant UN resolutions is yet to be achieved.** The presentation also illustrated how bycatch of VME indicator taxa is often the main method used to identify VMEs in the impacts assessments, and how scientific studies have not shown this approach to be representative of the i) benthic community, ii) impacted individuals and iii) benthic biomass.

Additionally, we also highlighted how scientific studies show recovery time scales in trawled areas that clearly exceed those of the FAO criteria, meaning that significant adverse impacts on VMEs are occurring in trawled areas. We presented a set of recommendations and re-iterated that DOSI is willing to collaborate and use the comprehensive report produced by the Fisheries WG to help improve standardisation of the impact assessments across the RMFOs. Despite being the last panel of the event, this event generated the most dialogue among the panellists, states and NGOs. The presentation received several questions and general support from the workshop, with a clear interest in further developing impact assessment guidelines. In response to requests, Lissette Victorero highlighted that DOSI has an interest in continuing the work we have done so far to ensure the integration of the latest scientific evidence in any potential revisions of the IA criteria. In response to FAO's query on how DOSI's work on the subject can be used directly, Victorero responded that the questionnaire questions are available in the DOSI report and can be freely utilised by the RMFOs to improve their implementation of FAO guidelines.

In response to questions about DOSI's work – specifically about whether our report is a best practice impact assessment and how it could be used – Lissette Victorero responded with the following:

"The guidance is there in the FAO guidelines, but the problem is on the implementation– and the template of the questions DOSI utilized to break down the FAO guidelines based on the resolutions are available. The questionnaire is actually fully available for RMFOs to take from our report and apply in order to improve the implementation of the resolutions.

“We have not developed ‘per se’ a best practice Impact Assessment, but I would say that through this work and by developing our extensive questionnaire, there is a lot of substance there to work towards producing a template for a best practice impact assessment that would focus on the implementation.

“Yes, the RMFOS are different, but they have the same tasks and same legal obligations, so it makes sense for there to be co-operative activities. And I would like to emphasize the importance of independent evaluations of the impact assessments and, obviously, a standardization of impact assessments would help such evaluations as well. This is something that the RMFOs could pick up and continue working on, or we could also consider a collaboration with the FAO.”

The dialogue in this panel also revolved around the fishing footprint, since some nations feel that their fishing footprint is so small that significant adverse impacts are unlikely. Many nations, such as New Zealand, calculate the fishing footprint as a percentage of the whole convention area of the RMFO, which results in small values and risk assessments that claim there are no potential impacts. Lissette Victorero reiterated in the panel that the fishing footprint should be calculated as a percentage of the area which has habitats with commercial fish e.g., “fishable area”:

“You mentioned that New Zealand had conducted a risk assessment, which is great, but at the same time the impact assessment claimed there are no significant adverse impacts because the fishing footprint is focused on 0.1% of the convention area, which you again discussed in the presentation. The majority of the convention area, however, will have an average depth of 4 km or so. In other words, it is too deep for fishing and for there to be abundant biomasses of fish that are marketable. So through a quick calculation, the area that is fishable in SPRFMO is actually 0.74%. From this the estimates vary, but you are fishing on approximately at least 13% of the fishable area.”

The states generally also found that “causing significant adverse impacts” is a concept that is hard to evaluate, despite it being one of the most quantitative criteria in the FAO guidelines because there is temporal reference. The industry generally agreed that more mapping should be carried out in order to understand the distribution of VMEs. In addition, the workshop provided DOSI an opportunity to discuss the science-based criteria directly with representatives from RFMOs. [The preliminary report from the workshop, together with the presentations, can be viewed here](#). The DOSI Fisheries WG also prepared and distributed a single page summary of the report for those attending the workshop.

Interventions

DOSI participated in the discussions by delivering the following interventions:

Day 1

Segment 2: Progress made by States in addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks, in particular through the implementation of relevant paragraphs of resolutions 64/72, 66/68 and 71/123

Intervention: DOSI, Lissette Victorero to Mr. Paul Lansbergen.

Thank you madame moderator, I have a question directed at the representative of the International Coalition of fisheries associations. Thank you for your presentation.

You said in your calculations that bottom trawling is critical for global food security and presented a value of 19 million tons. However, can you clarify if that value is in fact for deep-sea fisheries or just anything that is trawled in the oceans? I have worked with FAO data as well as reconstructions of discard and bycatch data from specifically deep-sea fisheries and have found that deep sea fisheries, especially those occurring deeper than 400 m only contribute 0.4 % to the portion of global catch. This value includes catches from EEZ and international waters and hence the value for purely international waters, which is what we are discussing here in this workshop, is extremely likely to be even smaller and as such not an important food source. So can you clarify if you think high seas bottom trawling is important for global food security and if so, can you please provide the references for the research showing this?

Day 2

Segment 4 Progress made by regional fisheries management organisations and arrangements in addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and the long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks, in particular through the implementation of relevant paragraphs of resolutions 64/72, 66/68 and 71/123

Intervention: DOSI, Laura Kaikkonen to all panel members.

Thank you, madam moderator. Thank you to all panellists for sharing your experiences. We would like to enquire how the panellists view the opportunities of increasing the transparency of fisheries management and assessment of impacts in the context of the work of the various RFMOs. This is very much related to the important question by Spain on data confidentiality. DOSI recently reviewed a number of impact assessments conducted by states and RFMOs, and found that unfortunately many of the assessments and the data underpinning them are not publicly available. Paragraph 83 of UNGA Resolution 61/105 specifically calls for making this information available. This unavailability of data and documents, as well as the description of the methods applied to assess the impacts of bottom fishing on VMEs poses a serious challenge for evaluating the impacts of fishing and the subsequent management and mitigation measures. This information should be made available in the interest of both States interested in evaluating the fishing impacts on the high seas and the representatives of the civil society. Here for instance the example given by GFCM in being open to applications from scientists and other members of society in proposing closures is encouraging and we would welcome broader application of such approaches in other regions to increase transparency. Therefore, we would be happy to hear from the panellists how they view the possibilities of expanding the availability of the information used to assess the impacts of deep-sea fishing beyond the dedicated working groups of the RFMOs for improved and independent evaluation of the measures taken to protect deep-sea biodiversity.

Segment 5 : Opportunities and challenges in further addressing the impacts of bottom fisheries on vulnerable marine ecosystems and long-term sustainability of deep-sea fish stocks

Intervention: DOSI, Laura Kaikkonen to all panel members.

With respect to significant adverse impacts, the FAO guidelines are quite clear about this and note that any impacts that compromise ecosystem integrity in a non-temporary manner, in the time scales of beyond 5 to 20 years, should be considered a significant adverse impact. Many VME taxa are long-lived and their recovery from disturbance often takes longer than this 20 years limit that has been set for a SAI.

In the case that the available data does not allow to demonstrate that SAI cannot be prevented, these higher uncertainties should reflect a greater precautionary approach in management decisions, including not permitting fishing to occur. My question thus is to the entire panel: can we accept the inverse application of the precautionary approach in data poor regions or should further mapping of VMEs be established as a requirement to continue fishing?

Final statement: DOSI, Laura Kaikkonen for all panel members.

Thank you, madam moderator. DOSI would like to thank the organisers and the participants for the fruitful discussions during the workshop. DOSI welcomes the recognition of deep-sea science in the various presentations and echoes the message from the panel on the need to better map VMEs and to improve the impact assessment to adequately manage fishing impacts and prevent SAIs. DOSI remains open for future cooperation and we hope you reach out to us to ensure the application of the most recent science to protect deep-sea biodiversity. Thank you.