



Request for the US to Address Area-Based Management Tools at the UN FAO Committee on Fisheries, Thirty-Fourth Session (COFI34)

May 2021 CCC Meeting

Purpose

International negotiations are underway to incorporate area-based management tools (ABMTs) in blue water ecosystems, including closing areas to fishing, in order to protect biodiversity and sustain food production, thus improving the governance of natural resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). The negotiations are a result of perceived pressures on the sustainability of natural resources and to biodiversity in these areas, including from fisheries.

But do these ABMTs work to achieve the intended ecological and socioeconomic objectives? At present, science-based guidelines to plan, evaluate, identify unintended consequences, and monitor area-based management implementation discussed in these negotiations are lacking.

Such guidelines and decision-making tools are imperative for existing fishery management entities to evaluate and weigh objectives, identify performance metrics, and develop plans to address consequences of spatial management of activities in pelagic ecosystems. The WP Council convened the International Workshop for Area-Based Management of Blue Water Fisheries in June 2020 with the purpose of exploring guidelines for ABMT employment in blue water ecosystems. Outcomes of the workshop can be found here:

<http://www.wpcouncil.org/Blue-Water-ABMT-workshop/>

WP Council Request to US Delegation

1. The US should request that COFI establish a new working group on ABMTs, using workshop outcomes as a blueprint for developing ‘best practices’ on ABMT implementation; or

Develop an ABMT sub-committee within a planned new Fisheries Management Committee to be established by COFI34.

2. The US should request that COFI identify processes for which a Scientific Body, as prescribed in BBNJ negotiation, may recommend or evaluate ABMTs. If no process is in development, a small working group or sub-committee may serve that purpose.

In advance of the meeting, the US should pursue support from other COFI Members for the above proposed agenda items.

Relevant Outcomes from COFI34

A Subcommittee on Fisheries Management was proposed by Norway at COFI34, which could advance concerns regarding ABMTs or a working group on the matter. However, agreement on the terms and conditions of the Subcommittee will be at a later COFI meeting and a proposal will be submitted to COFI35 in 2022.

COFI34 did note the importance of considering multiple effective time and area based management tools, such as protected areas and other effective area based conservation measures (OECMs) for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. COFI34 also noted the relevance of OECMs to achieving a number of the UN's sustainable development goals and global biodiversity targets, and requested that FAO produce and disseminate practical guidelines to support members in their identification and implementation.

The FAO Workplan was distributed at COFI34, which called for expertise consultation and “regional learning events” on ABMTs, which could be an opportunity for existing fishery management bodies to develop guidelines as requested by the WP Council. The FAO Workplan acknowledged criticism of ABMT and MPA implementation. It also suggested to build general awareness on the use of spatial management tools and their benefits to fisheries and biodiversity, both at global and regional levels through advisory processes and communications materials. Canada made an intervention for FAO to continue work on regional implementation of ABMT or OECMs. The United States did not intervene on the matter or make a request, but did circulate information on the WP Council workshop in its written statement to COFI34.

The COFI34 Report can be accessed here: <http://www.fao.org/3/ne907en/ne907en.pdf>