STATEMENT BY FAO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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Distinguished members of the SEAFDEC Program Committee, on behalf of Mr. Jong-Jin Kim, Assistant Director General and Regional Representative of the FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, I have the pleasure of providing a statement concerning the cooperation between FAO and SEAFDEC.

The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center and FAO have a long history of cooperation and collaboration in the promotion and operationalization of responsible fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia. As an example, just over the past few months, FAO has provided the active participation of many FAO technical officers sharing their technical expertise in SEAFDEC webinars with themes ranging from small-scale fisheries to subsidies. This demonstrates that we are now increasingly able to access technical advice in webinar format, from across the FAO global technical network.

These are challenging times for everyone, as the COVID-19 pandemic affects lives, livelihoods and the way we work. Those who depend on fishing and fish farming for their livelihoods, such as small-scale fishers and fish farmers, crew members, fish processors and fish traders, among others, have, in one way or another been negatively affected by the measures implemented to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has also impacted our way of working as global and regional intergovernmental organizations. Project operations have been affected along with our ability to provide advice on site. We have had to adjust how we work at national and regional levels and virtual interaction has moved from a rare event to the new normal. In your deliberations at the Program Committee, it will be important to consider and reflect how to deliver the SEAFDEC regional work program and activities at national level within a context of reduced mobility and travel.

In July of this year, the 2020 State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture (SOFIA) was launched virtually. The theme of this year’s SOFIA is Sustainability in Action, which is very relevant to your deliberations in the Program Committee. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate the key messages of SOFIA 2020, as presented by Manuel Barange, Director of the FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Division, during its virtual launch, as follows:

1. Now more than ever, fish and fish products are essential in the fight against hunger and poverty
2. Sustainable intensification, adequate frameworks and innovative value chains are essential for further aquaculture growth
3. Effective management is the only path to sustainability – management is the best conservation
4. Development of sustainable value chains essential to enhance market access and increase global trade in fish and fish products
5. Enhance efforts towards social sustainability in fisheries and aquaculture
6. There is no alternative to sustainability – the world needs programmes to further improve fisheries and aquaculture

The analysis presented in SOFIA 2020 showed that stocks under effective management are increasingly sustainable and those not under effective management are increasingly deteriorating.
As a leading regional organization in Asia, SEAFDEC and its Member countries have a big role to play in advancing and realizing the sustainability agenda at the regional, national and local levels. Towards this shared goal of fisheries and aquaculture sustainability, FAO is pleased to continue its collaboration with SEAFDEC in areas of mutual concern.

FAO is looking to build and finance regional partnerships for capacity building in the assessment of marine fish stocks that can provide meaningful advice for decision making, under the data poor situations that face many fishery managers.

FAO is also looking forward to cooperating with SEAFDEC as executing agency for two regional projects under the International Waters Programme of the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

The first is the Sustainable management of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Phase II, which is geared towards the implementation of the BOBLME Strategic Action Programme in four of eight participating countries, i.e. Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand and expected to commence in 2021.

The second regional project is Promoting the blue economy and strengthening fisheries governance of the Gulf of Thailand through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (GoTFish), involving Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam. This project is in the concept note stage for submission to and consideration by the GEF Council and development of the full project is expected to commence in 2021.

I would also like to mention a number of other areas where FAO is already cooperating with SEAFDEC.

The ongoing project on Gender dimension in the value chain of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia, which is funded under the Global Umbrella Programme for the implementation of the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.

Survey work to assess abandoned lost and discarded fish gear (ALDFG) in Thailand, and hopefully other SEAFDE member countries.

Under various country and regional projects, further development and roll out of the ecosystem approach to fishery management training, which has been a long running cooperation between FAO and SEAFDEC.

In closing, we would like to reiterate FAO’s commitment to our continued cooperation and collaboration in the realization of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia.

Please accept our best wishes for a successful organization and completion of the Forty-third Meeting of the Program Committee.