

COUNCIL**Council****IN-DEPTH EVALUATION OF THE FISHERIES COMMITTEE****Executive Summary****JT03522013**

Declassified

IN-DEPTH EVALUATION OF THE FISHERIES COMMITTEE

The Fisheries Committee (hereafter “the Committee” or “COFI”), was established in 1961. According to its mandate, which was last revised in 2015, the Committee seeks to “a) Promote sustainable well-managed, efficient and resilient fisheries and aquaculture that contribute to healthy ecosystems, support sustainable livelihoods and communities, and contribute to food security, responsible trade and consumption; and b) Promote mutual understanding of developments in fisheries and aquaculture policies”. Throughout the IDE review period, COFI has set out to reach this objective through the development of a group of products and activities, including its flagship “OECD Review of Fisheries” and the “Fisheries Support Estimate (FSE)” database. COFI does not currently have any legal instruments under its responsibility. Two legal instruments¹ under its responsibility were abrogated in 2017, in the context of the OECD-wide Standard-Setting Review, due to their limited impact and partially outdated content, and a lack of Committee resources to effectively implement them. COFI does not have any Level II subsidiary bodies. Its secretariat is situated within the OECD’s Trade and Agriculture Directorate (TAD).

The present IDE assesses the Committee’s relevance, the effectiveness and quality of its products, and its functioning over the period 2015-2021. Overall, the IDE shows that the Committee has addressed issues of high relevance to Members (e.g. harmful fisheries subsidies). Furthermore, despite its modest size and resources, COFI has contributed to some of the domestic and international policies designed to address these issues; confirming its role as a key actor and source of robust data and knowledge, in the international arena of fisheries policy. COFI has made considerable efforts throughout the evaluation review period to enhance the quality and visibility of its flagship products. This said, the Committee’s impact, the quality of products, and some aspects of its functioning have been hampered by the limited scale of its work and resources. This is illustrated for instance by the lack of a policy impact track record in the area of aquaculture.

Committee objectives are generally aligned with Members’ policy needs. The highest-scoring objective for relevance is “to identify and increase knowledge of best practices for transparency and effectiveness of fisheries and aquaculture policy and institutional arrangements”; while the objective “to increase the understanding of the contribution and role of the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the landscape of global ocean governance” received comparatively lower relevance scores. The differences between top and bottom-rated objectives for relevance is however limited. Overall, COFI is perceived as a highly relevant and unique forum to address issues relating to fisheries and aquaculture policy, from an economic perspective. As per its mandate, Members consider aquaculture to be as relevant as fisheries, which confirms the growing importance of the sector in the global economy, and Members’ potential interest in seeing aquaculture be addressed by the Committee on equal footing with fisheries.

Capital-based delegate participation for Members and Partners in COFI is low, and has decreased over time. In the area of fisheries, the European Union (EU) has exclusive competence for the conservation of marine living resources and shares competence with EU Member States for other aspects of fisheries management. Consequently, the EU expresses coordinated positions on behalf of

¹ The Recommendation on Principles and Guidelines for the Design and Implementation of Plans for Rebuilding Fisheries [[OECD/LEGAL/0391](#)] and the Recommendation on the Design and Implementation of Decommissioning Schemes in the Fishing Sector [[OECD/LEGAL/0367](#)]

EU Member States (which are also OECD Members). For those reasons, there seems to be less regular capital-based participation by the EU Member States within Committee meetings. Furthermore, the COFI Output Area is a middle-ranking priority according to the Medium-Term Orientations Survey, while funding for Committee work remained stable during the period.

As concerns effectiveness, the qualitative analysis of Committee work has shed light on certain areas whereby the Committee has enabled significant policy impact. During the period, COFI has managed to consolidate its position as a credible and reliable source of fisheries policy intelligence and statistics, as an open forum for the exchange of information among peers on best policy practices, and as an advocate for transparency in the gathering and sharing of information on fisheries support instruments. There is evidence of the impact of COFI's work not only in domestic policy arenas, but also in the international one as illustrated by the role COFI work has played in facilitating the World Trade Organization's negotiations on fisheries subsidies. Now that a formal Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies has been adopted at the WTO, COFI should reflect on how it could continue to support the implementation phase of this landmark agreement and continue building on its strong collaboration with the WTO. COFI also made direct contributions to addressing global priorities, including Sustainable Development Goal 14 (life under water), the global response to address the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to G20 and G7 priorities.

Recent efforts undertaken by the Committee to focus its limited resources on the production of a high-quality and more visible Review of Fisheries have yielded positive results, appear to have driven the perceived impact, usage, and quality of this flagship product. This effort is presented as a good practice in the framework of this evaluation.

COFI's contribution to policymaking and policy changes as compared to some other international organisations working in similar areas or other OECD Level I committees, remains modest. This is mainly due to the limited scope of its work, the limited diversity of products it develops (including the absence of legal instruments), and the limited availability of resources (financial and human). Resource limitations also explain in part why the significant majority, if not all of the contributions to policy changes observed, relate to the fisheries sector; while contributions to aquaculture policies remain limited for the time being. This in spite of the growing importance of aquaculture in the overall production and consumption of fish products at the global scale (aquaculture already accounts for more than half of fish consumption worldwide). This lack of further focus on the aquaculture sector is seen by some Members as one of the key hindering factors to the achievement of more wide-scale policy impact; along with limited engagement by delegates and levels of participation in Committee work; limited awareness of the existence of COFI products among policymakers; barriers to access to COFI products (e.g. paywall and difficulties finding them), and length of products; and the lack of country-specific recommendations.

The Committee's limited policy impact is confirmed by the results of the Programme Implementation Report (PIR) survey which show that the average of all COFI Product Group impact scores throughout the entire IDE review period is 2.8, which is only slightly above the lower IDE threshold of 2.75. Only the Product Group "Monitoring, evaluation and statistics of fisheries policies" is above the lower threshold of 2.75. This being said, PIR results have been on a positive upwards trend, especially in the later part of the IDE review period, as a result of the Committee's renewed focus on the development and dissemination of a high-quality Review of Fisheries. Finally, it is noted that PIR scores are higher for non-landlocked Members, as compared to their landlocked counterparts; for non-EU Member States as compared to EU Member States which are also OECD Members; and for OECD Members in the Americas, Asia and Oceania regions, as compared to OECD Members in Europe.

The Committee has functioned well over the review period, and has successfully managed to address most of the shortcomings identified by the previous In-depth Evaluation. Some of the key strengths in Committee functioning relate to the work of the Chair managing the Committee meetings; the transparency of the Programme of Work and Budget (PWB) development process; the efficient management of Committee meetings, including in the challenging circumstances generated by the COVID 19 pandemic; the balance of meeting agendas; and the strong collaboration with Committee observers (i.e. the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Trade Organization). Some areas for additional improvement in Committee functioning have nevertheless been identified, including the timeliness of distribution of meeting documentation to allow for more adequate preparation by delegates for Committee meetings; collaboration with other OECD bodies and with non-Members; and improving the regularity and frequency of communications activities.

Assessment²

<i>Relevance</i>	<i>Medium to High</i>
<i>Effectiveness</i>	<i>Low to Medium</i>
<i>Quality of Committee Products</i>	<i>Medium to High</i>
<i>Committee functioning</i>	<i>Highly Satisfactory</i>

Recommendations

Recommendation N° 1: The Committee should identify the factors behind the limited participation of Member and Partner capital-based delegates in its work and meetings. On this basis, it could consider taking actions to increase capital-based delegate participation, in light of enriching the quality of interactions taking place during meetings, strengthening the implementation of its work programme, and increasing the geographical reach of its impact.

Recommendation N° 2: Given the relevance and importance of aquaculture to COFI Members, as well as in the broader context of global food production, COFI should further support the achievement of its objectives in this area. This will require increasing the range of products specifically addressing the sector, as well as enlarging the scope of existing products to include aquaculture when relevant. Further, given its similarities with the agriculture sector, work in aquaculture could be carried out in collaboration with the Committee for Agriculture (COAG). Alternatively, COFI should assess the viability of maintaining aquaculture within the scope of its mandate.

Recommendation N° 3: Given the significance of the recently adopted World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to the fisheries policy landscape, and the historical contributions made by COFI to its development, the Committee should reflect on the means through which it can continue to leverage its products and expertise in order to contribute to the effective implementation of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, in the context of its mandate and expected outcomes.

Recommendation N° 4: The Committee should identify means through which it can further mainstream gender equality into its work programme and related activities.

² Relevance, effectiveness and quality are rated on a 9-point scale (Very Low / Very Low to Low / Low / Low to Medium / Medium / Medium to High / High / High to Very High / Very High); committee functioning is rated on a 5-point scale (Poor / Fair / Satisfactory / Highly Satisfactory / Excellent).

Recommendation N° 5: The Committee should seek ways to further expand and diversify the scope of its programme of work and product portfolio, in light of strengthening its policy impact in Members and non-Members, and fully exploit its potential as an OECD Level I substantive committee. In this context, the Committee should consider its strategic approach to OECD standard-setting with reference to its overall work programme and reflect on the possibility to develop legal instruments in areas where it has longstanding expertise as an additional avenue to further trigger policy impact in Members and non-Members.

Recommendation N° 6: The Committee should discuss the ideal timing for the distribution of preparatory meeting documentation, in order for delegates to have sufficient time to review and comment ahead of the meetings.

Recommendation N° 7: The Committee should enhance its communications and outreach by adopting and implementing a comprehensive communication strategy, containing clear goals and roles with regard to the future dissemination of Committee work. In light of the success of the Committee's COVID-19 policy briefs which were openly accessible, the communication strategy could place important emphasis on the development and distribution of open-access content.

Recommendation N° 8: The Committee should engage in broader and more meaningful co-operation with non-Members and other relevant international partners; enabling it to reach audiences and enhance its impact beyond OECD membership.