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الأغذية والزراعة  
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联合国  
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Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



Organisation des  
Nations Unies pour  
l'alimentation et  
l'agriculture

Продовольственная и  
сельскохозяйственная  
организация  
Объединенных Наций

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Our Ref.:

Your Ref.:

5 December 2017

Dear Mr de Serpa Soares,

I have the pleasure to refer to your letter of 9 October 2017 seeking the contribution of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to the report of the Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea, pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/71/257, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”, in particular paragraph 339 of that resolution concerning the decision of the General Assembly that the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on the Oceans and the Law of the Sea shall focus at its nineteenth meeting, in 2018, on the theme “Anthropogenic underwater noise”.

A significant proportion of the total underwater noise in the ocean is caused by vessel activities, including fishing vessels. Underwater noise from vessels could be reduced through appropriate technologies and measures addressing vessel design, construction, equipment and operation. In April 2014, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) approved the *Guidelines for the reduction of underwater noise from commercial shipping to address adverse impacts on marine life* (MEPC.1/Circ.833). These guidelines are intended to provide general advice to designers, shipbuilders and vessel operators and focus on the primary sources of underwater noise, particularly underwater noise associated with propellers, hull form, onboard machinery and operational aspects. Although the focus is on commercial ships in the IMO context, these IMO guidelines may also be applied to fishing vessels.

It is acknowledged that the best opportunity for the reduction of underwater noise will be during the initial design of the vessel. The design, construction and safety aspects of fishing vessels and fishers have been under assessment by FAO in collaboration with the IMO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) for over a decade. The outcomes of this collaboration include guidelines for competent authorities for the design, construction, equipment and training of the crews of fishing vessels, as well as operational safety, such as the *FAO/ILO/IMO Document for Guidance on Fishermen's Training and Certification, Voluntary Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Equipment of Small Fishing Vessel* 2005 and the revised *Code of Safety for Fishermen and Fishing Vessels* 2005.

Mr Miguel de Serpa Soares  
Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs  
and United Nations Legal Counsel  
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The *Safety Recommendations for Decked Fishing Vessels of Less than 12 metres in Length and Undecked Fishing Vessels* approved in 2010 by the IMO and ILO and in 2011 by FAO is another example of tripartite collaboration. These guidelines include specifications for the design categories and construction of small fishing vessels within the parameters of sea and wind conditions for which a vessel is assessed to be suitable as well as the operations of the vessel and the speed appropriate to the prevailing sea state.

Design, construction, and safety issues aside, there are few references to underwater noise from fishing vessels in FAO publications. For instance, the FAO Technical Guidelines for Recreational Fisheries identifies boat noise as a source of disturbance to the environment and wildlife.

Notwithstanding ongoing efforts, it is noted that there is a gap in knowledge on the effects of underwater noise, indicating that more research is needed.

Yours sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AT' or a similar initials, is written over a diagonal line.

Antonio Tavares  
Legal Counsel