

COFI 36 Agenda item 6 - NGO Statement on Securing Market Access for Small-Scale Fisheries

Delivered by IPNLF, Blue Ventures, DSM, Instituto Baleia Jubarte, Ibracon, KNTI, Pesisir Lestari, APASA, Ocean Care, IONC, EAC, SFACT, AWI, SATA, MSCCount, CSI, SeaChoice, and Living Oceans at the 36th COFI Meeting, July 2024

Distinguished delegates,

IPNLF, Blue Ventures, DSM, Instituto Baleia Jubarte, Ibracon, KNTI, Pesisir Lestari, APASA, Ocean Care, IONC, EAC, SFACT, AWI, SATA, MSCCount, CSI, SeaChoice, and Living Oceans appreciate the opportunity to address the FAO Committee on Fisheries. Our intervention is on Agenda item 6, Decisions and Recommendations of the Nineteenth Session of the COFI Sub-Committee on Fish Trade.

We would like to highlight the need for continued efforts to promote equitable participation of small-scale fisheries in global markets to achieve target 14b of the Sustainable Development Goals: “provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets”.

Small-scale fisheries are vital to global food security and economic stability, especially in developing regions. However, small-scale fisheries face systemic challenges in accessing international markets despite their significance. One increasingly important barrier is the reliance on ecolabelling schemes for market entry. Ecolabelling promotes sustainable practices, yet it often marginalises small-scale fisheries. The high costs, stringent data requirements, and complex standards necessary for certification are frequently out of reach for these small operators. This not only restricts their market access but also exacerbates economic disparities. The marginalisation of small-scale fisheries has long-lasting impacts on ocean biodiversity. It is not aligned with the visions of sustainable food production set out at the UN Food Systems Summit 2021.

We appreciate the significant work done by the Sub-Committee on Fish Trade to understand and mitigate these systemic challenges and urge COFI to recognise and address barriers to market access for small-scale fisheries. Noting that ecolabelling schemes can constitute such a barrier, we urge COFI and its Sub-Committee on Fish Trade to heed calls to initiate a review of the FAO Ecolabelling Guidelines, given the significant developments in the global frameworks on both Small-scale fisheries and sustainable fishing since 2009 when the guidelines were last updated.

The review should integrate and fully address the varied contexts of small-scale fisheries into the Ecolabelling Guidelines. This will require investigating the relationship between small-scale fisheries' management practices and the requirements of the ecolabelling certification schemes. Further, the Ecolabelling Guidelines should be updated to reflect the expansion of the international framework on sustainable fishing so that the guidelines can better serve in meeting the objectives of this framework, most notably the Sustainable Development Goals.

To fully implement the Voluntary Guidelines for Small-scale Fisheries and to truly support the vision of a world where food and agriculture improve the living standards of all, particularly the most vulnerable, we must create equitable opportunities for small-scale fishers in the global market. We look forward to working alongside the FAO and COFI to achieve this vision.

Thank you.

