



Distr.: General
29 April 2025

Original: English



UNITED NATIONS
OCEAN CONFERENCE
NICE, FRANCE 2025

**2025 United Nations Conference to Support the
Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14:
Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and
marine resources for sustainable development**

Nice, France, 9–13 June 2025

Item 9 of the provisional agenda*

Ocean Action panels

**Ocean Action panel 5: Fostering sustainable fisheries
management, including supporting small-scale fishers**

Concept paper prepared by the Secretariat

Summary

The present concept paper was prepared pursuant to paragraph 24 of General Assembly resolution [78/128](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the 2025 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development to prepare concept papers on each of the themes of the Ocean Action panels, taking into account the relevant ocean-related processes of the Assembly and other possible contributions. The present paper relates to Ocean Action panel 5, on the theme “Fostering sustainable fisheries management, including supporting small-scale fishers”. In the paper, the status, trends, challenges and opportunities for the achievement of relevant targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 are set out, under the overarching theme of the Conference: “Accelerating action and mobilizing all actors to conserve and sustainably use the ocean”.

* [A/CONF.230/2025/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. Fisheries are integral to the global food system, providing a vital source of protein and nutrition for billions and playing a crucial role in poverty alleviation and economic development, particularly in coastal communities (Sustainable Development Goals 1, 2 and 8). The growing global population will likely require an increase in sustainable food production, making the responsible management of aquatic resources an important concern. This requires a multifaceted and adaptive approach, acknowledging the wide diversity of fisheries and management systems across the globe. Effective management relies on robust institutional capacities, clearly defined governance frameworks and efficient operational strategies at the local, national, regional (through regional fisheries management bodies and regional fisheries bodies) and international levels. These frameworks must be guided by relevant international instruments and agreements, integrating into national policies for cohesive and effective action. This is directly relevant to Goal 14, on conserving and sustainably using the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, and also contributes to many other Goals.

2. The complexity of global fisheries demands flexibility and context-specific solutions. Management strategies must be tailored to the unique social, economic and cultural realities of each fishery and nation. An evidence-based, adaptive and participatory approach is particularly crucial for small-scale fisheries, which often operate with limited resources and data. Devolution of rights, capacity-building, technical assistance, better data, including recognition of local and traditional knowledge, and technology transfer are vital in supporting local communities to adopt sustainable fishing practices and gain fair access to markets. Moreover, strengthening global dialogue and cooperation among key stakeholders, including international organizations and regional fisheries management bodies, is essential for policy harmonization and effective enforcement of regulations.

3. Significant challenges remain that threaten the long-term sustainability of fisheries. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing continues to undermine fisheries management, with detrimental consequences for fish stocks and their ecosystems, jeopardizing livelihoods, exacerbating poverty and increasing food insecurity. Moreover, harmful subsidies often exacerbate overcapacity, leading to unsustainable fishing practices, with negative consequences for both large-scale and small-scale fisheries. Climate change further complicates the situation, altering ecosystems and affecting fish populations (Goal 13). Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive, collaborative and adaptive approach. Promoting sustainable practices, ensuring equitable access to resources and markets, and fostering responsible trade are essential steps.

4. Such an approach involves implementing international and regional governance frameworks and effective control and enforcement mechanisms, promoting innovative technological solutions, enhancing transparency and traceability within supply chains, and strengthening consumer awareness about sustainable seafood choices. By prioritizing sustainable practices, promoting equitable access to resources and fostering responsible trade, we can enhance the potential of fisheries to increase food security, alleviate poverty and stimulate sustainable economic growth, contributing significantly to achieving the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 14 and others. The future of fisheries, and the well-being of billions of people, depends on our collective commitment to responsible and effective management and coordinated global action.

II. Status and trends

5. Marine capture fisheries production reached 78.3 million tons in 2023, which, together with inland capture production (12.0 million tons), represented 48 per cent of the world's total fisheries and aquaculture production of aquatic animals (188.9 million tons).¹ With a share of 41 per cent, marine capture fisheries remain the major source of global aquatic animal production. Global apparent consumption of aquatic animal foods increased by 3.0 per cent on average annually from 1961 to 2021, providing more than 3.2 billion people with at least 20 per cent of their average per capita intake of animal protein. Overall, aquatic animal products provide approximately 15 per cent of the global population's intake of animal protein. In 2022, 62 million people were directly employed in the capture fisheries and aquaculture primary sector, of which about 16 million people were employed in marine fisheries. If subsistence fishing and employment in the post-harvest subsector are included, 113 million people participate in small-scale fishing.

6. Small-scale fisheries provide at least 40 per cent of global fisheries catches, rising to 68 per cent if considering marine capture fisheries only,² and 2.3 billion people with, on average, 20 per cent of their dietary intake across six key micronutrients essential for human health.³ Globally, 492 million people, nearly half of them women, depend partly on small-scale fisheries, in total generating about 44 per cent of the economic value of all fish landed. There is evidence that participatory management (e.g. co-management) is a real solution for the effective management of many small-scale fisheries.⁴ Yet, only 36 per cent of the global catch from small-scale fisheries is associated with the transfer of management rights to fishers.⁵ This highlights the importance of promoting policies that put fishers at the centre of fisheries management processes, providing benefits to ecosystems and the people depending on them.

7. In terms of the health of fish stocks, the proportion of stocks assessed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and categorized as overfished has continued to increase since the 1970s, reaching 37.7 per cent in 2021. Due to data and technical capacity limitations, only about 50 per cent of the global catch comes from scientifically assessed stocks. In fact, 50 per cent of FAO member States have reported a lack of information on stock status within their fisheries management systems.⁶ These numbers are concerning given the strong correlation between scientifically assessed fish stocks and the effectiveness of fisheries management systems in achieving sustainability.⁷

8. The proper design and implementation of management plans are most often a prerequisite for effective fisheries management. Management plans were available for 71 per cent and implemented for 68 per cent of the fisheries included in the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries questionnaire,⁸ suggesting that a substantial percentage of fisheries globally remain formally unmanaged (32 per cent global average). In terms of the provisions of fisheries management plans, the most frequent included the prohibition of destructive fishing methods and practices (99 per cent), provisions for stakeholder participation in management decisions (97 per cent)

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024: Blue Transformation in Action* (Rome, 2024).

² FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, *Illuminating Hidden Harvests: The Contributions of Small-Scale Fisheries to Sustainable Development* (Rome, 2023).

³ See www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-08448-z.

⁴ See www.nature.com/articles/nature09689.

⁵ FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, *Illuminating Hidden Harvests*.

⁶ See www.fao.org/3/cc9129en/cc9129en.pdf.

⁷ See www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1909726116.

⁸ See www.fao.org/3/nn947en/nn947en.pdf.

and the consideration of the rights of small-scale fishers (94 per cent). The least frequent were provisions to address fishing capacity under defined economic conditions (72 per cent) and the consideration of stock-specific target reference points (72 per cent).⁹

9. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing remains one of the greatest threats to sustainable fisheries and the conservation of marine ecosystems. It undermines national, regional and global efforts to conserve and manage fish stocks and, as a consequence, inhibits progress towards achieving the goals of long-term sustainability. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing creates unfair competition with fishers who abide by the regulations, threatening the food security and livelihoods of entire coastal communities. Such fishing is also associated with unsafe and indecent working conditions, labour abuse and slavery.

10. A significant share of marine production enters international trade, improving the distribution of and access to aquatic products through imports and contributing to employment, revenue generation and economic growth, although it should be noted that small-scale fishers do not always have access to international markets. In 2023, exports of all fisheries and aquaculture products totalled \$194 billion, with an estimated 76 per cent from marine products (including aquaculture). However, the precise proportion of marine products within total trade of aquatic products remains an estimate, as some countries report their trade under broad categories of aquatic products without differentiating between marine and freshwater species, or by farmed or wild origin. Informal regional trade, for example of small pelagic fish in West Africa, is not always included in statistics, despite being important to local livelihoods.¹⁰

11. Fisheries are vital to South-South trade and global food security, with developing economies leading global exports in processed fish and other aquatic products. In 2023, South-South trade in primary and processed fish was estimated at \$19 billion and \$23 billion, respectively, with growth of 43 per cent and 89 per cent since 2012.¹¹ Leveraging South-South trade platforms, such as the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries¹² and regional trade agreements, can help to reduce trade barriers and unlock the potential of developing countries.

12. An estimated \$22 billion of annual government subsidies are expanding fishing capacity, thereby contributing to overcapacity and overfishing and practices that deplete fish stocks and undermine efforts to achieve sustainable fisheries.¹³ The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted in June 2022, prohibits subsidies to vessels or operators involved in illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, fishing of overfished stocks and fishing in the unregulated high seas. Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, WTO members have submitted 617 environment-related trade measures aimed at ensuring sustainable fisheries management to WTO.¹⁴ This could increase further with the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which is intended to regulate subsidies that could otherwise distort trade or harm the sustainability of fisheries.

⁹ See www.fao.org/3/cc9129en/cc9129en.pdf.

¹⁰ See <https://digitalarchive.worldfishcenter.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/60afd44a-0819-4a4d-86b9-d371fe1b1731/content>.

¹¹ See <https://unctad.org/publication/south-south-trade-marine-fisheries-and-aquaculture-sectors>.

¹² See <https://unctad.org/topic/trade-agreements/global-system-of-trade-preferences>.

¹³ See www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X19303677.

¹⁴ World Trade Organization, Environmental Database, available at www.wto.org/edb.

III. Challenges and opportunities

13. The 2022 United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 highlighted challenges and opportunities for ocean sustainability. While progress has been made on several fronts, including on the adoption and implementation of key multilateral instruments relevant to fisheries, the strengthening of national and local fisheries management institutions, and the implementation of effective fisheries management systems, several factors have intensified existing challenges and created new ones, underscoring the urgency of coordinated and transformative action.

14. **Strengthening international fisheries governance.** The global fisheries governance framework still faces significant hurdles, although some progress has been made. While the FAO Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing has garnered widespread support, with 81 States Parties, which are focused on implementing the Agreement and maximizing its effectiveness, further actions are required to strengthen the implementation and/or advance the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas, the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188), the Cape Town Agreement of 2012, and the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction. The Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication, the Voluntary Guidelines for Flag State Performance, the Voluntary Guidelines for Transshipment, the BioTrade Principles and Criteria, and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework also represent opportunities to address governance gaps in the fisheries sector, including small-scale fisheries. Their effective integration into national and regional policies and management frameworks and fisheries access arrangements is crucial, requiring additional efforts in capacity-building and technical support, particularly for small-scale fisheries. This lack of comprehensive and consistent implementation weakens the overall effectiveness of the international legal framework, hindering progress towards Sustainable Development Goal target 14.4 (sustainable fish stocks) and other relevant targets. The lack of coordination and harmonization among these different frameworks further complicates the challenge.

15. **Strengthening regional fisheries governance.** The objective of the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement is to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks through effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The Convention identified regional fisheries bodies, in particular regional fisheries management organizations and arrangements, as the mechanism through which States can fulfil their obligations to conserve and manage fish stocks. Regional fisheries management organizations are among the most important international cooperative mechanisms in fisheries management, as they have the authority to adopt international legally binding conservation and management measures concerning fishing operations and associated activities. They form some of the most effective intergovernmental partnerships currently regulating the high seas and provide a forum for collaboration and implementation of the Convention, the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement and many other international legally binding and non-binding instruments. They also provide opportunities to discuss, evaluate and improve the science on key aspects of ocean governance, particularly for the conservation and management of fisheries resources. Significant

measures taken by regional fisheries management organizations include the adoption of binding management and conservation measures, the regulation of fishing gear and techniques, including bans on certain practices, the implementation of closed periods, quotas and fishing effort stabilization measures, the carrying out of fish stock assessments by scientific committees and observer programmes, and the implementation of monitoring, control and surveillance measures and management strategy evaluations. The work of regional fisheries management organizations remains essential and the successes mentioned above must continue. Collaboration among such organizations continues to be crucial, as it increases efficiency in terms of information-sharing, capacity to adopt science-based management measures, technical and financial support, transfer of knowledge and technology and avoidance of duplicate costs.

16. Strengthening national fisheries governance. Strengthening such governance is essential for the sustainable management of marine resources. At the national level, it is crucial to establish robust political and legal frameworks that facilitate the effective implementation of international policy frameworks, agreements and best practices. This includes adopting the ecosystem approach to fisheries, which emphasizes the importance of considering the entire marine ecosystem and its interactions when managing fish stocks. In addition, participatory decision-making processes are vital for involving a diverse range of stakeholders, including local communities, fishers, scientists and policymakers. By engaging these groups in the management and governance process, we can foster transparency, build trust and ensure that various perspectives and expertise inform management decisions. Such inclusive approaches not only enhance the legitimacy of governance structures but also promote social equity and resilience within fishing communities.

17. Overcoming technical, legal, financial and institutional barriers. Institutional, technical and financial constraints hinder progress in fisheries sustainability. Many fisheries do not have comprehensive management plans, in particular inland and small-scale fisheries.¹⁵ Even where such plans exist, implementation faces significant hurdles (32 per cent of fisheries globally do not have management plans implemented).¹⁶ This is mostly due to limited financial and technical capacities, weak governance and enforcement – including devolution of rights – and a lack of political will. The lack of a systematic framework for evaluating management effectiveness hinders the identification of areas needing improvement, as does the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the diverse fisheries management approaches and their suitability for different contexts. Furthermore, the complexity of the fisheries sector, including intricate value chains, requires a multisectoral and multidimensional approach that is often lacking in many fisheries, particularly in marine and inland small-scale fisheries. Overcoming these challenges necessitates further targeted financial assistance, capacity-building initiatives, and the development of effective governance structures that involve and empower local communities in participatory management (e.g. co-management).

18. Improving data and information for decision-making. Data and information are critical for effective, evidence-based fisheries management and policy formulation. However, significant gaps exist, particularly for small-scale fisheries and multi-species tropical fisheries. Data collection protocols are often inadequate, data management and analytical capacity are weak, and socioeconomic data related to fisheries are scarce. This lack of comprehensive and reliable data limits the effectiveness of stock assessments and other empirical approaches necessary to inform decision-making.¹⁷ The need to integrate social, economic, gender and nutritional considerations into

¹⁵ See www.fao.org/3/nn947en/nn947en.pdf.

¹⁶ See www.fao.org/3/cc9129en/cc9129en.pdf.

¹⁷ FAO, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024*.

data collection and analysis is particularly critical for small-scale fisheries.¹⁸ Other elements that need to be considered are climate variability, extreme weather events and adaptation measures, and the impact and risks of pandemics. Improving data and information systems requires investment in technology, capacity-building, and fostering international collaboration to standardize data collection and analysis, as well as recognizing and integrating traditional and local knowledge.

19. Considering the multidimensional aspects of the fisheries sector. Fisheries management must go beyond simply focusing on the sustainability of the fishery resources. Value chains need to be viewed as an integral part of the overall food system, encompassing harvest and post-harvest activities, and acknowledging the complex interplay of environmental, economic, social and governance factors. Obtaining sufficient multidimensional information about the fisheries sector, in particular small-scale fisheries, and institutionalizing the capacity to analyse and use that information to inform fisheries management is necessary but not sufficient to sustain the wide range of benefits from fisheries.¹⁹ Effective management and governance will require the evaluation of well-informed trade-offs in multidimensional management objectives and associated policies that reflect the diverse contributions of fisheries to sustainable development.²⁰ In addition, effective fisheries management requires a multisectoral approach involving all stakeholders – governments, industry, research institutions and civil society – to achieve a balanced approach that considers social, economic and ecological sustainability.

20. Integrating climate change into fisheries management. Climate change poses a significant threat to marine ecosystems and fisheries. Rising ocean temperatures, ocean acidification, changes in ocean currents and extreme weather events are altering fish distribution, abundance and species composition. At the same time, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimates that global fishing fleets, powered mainly by fossil fuels such as marine diesel, emit between 0.1 per cent and 0.5 per cent of global carbon emissions, or up to 159 million tons annually, according to the latest available data.²¹ Information on the impact at the local level is limited, and the full range of uncertainty is not adequately understood. Many national and regional fisheries management plans do not explicitly integrate climate change and decarbonization considerations into their planning, policymaking and decision-making. Enhancing understanding of the impact of climate change on fisheries at the local and species levels and incorporating climate projections into fisheries management and policy are crucial. This necessitates improving climate models and projections at the local level, enhancing local capacity to assess and manage climate risks, integrating climate change considerations into sectoral planning, and fostering international collaboration and data-sharing on climate change impacts on marine ecosystems and fisheries.

21. Addressing multisectoral developments. The increasing focus on a blue economy requires a multisectoral approach to fisheries management. Developments in sectors such as aquaculture, offshore energy, tourism and shipping can affect fisheries and marine ecosystems, necessitating integrated marine spatial planning and other mechanisms to minimize conflicts and maximize synergies. This involves engaging multiple stakeholders from diverse sectors, developing mechanisms for conflict resolution, ensuring fair and equitable resource allocation, and establishing and enforcing legal frameworks to govern resource use and ecosystem protection.

¹⁸ See www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-08448-z.

¹⁹ FAO, *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2024*.

²⁰ See www.nature.com/articles/s41586-024-08448-z.

²¹ See <https://unctad.org/news/energy-transition-charting-fair-course-fishing-fleets>.

22. Enhancing sustainable, equitable and traceable trade of aquatic products.

Trade can be a powerful driver of sustainable fisheries management but only if managed effectively. Overcoming tariff and non-tariff trade barriers is essential, particularly for small-scale fisheries, to enable fishers to access global markets and increase their incomes and livelihoods. Fisheries-related tariffs have the highest average rates of any sector of the ocean economy, with tariffs of up to 30–50 per cent in some markets. Mutually reducing tariffs and streamlining non-tariff measures would encourage trade, which can promote legality due to the higher scrutiny of many big importers. Implementing robust traceability systems is essential to ensuring the legality and sustainability of seafood products and tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, which undermines sustainable fisheries management, reduces incomes for small-scale fisheries and undermines livelihoods. Promoting the implementation of international initiatives such as the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and the BioTrade Principles and Criteria can increase transparency and build trust in seafood supply chains, particularly in high-value, low-volume small-scale fisheries value chains.

23. Supporting sustainable South-South trade in marine fisheries products.

South-South trade in marine fisheries products is hampered by high tariff and non-tariff barriers. Most-favoured-nation tariffs among the members of the Global System of Trade Preferences range from 12 to 16 per cent for primary products and up to 20 per cent for prepared crustaceans, molluscs and other aquatic invertebrates. In addition, some non-tariff measures constitute unnecessary barriers to trade. Complying with such measures can be burdensome, particularly for small-scale fisheries. In addition, small-scale fisheries face difficulties exporting due to the informality of the sector, limited infrastructure and services, such as transport facilities and cold storage, lack of economies of scale, and lack of knowledge, hardware and software to introduce effective traceability systems and comply with regulatory requirements. Simplifying and harmonizing non-tariff measures, including those related to fisheries management, might increase the market access of small-scale fisheries while promoting sustainable trade.

24. Capitalizing on regional fisheries cooperation. The regional dimension is key to international fisheries management policy, and the role of regional fisheries bodies is increasingly recognized. There are over 50 such bodies worldwide, almost half of which are regional fisheries management organizations that have mandates to adopt legally binding conservation and management measures concerning fishing operations and associated activities. Regional fisheries management organizations utilize scientific advice to establish and implement a range of management tools, including catch and effort limits, spatial and temporal restrictions, and monitoring, control and surveillance rules, and regularly review parties' compliance with their obligations. In 2017, 152 States and regional economic integration organizations were members of one or more regional fisheries management organizations, with many States being members of more than one such organization.²²

25. Shifting harmful subsidies. Fisheries subsidies can often exacerbate unsustainable fishing practices, leading to overcapacity and overfishing. The Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies establishes an important framework for addressing harmful fisheries subsidies, aiming to shift subsidies towards sustainable practices, such as supporting effectively managed small-scale fisheries and reducing capacity-enhancing subsidies. However, implementation of the Agreement requires national efforts to develop domestic policies, strengthen capacity and develop institutional

²² Terje Løbach and others, *Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and Advisory Bodies: Activities and Developments, 2000–2017*, FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper, No. 651 (Rome, 2020).

frameworks to ensure the effective management of subsidies. There is a need to foster greater transparency and accountability in subsidy allocation, disbursement and related data, which the Agreement is expected to facilitate once it enters into force. This should include a significant redirection of financial resources to support sustainable practices, in particular within the small-scale fisheries sector.

26. Achieving effective management of all fisheries. The challenges to effective fisheries management aimed at achieving sustainability of the sector have intensified since 2022, as evidenced by, for example, the proportion of stocks categorized as overfished. Addressing these, as indicated in the FAO Blue Transformation Roadmap, requires a multi-pronged approach involving strengthening international and national governance, overcoming financial and institutional barriers, improving data and information systems, considering multidimensional aspects of the fisheries sector, integrating climate change considerations, engaging with multisectoral developments, promoting sustainable trade, shifting harmful incentives and fostering international and regional collaboration. Only through coordinated, transformative and collaborative action can we effectively address these challenges and seize the opportunities for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 and related targets, contributing to healthy oceans and sustainable development for all.

IV. Scalable solutions and high-impact initiatives to advance fisheries sustainability

27. Strengthening and enforcing the implementation of international fisheries instruments has become an urgent priority for many countries, particularly in the light of the ongoing challenges posed by illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, as well as the need for equitable and effective management of marine fishery resources. In this regard, it is critical to increase capacity development in order to place developing countries in a better position to fulfil their port, flag, coastal and market State responsibilities. In 2021, in line with the Blue Transformation Roadmap objective of ensuring that all fisheries are under effective management, FAO and its partners conducted several regional capacity-building workshops targeting developing States, particularly in the western Indian Ocean. These workshops provided training on the significance of the international fisheries instruments and detailed practical steps for their implementation. Countries including Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania participated actively, resulting in commitments from their Governments to take concrete steps towards ratifying these agreements. The FAO Global Capacity Development Programme in support of the Agreement on Port State Measures and complementary instruments has supported over 60 countries in the past eight years, increasing their legal, institutional, monitoring, control and surveillance, and enforcement framework capacities. WTO held eight regional workshops on the implementation of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies for developing and least developed countries in 2022 and 2023 and continues to hold more targeted national and regional workshops at the request of its members. These training programmes have shown promise in not only increasing awareness but also facilitating subsequent policy changes.

28. In addition, the integration of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries into national frameworks is crucial for creating effective governance mechanisms. To date, a number of countries have developed and implemented national plans of action for small-scale fisheries as a systemic approach to facilitate implementation of the Guidelines according to national and local priorities, namely, Madagascar, Malawi, Namibia, the Philippines, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda, with work in

progress in additional countries. National plans of action for small-scale fisheries are developed in a participatory manner and include, among other things, reviewing legal and policy frameworks and setting out country priorities for achieving environmentally, socially and economically sustainable small-scale fisheries.

29. The ecosystem approach to fisheries, based on the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, focuses on sustainable fisheries management by balancing the ecological and socioeconomic aspects of fisheries. First introduced in 2001 at the Reykjavik Conference on Responsible Fisheries in the Marine Ecosystem, the ecosystem approach to fisheries provides a practical framework for managing fisheries effectively. Over the years, FAO and its partners have worked extensively to promote the ecosystem approach in fisheries worldwide. Over 50 fisheries management plans that comply with the ecosystem approach have been created, including in Africa, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific region. These efforts have encouraged multi-stakeholder participation and stimulated changes in behaviour, showing how sustainable practices can align environmental, social and economic goals while supporting profitability and job creation. The ecosystem approach to fisheries has resulted in tangible success, with growing adoption by national fisheries administrations and regional fisheries bodies. Increasingly, policies reflect principles associated with the ecosystem approach, including participatory decision-making, precautionary approaches and evidence-based management. Lessons learned from transitioning to ecosystem approach-compliant management systems include the need to integrate ecosystem approach principles into fisheries planning to improve awareness, accountability and multi-stakeholder engagement. Securing consistent funding and maintaining stakeholder involvement are critical for operationalizing plans. Legal and regulatory frameworks also need to support precautionary and participatory management. Raising awareness among managers and policymakers about the benefits of investing in fisheries management is equally important. The progress in the adoption of the ecosystem approach underscores its potential as a scalable and effective model for sustainable fisheries management.

30. The Coastal Fisheries Initiative, which is funded by the Global Environment Facility and implemented by FAO and its partners, has contributed to overcoming technical, financial and institutional barriers to achieving effective fisheries management and governance in participating countries by promoting a holistic approach and championing working in a participatory manner with stakeholders along the value chain, including harvest and postharvest. In recognition of the importance of addressing the three pillars of sustainable development, namely, environmental, social and economic, the Initiative has promoted the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries and the gender dimension in Asia, Latin America and Africa. Fishing communities and national and local authorities have been provided with support to develop and implement fisheries management plans and co-management arrangements that are compatible with the ecosystem approach to fisheries in data-limited situations. Focusing on community engagement, capacity-building and policy development, the Initiative has provided countries with essential tools and resources. For example, in Indonesia and Senegal, capacity-building programmes have introduced best practices in fish preservation and sustainable fishing techniques, allowing local fishers to improve their catch efficiency while minimizing the ecological impact. In Peru, the Initiative has facilitated the creation of saving and credit groups within fishing communities, granting fishers and fish workers access to capital for sustainable investments and recovery from economic shocks. Furthermore, the Initiative fosters better governance by encouraging the participation of local stakeholders, in particular women, in decision-making.

31. Several action-oriented solutions to improve fisheries data and information for effective fisheries management have been implemented by FAO and other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. As part of the Illuminating Hidden Harvest initiative, led by FAO, Duke University and WorldFish, over 800 experts from 58 countries helped to collate, analyse and interpret environmental, social, economic, nutrition and gender data aimed at informing small-scale fisheries policies and governance frameworks.²³ The data collection approach is now being applied at the national level in the United Republic of Tanzania and Madagascar, with a view to informing policy formulation and improving small-scale fisheries management. Capacity development programmes should focus on increasing countries' capacity to curate, manage and analyse good-quality data and information, rather than only on expensive data collection systems. The use of local ecological knowledge and community-based data collection programmes has proved to be a cost-effective mechanism to move fisheries from data poor to data rich.²⁴

32. Fisheries are socioecological systems that need to be addressed using multidimensional approaches in their management and governance. Such approaches underscore the need for holistic sustainable fisheries management that extends beyond the sustainability of fishery resources in line with the Blue Transformation Roadmap. Developing integrated value chains and crafting policies that balance economic growth, social equity and ecological integrity are essential. Assessments should be aimed at identifying inefficiencies and promoting sustainable fishing and post-harvest practices. A multisectoral and participatory approach that fosters cooperation among government agencies and promotes partnerships with research institutions will enhance fisheries management. These collective efforts can secure the ecological health, economic viability and social equity crucial for communities that depend on fishery resources. In an effort to strengthen sustainable fisheries production and trade, it is crucial to facilitate capacity-building and the sharing of knowledge and technologies with developing countries, including through South-South and triangular cooperation, in the areas of fisheries, mariculture and aquaculture production techniques, marine spatial planning, assessment and strengthening of the national quality infrastructure, meeting international standards, development of diversification and export strategies, sustainability enhancement and certification, and other key areas such as negotiating balanced fisheries access agreements. UNCTAD, with its global network of centres of excellence in fisheries and aquaculture, standards and sustainability, is an example of such ongoing technical assistance.

33. The integration of climate change adaptation into national and local fisheries management and the use of climate data and information, including results from climate risk assessments and monitoring, in decision-making are critical elements of climate-resilient fisheries and ecosystem management. This can be accomplished through mechanisms such as nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans. According to an analysis carried out by FAO of nationally determined contributions submitted as at 1 January 2024, 60 per cent of nationally determined contributions with an adaptation component include adaptation actions related to fisheries and aquaculture. These primarily consist of sustainable fisheries practices (29 per cent) and adaptive capture fishing practices and technologies (19 per cent). Regionally, references to adaptation actions in fisheries and aquaculture occur more frequently in nationally determined contributions submitted by countries in sub-Saharan Africa (81 per cent) and Latin America and the Caribbean (67 per cent) than the global average.²⁵ In addition, UNCTAD research on 606 ocean-related

²³ See <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc4576en>.

²⁴ See www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03632415.2017.1383904.

²⁵ Krystal Crumpler and others, *Agrifood Systems in Nationally Determined Contributions: Global Analysis – Key Findings* (Rome, FAO, 2024).

measures found in the nationally determined contributions of small island developing States indicates that over half of the measures (328) relate to sustainably using the ocean for economic development, while 278 focus on marine and coastal conservation efforts. Most management and conservation measures concern area-based management (121 measures) or ecosystem protection, expansion and restoration (101 measures). With 85 measures, fisheries is one the most targeted ocean economic sectors in the nationally determined contributions of small island developing States, particularly for adaptation purposes. Elsewhere in the world, the nationally determined contribution of Albania recognizes developing sectoral adaptation plans, including for the fisheries sector, as a high-priority adaptation measure. Other examples include Chile, Saint Lucia, Senegal and the Philippines. There is also an increasing recognition of the importance of integrating traditional and local knowledge into climate solutions in the fisheries management cycle, as seen in the Pacific and the Amazon.²⁶

34. Addressing the multisectoral challenges of the blue economy requires pragmatic solutions that foster collaboration across various sectors, including fisheries, aquaculture, shipping and tourism. Implementing integrated marine spatial planning can optimize marine resource use and minimize conflicts but it needs to be implemented in an inclusive manner, and small-scale fisheries in particular may require capacity-building and empowerment to be able to participate in an effective way. Establishing multi-stakeholder engagement platforms and effective conflict resolution mechanisms help to maintain balance across competing interests, while robust legal and policy frameworks, such as the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries, should be referred to. Scaling up the application of such existing policy frameworks will contribute significantly to sustainable fisheries management, including the resilience of marine ecosystems and livelihoods, as we approach the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, but this requires respecting existing rights and promoting equitable approaches.

35. South-South trade can be a pathway for boosting legal fishing through enhanced monitoring of the origin of fisheries products by both exporters and importers from sea to dish. Members of the Global System of Trade Preferences would benefit from negotiating a sectoral-level agreement on reducing tariff and non-tariff measures on marine fisheries products, including the protection of social and environmental standards. As members of the Global System of Trade Preferences often harvest and trade different species, such an agreement would enable complementarity and create economic, social and environmental benefits, particularly for small-scale fisheries.

36. One of the expected benefits of eliminating harmful subsidies through the operation of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies is the unlocking of resources that could be redirected to promote and support sustainable fisheries management and practices by all WTO member States, including developing and least developed countries. The Agreement has also established the WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism, known as the Fish Fund, to support developing and least developed countries that have deposited their instruments of acceptance to implement the Agreement. The Fish Fund will provide financial support for technical assistance and capacity-building to assist members in making the required notifications, improving their fisheries management capabilities, including data collection and reporting, and developing their relevant institutional capacities, including inter-agency coordination, to meet the requirements of the Agreement. For the Agreement to become operational, and thus deliver its sustainability benefits, two thirds of WTO members have to deposit their instruments of acceptance with WTO. The Agreement is expected to enter into force in 2025.

²⁶ See <https://cgspace.cgiar.org/items/2ce9de7a-590d-49ba-8652-d7968ee6c51c>.