

PRIVATE SECTOR MECHANISM

ICFA/NFI COMMENTS TO ICN2

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Thank you, Chair, for the opportunity to share the perspectives of the global seafood community, as a part of the Private Sector Mechanism. The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations fully supports the Framework for Action and Rome Declaration.

As background, my father was a pediatrician, a doctor ministering to young children first in urban America and then in part in rural Ireland. As he counseled a woman from either of these very different backgrounds, he reminded her of the importance of enjoying healthy, balanced meals ---- meals that could include dairies and meats, vegetables and fruits, and of course fish -- -- to ensure the health of her child. In his office he had a sign referencing how a tree grows. It read "As the twig is bent, so the branch is inclined." He wanted to stress to his patients that the decision the young mother made in the earliest stages of her child's life would set the stage for her family's future health. This simple doctor's lesson is one that the private sector and governments might adopt.

In keeping with that thinking, ICFA is pleased with the special emphasis both convening organizations, FAO and WHO, and the member governments have placed on the "first thousand days." A child eating a balanced meal, one that meets nutrition, taste, and affordability needs, is much more likely to grow into a healthy adult. It is difficult to change that direction later in life.

Fish is an essential component to a child's development, from conception to early childhood growth. Its fatty acids literally are the building blocks of a developing child's brain. Its micronutrients ensure a woman recovers from her pregnancy more quickly and avoids the terror of post-partum depression. And the nutritional benefits of fish move from the first thousand days to the full thirty thousand days we expect to live, as its omega-3s prevent heart disease in middle age and its vitamins slow the onset of arthritis and eye disease in the elderly. Fish is the food for a full life.

Seafood is especially important in developing nations, as a source of nutrition and economic development. As the Committee on Food Security noted last month, fish provides about 17 percent of animal protein for humans. It is the main source of essential fatty acids for more than 4 in 10 people globally. And these percentages are much higher in Africa, Asia, and Small Island Developing States, countries with much higher daily seafood consumption.

The global seafood community takes particular pleasure in noting the very practical tools FAO and WHO have developed to better understand the importance of seafood. FAO and WHO recently released the results of an Expert Consultation of the Risks and Benefits of Seafood. It rightfully called on national governments to more clearly communicate to women that they

actually increase the risk to their developing child by not eating enough seafood when pregnant. The organizations further called on governments to clearly communicate this advice to expecting mothers, in ways they can understand and at the very start of the first thousand days of life.

It is vitally important that governments, and when appropriate with the private sector, more effectively communicate the importance of a diverse diet to promote health in the most vulnerable, women, children, and elderly.

ICFA and the broader food-producing private sector looks forward to continuing to support WHO, FAO and the ICN process in ensuring that developed and developing nations' governments, civil society, and the private sector all partner to help women understand that as the twig of pregnancy and early childhood is bent, so is the branch of a healthy adult inclined.