

The Pew Charitable Trusts

Statement to the First Session of the Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization Committee on Fisheries

15-18 January 2024

Agenda Item 4: Mainstreaming biodiversity in fisheries management

Pew appreciates the FAO's support for the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation into fisheries management, including the prioritisation of fisheries' contributions to the targets of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), and agrees with the intent to elaborate on the actions Members can take in a level of detail that mirrors the FAO's 'Strategy on Biodiversity Mainstreaming across Agricultural Sectors.' The purpose of the GBF is to "halt and reverse biodiversity loss" and put nature on a path to recovery for the benefit of people and the planet over the long term, and it includes targets aimed at reducing threats to biodiversity, managing sustainable use, and providing implementation tools.

Target 5 offers added impetus to mainstream ecosystem approaches in fisheries management, broadening management aims where wider impacts of fishing on marine ecosystems are insufficiently accounted for. **In this regard, Pew encourages FAO to help its Members identify practical tools to mainstream biodiversity conservation in fisheries management, applying practical tools that account for interactions between marine species, impacts of fishing on ecosystems and vice versa, and building resilience to respond to changes in the marine environment.**

Target 10 introduces requirements to report spatially on areas under sustainable fisheries management that conserve and restore biodiversity, including through a substantial increase of the application of biodiversity friendly practices. This target requires management that goes further than baseline sustainable management on a single or multi species basis, contributing additional biodiversity safeguards. Although the building blocks of an ecosystem approach are outlined in existing texts such as the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, progress to operationalize this has been slow. The identification of indicators for Target 10, and subsequent identification of candidate areas, offer opportunities to elaborate on the types of additional biodiversity conservation that should be mainstreamed into management. **Pew urges that practical application of an ecosystem approach should draw on existing guidance, including from the FAO, and the tools already being applied in specific fisheries** such as: measures aimed at restoring non-target species; spatial protections to protect vulnerable habitats, species and/or life stages; innovative scientific methodologies and reference points to account for intra and inter-species dynamics, food webs, and the impacts of climate change; and planning that places fisheries in the context of wider ecosystem pressures and human activities.

Fisheries managers also have a key role to play in other targets, including those focused on protection, such as Target 3. While the GBF acknowledges that some sustainable natural resource use may be compatible with protected and conserved areas counted towards Target 3, Target 3 is intended to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity – not just sustain current populations of harvested species. Thus, only activities that support the long-term, in situ conservation of an area and the species and ecosystems that it supports should be allowed in areas counted towards Target 3, in addition to other criteria. More specifically, the CBD's guidance on sustainable use that might continue in areas under Target 3 foresees only "*limited types of non-industrial, traditional cultural activities*", and IUCN guidance on Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs) contributing to Target 3 precludes any "*industrial fishing*". In other words, the scope for continued sustainable use in areas contributing to Target 3 is much more limited than the FAO's briefing paper suggests. **Pew urges the FAO to help its Members understand the criteria for OECMs, and the existing/evolving guidance, including the FAO's 2022 OECM Handbook.**

As noted in the document, countries will need support in making and measuring progress towards the GBF Targets, thus Pew encourages the FAO and its Members to focus near-term efforts on developing sector-specific indicators and guidance for country-led efforts to implement two particular targets in the “Sustainable Use” category: Target 5 and Target 10.