

UN Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake

SIDE EVENT REPORT

Shifting the Narrative on Blue Foods to Support People, Nature, and Climate

27 July 2025 | 14:00 – 15:15

Organizers and partners: World Resources Institute (WRI), The High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy (Ocean Panel) and the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition (ABFC)

Side event overview: The event convened participants at the UNFSS +4 to explore the central role aquatic or 'blue' foods can play in transforming food systems, improving nutrition, supporting livelihoods, and bolstering climate resilience. Through a keynote speech, a moderated panel, and a participant roundtable dialogue, the event highlighted national leadership and multilateral efforts to elevate blue foods in policy and finance and explored practical entry points to integrate aquatic foods into national strategies, NDCs, and global frameworks such as SDG2, SDG14, and the Paris Agreement.

List of speakers and key messages

NAME AND TITLE OF SPEAKER	KEY MESSAGES OR/AND RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS
1. Mr Jon Erlingur Jonasson <i>Special Envoy for the Ocean, Iceland and Chair of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The global food system contributes to up to 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions, while also being the leading cause of biodiversity loss, water over use, and land degradation, while nutritional outcomes are worsening, and billions lack access to essential micronutrients.- Aquatic blue foods are an underrepresented part of the food systems discussions yet can play an important role in food systems transformations. The multifaceted benefits of blue foods, including:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nutrition: Blue foods offer critical micronutrients like omega-3s, iron, and vitamin A, essential for child development and maternal health.- Livelihoods: Over 3 billion people depend on aquatic foods for their livelihoods, with small-scale fisheries accounting for the majority of jobs.- Climate Resilience: Aquaculture and well-managed fisheries

	<p>can adapt to climate risk. Systems like seaweed farming and bivalve aquaculture can improve water quality and sequester carbon</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low environmental impact: Blue foods have a lower carbon footprint than land-based proteins, and sustainable aquaculture can support both adaptation and mitigation goals. - Environmental challenges, like overfishing and habitat degradation must be tackled, but argued for a narrative that also highlights positive opportunities. - Challenges and risks facing blue foods, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate-related pressures facing blue food-dependent nations, especially tropical and island states. Stressors on blue foods are diverse, and include ocean acidification, sea-level rise, marine heat waves, droughts, and extreme weather. - Funding gaps: Aquatic goods receive <1% of global ocean investment. Fisheries and aquaculture are underfunded compared to other agricultural sectors. - Policy Exclusion: Blue foods are historically neglected in climate, food security, and nutrition plans (including NDCs). - The Aquatic Blue Food Coalition (AFBC) was formed at the 2021 UN Food Summit and includes 60+ members (15 countries, IGOs, NGOs, academia and industry). Its objectives include raising the profile of aquatic foods in policy and public discourse, mobilizing funding and technical support for countries, and fostering knowledge exchange and analyzing place-based actions. - The recent achievements of the AFBC include the inclusion of aquatic foods in COP28's Emirates Declaration, National blue food integration projects in Indonesia and Sierra Leone, collaboration with the School Meals Coalition and the Blue NDC Challenge.
<p>2. Dr Andreas Schaumayer <i>Head of Division, Food Security and Fisheries, German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stressed the importance of governance and standards, citing Germany's support for the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI). - Highlighted the problem of harmful subsidies in global fisheries, which currently undermine sustainability efforts - Supported inclusive governance and policies, especially recognizing women and small-scale producers. Securing women's rights to land ownership was emphasized as a clear approach. - Additionally scaling sustainable aquaculture, subsidy reform, local co-management models, and improved data collection

	were repeatedly mentioned by participants as key enablers for valuing and scaling sustainable blue food systems.
3. Ms Laura Chavez Anderson <i>Engagement Project Manager, Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions</i>	- Underlined the power of data and storytelling to shift perceptions, noting findings from the Blue Foods Assessment. Specifically, the report revealed that blue foods are extremely diverse (2,5000+ species) and therefore not all blue foods are equal. Some like small pelagics and bivalves are highly nutritious and have a low-carbon footprint. Blue foods are rich in nutrition beyond just protein, offering an important array of micronutrients. She also highlighted policy tools like the Coalition’s guidelines on integrating aquatic foods into NDCs as well as school feeding programs and national development strategies, and even in landlocked nations through shelf-stable fish powder products (referring to research efforts by partners at WorldFish).
4. Dr Bernice Mclean <i>Senior Programme Officer, Blue Economy AUDA-NEPAD</i>	- Discussed how AU frameworks like the 2014 Policy Framework and Reform Strategy, Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) and the Blue Economy Strategy are beginning to integrate aquatic food systems. The most recent version of CAADP explicitly incorporates blue foods based on a shared position adopted by African Nations at UNFSS+2. She emphasized the need for policy coherence and private sector engagement and stressed that implementation is a key bottle neck.
5. Ms Oluwafunmilola Shelika <i>President, African Women Fish Processors and Traders Network (Nigerian Chapter)</i>	- Highlighted gender disparities which go beyond access to money, and include lack of access to land, technology, and credit. She raised limited representation in decision-making despite women comprising a large part of the workforce. - Emphasized occupation health risks facing women in the sector and lack of protections and access to insurance. - Advocated for adoption and implementation of Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries (VGSSF) guidelines, especially in Africa.
6. Mr Leonardo A. A. Teguh Sambodo <i>Deputy Minister for Food Affairs, Natural Resources and Environment, Indonesia</i>	- Highlighted the upcoming national Blue Food Assessment for Indonesia as a model for integrating aquatic foods into food and climate strategies. - Underscored that shifting the narrative on blue foods is not only timely but essential to building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food systems.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Left participants will the call to action to integrate blue foods into mainstream food and climate policies, prioritize equity, and ensure blue foods receive the recognition and investment they deserve.
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Optional: Interventions from the floor

SPEAKER	QUESTION OR KEY POINT OF INTERVENTION
1. UNEP representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raised concerns about not sufficiently addressing benefits to biodiversity and other co-benefits in the blue foods narrative
2. UN Hub representative (Kazakhstan)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asked on how landlocked countries can benefit from blue foods. - Jón emphasized the role of trade and nutrition delivery, not just local production. - Laura mentioned the potential for the use of shelf-stable products such as fish powder.
3. UNEP representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Asked about outcomes and lack of focus around unsustainable practices, overexploitation, and management of common pool resources. - Panelists raised that the coalition focuses on raising the awareness of the potential of sustainable production and harvest regimes as well as promoting sustainable management of overexploited stocks. Specifically, global capture fisheries have stagnated at around 90 million tons annually, but up to 17 million tons more could be harvested sustainably with better governance. - Panelists also raised that 65% of fisheries subsidies are harmful, totally 63 times the value of global ODA. Aquaculture, meanwhile, offers growth potential with lower environmental footprints.
4. UNEP representative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Called for better integration of blue foods into environmental-economic accounts and national planning, but also cautioned against solely using valuation and emphasized the need to include societal benefits in the narrative, not just economic values.

Overall session summary, conclusions and recommended actions (max 300 words)

The side event explored the transformative potential of aquatic or “blue” foods in advancing nutrition, livelihoods, and climate resilience. Jón Erlingur Jónasson, Chair of the Aquatic Blue Food Coalition (AFBC), delivered a keynote highlighting the global food system’s shortcomings and the untapped promise of blue foods. He emphasized their nutritional value, low environmental footprint, and importance to over 3 billion livelihoods, while acknowledging challenges like climate stressors, underfunding, and policy exclusion.

The panel, moderated by Rachel Thoms (WRI), featured insights from global experts across government, civil society, and academia. The discussion focused on the key levers to shift the narrative on “blue foods” to highlight their critical role in food systems transformations. Panellists covered challenges in governance, harmful subsidies, gender disparities, and the need for policy coherence, stressing the importance of more inclusive governance, data-driven storytelling, and integrating blue foods into national strategies and climate plans. Panellists agreed that political recognition, inclusive governance, and better data are foundational for reform. Key enablers discussed included scaling sustainable aquaculture, reforming subsidies, and empowering small-scale producers, especially women, to unlock the full potential of blue food systems.

Closing remarks by Leonardo A. A. Teguh Sambodo (Dep Minister for Food Affairs, Indonesia) highlighted the following key messages:

1. Blue foods must be central to food systems transformation, contributing to SDGs on health, equity, and climate.
2. Policy integration is critical—blue foods should be reflected in NDCs, SDG strategies, and school meal programs.
3. Equity and inclusion must be prioritized—support for women, Indigenous groups, and small-scale producers is essential.
4. Communication matters—changing narratives requires compelling data and inclusive storytelling.
5. Multi-stakeholder collaboration is key—government, civil society, and research institutions must work together.