



ICFA Statement on Petition to ban fishing on the High Seas

17 February 2023—The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) disagrees with a petition created by Dr. Rashid Sumaila and Dr. Daniel Pauly, both of University of British Columbia, that calls for the prohibition of all commercial fishing on the high seas and the declaration of those waters as a United Nations Protected Area. The open letter is addressed to parties to the United Nations’ Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, also known as the Treaty of the High Seas, and claims that high-seas fishing is unsustainable and unprofitable.

Fishing on the high seas, when managed by sufficient science and regulations, is an opportunity to provide healthy, sustainable, low-carbon protein to a rapidly growing population. A robust blue-food movement is a critical component of a sustainable future.

In their 2022 State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Report, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) determined that 82.5% of world fisheries have reached biological sustainability by volume – up from 78.7% in its 2020 report. Fisheries science and management strategies continue to improve the balance of marine conservation and maximum sustainable use, ensuring the benefits of this renewable resource are captured long-term.

Some 3 billion people worldwide rely on seafood as their primary source of protein. In addition, the United Nations High-Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy reports that seafood production results in up to 250 times less carbon per kilogram.

Instead of an outright ban on fishing in the high seas, which is based on neither science nor economics, ICFA calls for the following:

- a) Improved and expanded fisheries management across jurisdictions with the aim to eliminate IUU fishing and achieve 100% sustainable production.
- b) Effective implementation of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.
- c) A stronger involvement of fisheries experts as well as a better consultation between BBNJ delegations and national representatives of Fisheries Agencies and Ministries of Fisheries in the context of the BBNJ negotiating process and future proceedings.
- d) The exclusion of fisheries from the BBNJ Agreement, as fishing activities in the high seas shall continue to be managed at the regional level in relation with the species of common interest for the contracting Parties of a given legal instrument, framework or relevant body;
- e) A BBNJ Agreement that effectively collaborates or cooperates with RFMOs in a manner that does not undermine their scope, mandate and competences. As a result, the following shall apply:
 - MPAs identified and designated in the context of the BBNJ Agreement that overlap with the coverage of an RFMO shall not regulate fishing activities.
 - EIAs shall not be required for vessels under the purview of RFMOs management measures

- RFMOs and members thereof shall always be consulted when COP or any subsidiary BBNJ body seeks to adopt any action in the area of competence of such an RFMO
- Once an RFMO has been created and it has adopted the corresponding management measures for the management of certain area in the high seas, any regulation adopted under BBNJ shall cease to be in effect.

The International Coalition of Fisheries Associations (ICFA) is a coalition of the national fish and seafood industry trade associations from the world's major fishing nations. Formed in 1988, ICFA members advocate on policies for the long-term sustainable use of living marine resources for the benefit of global food security and prosperity. ICFA members are deeply committed to science-based and fully participatory fishery conservation and management processes. ICFA is a recognized Non-Governmental Organization observer for United Nations agencies.