

13 June 2025

Collaborative Statement to UN Ocean Conference 2025 (UNOC 3), Nice, France

Accredited Organisation: **Friends of Marine Life (FML)**

Partner Organizations:

Dakshin Foundation

Rise Up

Transform Bottom Trawling Coalition (TBT)

Department of Aquatic Biology, Kerala University

South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS)

Coastal Students Cultural Forum (CSCF)

Adhwana

Scuba Cochin

As we are concluding the UNOC3 and moving towards Belem for COP30 of UNFCCC, we small-scale fishing communities from Asia, Africa and the Pacific and the support organisations, call upon the governments to

1. Protect Marine and coastal tenurial rights for SSF:

We call for the states of the UN to ensure their respective SSF are conferred exclusive tenurial rights over coastal spaces and fishing grounds that are critical for their survival and wellbeing through a Preferential Access Area approach as envisaged in the SSF Guidelines of the FAO adopted in 2014. We also call for the member states to unequivocally identify the SSF as the stewards of the coast and the sea, and through co-management arrangements, devolve powers to the SSF to effectively manage and sustainably utilise their resources.

2. Ensure Market and trade regulations:

We call on the states of the UN to ensure transparent markets, ensure fair distribution of risks and benefits and put in place efficient financial instruments that can ensure the SSF are economically resilient and protected.

Small scale fisherfolk, both men and women, have poor access to markets, lack of transparency in pricing, and unequal power relationships across the supply chain. Cold chains globally are operated by private actors with little to no regulation or oversight by state agencies, making fishers highly vulnerable to further exploitation, often keeping them in perpetual debt traps, with little to no safety nets. Market-driven sustainability efforts like certification tools, again, pass the burden back on the fisher communities, making them more vulnerable. We call upon the governments to ensure fair and equitable market and trade regulations.

3. Recognize and Integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK):

Indigenous and small-scale coastal fishing communities possess generations of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) that has sustained marine ecosystems through culturally rooted practices. We call for the formal recognition of TEK as complementary to scientific knowledge and urge its integration into marine monitoring, policy formulation, and conservation decision-making processes. Such integration is essential for achieving equitable, place-based, and effective ocean governance.

4. Youth Leadership and Capacity Building

Investing in youth from coastal communities is vital for intergenerational stewardship of the ocean. Nation states must carry out such approaches that nurture future ocean custodians who are grounded in both cultural identity and scientific understanding.

5. Safeguarding Coastal Livelihoods and Ecosystems:

Sustainable ocean futures depend on securing the rights, knowledge, and livelihoods of coastal communities. We urge member states and international partners to adopt participatory marine spatial planning that reflects local ecological realities, recognizes customary marine tenure, and centers the voices of historically marginalized communities. Protecting critical marine habitats must go hand-in-hand with protecting the socio-economic fabric of coastal life.

Along with these clear asks, we also declare our commitment to Collaborative Ocean Action:

We commit to co-developing context-specific marine conservation and fisheries management strategies with fisher communities and scientific institutions. We aim to formalize a network for fisher–scientist partnerships that strengthens TEK integration, promotes knowledge justice, and supports the implementation of SDG 14.

