

For individual SDGs:

SDG 14.4

by 2020, effectively regulate harvesting, end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

Indicator 14.4.1 - proportion of biologically sustainable fish stocks, which measures progress against SDG Target 14.4

- **What is the current status of the Goal or target, in terms of actual measured progress and trends?**
 - The proportion of biologically sustainable fish stocks in the world's marine fisheries was 90 per cent in 1974 but declined to 65.8 per cent in 2017¹.
 - Despite the continuous decrease in the proportion, the rate of decline has slowed down in the most recent years.
 - Fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels contributed 78.7 percent of the global marine fish landings in 2017.
- **What has changed since the last time this Goal was reviewed at the HLPF?**
 - *Any deviations in progress from what was expected (including due to COVID-19)?*

The status and trends of global marine fish stocks have been assessed every other year. So, no new assessment has been done yet after the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. Its effects on stock status seem not obvious, at least in the short term.

- **Additional obstacles or opportunities in implementation including through interlinkages with other Goals, and connections to related processes?**

Implementing SDG 14.4 requires stock assessment, which is technically challenging and data demanding. Most developing economies lack sufficient fishery data and technical capacity to support stock assessment. At present, only about 25% of the world's marine landings come from formally assessed stocks and the majority of fish stocks are unassessed and therefore, their status is unknown. The international community and member states need to work together to overcome the two major issues: data insufficiency and technical capacity shortage in many developing countries.

- **New/promising openings for tracking progress, including from additional data sources?**

The FAO just started a country-level questionnaire survey in 2019 to collect information on the status and trends of SDG Indicator 14.4.1. The biggest challenge of such an effort is that most developing

¹ <http://www.fao.org/sustainable-development-goals/indicators/1441/en/>

economics lack sufficient data and have very few stocks formally assessed. Therefore, capacity development is the priority to achieve a global success in such an initiative.

- **What are promising strategies to accelerate action (by UN and partners) and to mobilize other stakeholders to advance implementation?**

Indicator 14.4.1 is making progress towards its set target in areas with sufficient capacity of assessment, management and governance, but critical challenges remain in countries with limited data and poor capacity in assessment and management. Scientific studies² found that improved regulations and effective monitoring and surveillance have proven successful in reverting overfished stocks to biologically sustainable levels. However, the adoption of sustainable fisheries has generally been slow, particularly in many developing countries. It is also proved that rebuilding plans are the most important factor enabling overfished populations to recover and that ratification of international fishing agreements helps to reduce overfishing and rebuild biomass³. Therefore, to advance the implementation of SDG indicator 14.4.1, the international community needs to promote the development of rebuilding plans for overfished stocks and campaign the ratification of international and regional fishing agreements.

- **How would one monitor action for implementing these?**

Marine fishery management is largely carried out by coastal countries as required by the United Nations Law of the Sea, except for migratory and shared species and in the high seas. Therefore, monitoring of the implementation actions of SDG 14.4 also needs to rely on coastal states and regional and international fishery organizations or agencies as well. Therefore, country-level monitoring and reporting, supplemented by RFMOs, seem to be the most feasible and valuable approach.

² PNAS January 28, 2020 117 (4) 2218-2224; first published January 13, 2020; <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1909726116>

³ Melnychuk, M.C., Kurota, H., Mace, P.M. *et al.* Identifying management actions that promote sustainable fisheries. *Nat Sustain* **4**, 440–449 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-020-00668-1>