

**Hon. Mr. John Silk**  
**Minister of Natural Resources, Commerce and Development**  
**Republic of the Marshall Islands**  
**United Nations Oceans Conference**  
**Interactive Dialogue: “Making fisheries sustainable and providing**  
**access for small scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets”**  
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**Lisbon, Portugal**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is pleased to join other Pacific island nations, and fellow AOSIS members, in participating in today’s Interactive Dialogue focused on sustainable fisheries.

As island nations, we have taken strong and dramatic steps to action sustainable fisheries measures and to make sustainability a regional benchmark for some of the world’s largest and last remaining viable commercial tuna stocks. Our economies are narrow, and we know that overfishing will have devastating consequences. It would leave our future generations with almost nothing.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing remains a scourge, and in our region, is often interlinked with transnational organized crime. As large ocean nations, our responsibilities are vast, yet as small island developing states, our capacity is limited. We fully affirm efforts to consider not only traceability of tuna, but also to better ensure human rights accountability at land and at sea.

We would like to pose a key question for reflection:

How can partnerships best focus on *both* building capacity for improving surveillance to address IUU fishing, and, also address SIDS’ sustainable fisheries development aspirations?

Some of our key development partners have come forward with important technology-sharing and other joint efforts to help us better monitor our own, vast EEZs. This is vital, but it is only part of the picture.

Target 14.7 measures economic benefits to SIDS and LDCs from sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP, and Target 14.6.1 seeks to end IUU fishing. We suggest that increasing our direct participation in our own sustainable fisheries resources also helps to address IUU fishing, which is driven in our region largely by distant water fishing fleets. As islands, we have an obvious interest in ensuring the viability of our own primary sustainable resource, and policing our own efforts.

But too often, consensus outcomes from RFMOs like the WCPFC have not made enough room for advancing our development aspirations as coastal islands - interests at the negotiating table are too often focused on advancing our partners distant fishing interests and not our own. If SIDS had a stronger and more direct economic role in our own resource base, would enforcement of human rights at sea improve? Would drivers of IUU fishing decline? Would our security be advanced, both in patrolling our borders and addressing woeful underemployment in fragile economies? If we, as islands, were truly in the drivers seat of our own resources, would global fisheries sustainability goals be more readily achievable?