

PROMOTING THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE FOOD FROM THE OCEAN FOR POVERTY ERADICATION AND FOOD SECURITY

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Ocean Action Panel 9 | 13 June 2025
Third United Nations Ocean Conference
9-13 June 2025
Nice, France

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, and Colleagues,

I am honored to join you on this final morning of UNOC3 for these important discussions on the role of **sustainable food from the ocean** in **eradicating poverty** and ensuring **global food security**.

In my remarks today, I will highlight the vital role that tuna plays in both global and local food security, particularly through its dual function as a widely traded commodity and a critical source of nutrition for coastal communities. I will also reflect on its economic importance for Pacific Island countries, the progress we've made in sustaining tuna stocks, and the **practical actions** we can take to ensure tuna continues to contribute to poverty reduction, nutrition, and resilient livelihoods.

Let me begin with a view from the **community level**, where tuna plays a **lifesaving and life-sustaining role**.

Across **coastal and island communities** in the Pacific, **fresh tuna is more than a meal. It is a way of life**. Families rely on **subsistence and artisanal fishing** to meet their daily dietary needs. Caught using traditional methods, tuna is shared among neighbors, celebrated in community feasts, and prepared in ways passed down through generations. It is part of **local diets, cultural identity**, and **community resilience**.

In these places, tuna is not just part of the **economy**, it is part of the **social fabric**.

But tuna's importance extends far beyond these shorelines. It is also a **global commodity**.

Canned tuna is one of the **top five most consumed seafoods in the world**. In 2024, the global canned tuna market was valued at **20.4 billion USD**, with **skipjack tuna** accounting for nearly **48% of the market share**. Canned tuna is affordable, shelf-stable, nutrient-dense, and widely available, in supermarkets, school lunch programs, emergency food aid, and household pantries. For **millions of families** around the world, including those in **low-income or food-insecure communities**, it provides reliable, essential protein.

This is why I say tuna has a **dual role** in food security. On the one hand, it is a **high-value international product**, traded and processed on a global scale. On the other, it is a **local lifeline**, a source of daily nourishment for coastal communities that depend on the ocean for survival.

As the **Executive Director of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission**, the RFMO responsible for managing the **world's largest tuna fishery**, I see this duality every day. Our membership is dominated by **Pacific Small Island Developing States**, many of whom have spoken this week about the significance of tuna to their **health, livelihoods, and national development**.

In the **Marshall Islands**, where I'm from, **revenues from tuna fisheries** make up **32% of the national budget**. In the **Federated States of Micronesia**, where I live, tuna accounts for **nearly half of all domestically generated revenue**. In many Pacific Island countries, these revenues fund **education, hospitals, basic infrastructure**, and other essential public services. For them, and for us, a **healthy, sustainable tuna fishery** is not optional— it is existential.

So what can we do to ensure that tuna continues to serve its vital dual role?

To maximize tuna's contribution to food security and poverty reduction, our collective efforts must focus on **sustainable resource management, equitable access, and inclusive value chains**.

We must strengthen science-based fisheries governance, including through harvest strategies, to maintain healthy tuna stocks. At the same time, expanding **local**

processing, distribution infrastructure, and low-cost preservation methods (like canning or drying) can improve access to affordable, nutrient-rich tuna in vulnerable communities.

We can support **small-scale and artisanal fishers**, especially through cold chain access, cooperative models, and targeted financial support, ensuring that tuna directly benefits local nutrition and livelihoods.

Innovation is also key, ranging from **blockchain traceability** to **women-led processing enterprises** and **community-supported fisheries**. Social protection measures such as **seasonal income support, health insurance, and public procurement for school meals** can stabilize incomes while sustaining tuna consumption.

And finally, **global trade policies**, including tariffs on key inputs like tinplate and aluminum for cans, can raise production costs and retail prices of canned tuna, making it less affordable for low-income consumers. **Export restrictions or high import duties** may also limit access in food-insecure regions. These trade-related measures **risk disrupting the supply of canned tuna to vulnerable communities** that rely on it as a critical, low-cost source of protein and nutrition. Ensuring open, equitable trade and reducing barriers for essential tuna products is vital to maintaining food security.

Together, these actions can help secure a resilient tuna supply chain that delivers both **food security and economic opportunity**, particularly for coastal and island populations most reliant on the ocean.

Yesterday, we received encouraging news from the FAO's **2025 Review of the State of the World's Fishery Resources**. According to this report, **95% of the world's tuna supply** now comes from **fisheries that are not overfished**, and where **overfishing is not occurring**. This is a powerful testament to the **value of effective fisheries management**, and to the progress made by governments working together through regional cooperation.

But the review also reminds us: we cannot be complacent. **We must not expand existing fisheries**, and we must **strengthen management systems**, including through **adaptive measures like harvest strategies**, to ensure long-term sustainability.

Because if we are serious about ending hunger... if we are serious about supporting nutrition, health, and resilience in vulnerable communities... then we must be serious about **protecting and sustaining tuna resources**, and ensuring they remain **accessible to those who need them most**.

The future of food security for many around the world depends on it.

Thank you.