

Statement on behalf of Friends of Marine Life

Excellencies, member state representatives, and stake holders,

I am really proud to be here as a daughter of a fisherman and a member of a fishing community in India.

Friends of Marine Life (FML) is an indigenous coastal community voluntary organisation that aims to safeguard the marine biodiversity, coastal ecosystem services in South India. For some years FML has been undertaking seabed ecosystem studies with a team led by experienced scientists and citizen researches, scuba divers together with the support of indigenous fishermen. We have so far covered the Gulf of Mannar, Kanayakumari and Trivandrum districts in South India, around 3000 sq km area of near inshore and up to 43 m depth of the sea area. India's marine biodiversity assessment studies are not given much attention to the livelihood areas of the fisher folks. With limited understanding of the seabed ecosystems, the new technologies, commercialisation of fish industries are introduced in the country. This has encouraged overfishing and destructive fishing practices. Another worthwhile point is that only about 1% of the marine protected areas have been identified where as 10% of the land areas have been located. In this context, it is our responsibility as formally educated individuals within the community postulate that seabed ecosystem studies are important and essential to achieve Goal 14.

The fisher folk here are having tremendous knowledge about seabed ecosystems, coastal and marine biodiversity, who has been using the marine resources sustainably over centuries. However, very recently, they are compelled to follow the path of modern developers who has little concern for conservation and protection of critical marine habitats.

We are documenting the indigenous and local knowledge (ILK) of coastal community about the sea and marine ecosystems which is preserved in their language. It is therefore documenting the language has become an important tool to assess and conserve marine and coastal biodiversity. We have been working with UNESCO-IPBES Asia Pacific region to document and disseminate biocultural diversity of coastal fishing communities.

In order to encourage sustainable fisheries control measures should be undertaken on these policy and Economic development. At the same time there should be encouragement for Indigenous fishermen who do little damage to the fish stocks through their sustainable fishing. Therefore we believe solutions to sustainable fisheries lies not only with modern scientific advancement but also with Indigenous and local knowledge of fishing communities such as Mukkuva.

Thank you for your attention