



High Stakes on the High Seas: Sustainable Management of Global Tuna Fisheries
GEF Event: ABNJ Tuna
GEF CEO and Chairperson Monique Barbut
Remarks
June 16, 1530-1700
U.S. Center, Athletes Park

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished Speakers,

It gives me great pleasure to open this roundtable on the “Sustainable Management of Tuna Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation in the High Seas.

As we gather in this beautiful city and gaze out to see from Rio’s beaches and high points, we have to remind ourselves that we are gazing at troubled waters. That is why so much of the work we are doing in this summit has to do with our oceans. From shore, we cannot see two hundred nautical miles out to sea to the “Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.” But we know that those waters are suffering from the “tragedy of the commons.”

No one nation has the sole responsibility for the management of these high seas. Because of this, we are seeing the near collapse of some species of tuna, the loss of marine biodiversity, and rising threats to marine ecosystem health and services. In response, and in line with Conventions’ guidance and the Law of the Sea, the Global Environment Facility has spearheaded a powerful partnership. We have brought together an alliance of the top organizations engaged with fisheries management and oceans biodiversity with the private sector. Perhaps no group understands better the challenges facing our oceans, and the consequences of inaction. With this

alliance, we intend to show that the seemingly intractable problems confronting the high seas can actually be reversed. We believe that the results can lead to both sustainable economic development *and* ocean biodiversity conservation.

The overall High Seas program, the largest concerted effort to address the depletion of the High Seas, is benefitting from a US\$ 50 million grant, generating so far US\$ 268 million of co-financing. The program, coordinated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, includes four projects implemented by FAO, the World Bank and the United Nations Environment Programme, along with executing agencies and contributing partners.

The tuna project, one of the four projects of the High Seas program, is the focus of today's discussions.

The tuna project is sponsored by GEF, FAO, the Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations and member countries. Among the key partners are the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the International Seafood Sustainability Foundation, the World Wildlife Foundation, and Birdlife.

Tuna fisheries extend over about 35% of the Earth's surface. The global catch of tuna and tuna-like species in 2009 was estimated by FAO at more than 7% of the global catch of all marine fishes. Tunas are amongst the most commercially valuable marine resources on the planet. More than 85 countries harvest them in commercial quantities and their yearly exports represent about 8% of the internationally traded seafood. The value of landed catches of the most important tunas is estimated at over \$10 billion annually.

When poorly managed, the decline of these fisheries has serious negative impacts on marine ecosystems in the Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. These include the modification of trophic dynamics – that is, the relationship between predator fish and prey – by the targeting of predator species in the commercial fishery. Another serious threat is the damage done to biodiversity due to bycatch – what we might call the “innocent bystanders” of the fish world. Since tuna stocks are also found in the connected exclusive economic zones, poorly managed

fisheries in the High Seas can seriously undermine the viability of coastal fisheries on which over half-a-billion people around the world rely on for jobs and food security.

The tuna project strives to deliver transformational change. We seek to move away from the use of fisheries management systems and fishing practices that do not fully take into account the status of existing stocks, or the impacts on ecosystems. Instead, we intend to bring about the adoption of management systems based on clear and fair fishing rights within the framework of a rigorous ecosystem approach. This will ensure efficient and sustainable fishing over the years. It is also expected to significantly reduce illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and bycatch, especially of sharks, marine mammals, sea turtles and seabirds.

To obtain transformational change, it is crucial to work with the private sector. Tuna canners represent 50% of the tuna fisheries industry in terms of value. ISSF represents 60% of the tuna canners, equivalent to more than 25% of tuna fisheries industry in terms of value. The International Sustainable Seafood Foundation member companies have agreed since September 2009 to refrain from using the over-exploited [eastern Pacific big eye tuna](#). They have also vowed to avoid tuna from any boat listed by a regional fishery management organization as being involved in illegal or unregulated activity. ISSF members have also committed to sharing catch and purchase data with the fishery management organizations to prevent overfishing.

Bumble Bee Foods, the ISSF chair, is working to promote the implementation of sound science, better management and more accountability to protect the marine environment. As the partners prepare and implement the tuna project, the GEF looks forward to broadening the private-sector partnership. This is key to scaling up the alliance of producers, processors and retailers to promote a market of sustainable tuna and seafood trade from oceans to the dinner table. Without further adieux, I thank our distinguished partners and I am pleased to give them the floor to highlight their activities to address the challenges of maintaining a healthy tuna population and associated ecosystems.

Thank you for your commitment to healthier oceans.