



## **SUSTAINABLE OCEAN GOVERNANCE REQUIRES URGENT REFORM**

RFMOs are ill-equipped to meet the requirements of the High Seas Treaty

Washington DC, July 12, 2024 – As the Committee on Fisheries 36th Session (COFI36) ended last week, it is an opportune time to reiterate that Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) are consistently failing to sustain international fisheries and protect marine biodiversity - and are wholly ill-equipped to take on additional responsibilities for ensuring oceans sustainability.

“With fish populations increasingly at risk and climate impacts worsening, fundamental reforms are urgently needed,” said Ryan Orgera, Global Director of Accountability.Fish, the only global NGO solely focused on the reform of international marine governance.

Orgera noted that The United Nations Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (also referred to as the High Seas Treaty) and the Paris Agreement highlight the necessity of modernizing RFMOs for effective and accountable policies, but that the RFMOs have resisted such modernization.

“The main reason why RFMOs are wholly unsuitable for a greater role in marine sustainability at this time is that the RFMOs are dominated by industrial fishing interests and generally lack transparency and inclusiveness of non-extracting stakeholders. They are also severely hampered in their effectiveness by consensus-based voting rules that often give their worst actors veto power over any substantive changes.

The recently adopted High Seas Treaty, set for ratification next year, aims to conserve marine biodiversity in international waters. It mandates area-based management tools and Environmental Impact Assessments, necessitating coordination with RFMOs. But Orgera notes that “RFMOs are either incapable of changing, or are unwilling to conform even to the basic requirements of their mandate. Their reliance on closed-door processes and back-room dealing make them unsuitable for this massive increase in remit and responsibility.”

“The future of our oceans depends on modernizing RFMOs. That means making them accountable to the full range of stakeholders beyond their current focus on satisfying the demands of industrial fishers. This transformation is an opportunity we cannot afford to miss.”

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*Accountability.Fish is a global initiative committed to increasing openness and accountability in international fisheries decision making. It is funded by the Oceans Five Foundation.*

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