

**Statement made by World Forum of Fish Harvesters and Fish Workers (WFF),
World Forum of Fisher Peoples (WFFP), International Collective in Support of
Fishworkers (ICSF) and International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty,
on User Rights**

Statement on User Rights

Firstly we recognize that the proposed Global Work Program has highlighted some important dimensions crucial to the implementation of the VGSSF, and to the work that lies ahead in order to ensure a sustainable small scale fisheries sector in the future. In particular this proposal has rightly identified the very important connections between issues related to tenure rights and Small-Scale Fisheries as well as the need to focus on capacity building and knowledge sharing to ensure effective implementation of the SSF Guidelines and fair allocation of rights in a context specific way.

Indeed, fishing communities around the world are already working hard and deeply committed to this work in the context of the implementation of the SSF Guidelines. Given the challenging nature of this task, and the overlap with key elements of the Global Work Program proposed here in Agenda point 9.2, we request that the community of COFI member states cautiously assess where we put our limited resources as we move forward. We respectfully emphasize the fact that important advances have already been made to build capacity and operationalize tenure rights issues in the context of Small Scale Fisheries and future work should continue strengthening those efforts.

Chapter 5 of the VGSSF provides important guidance on how to approach and allocate tenure rights in fisheries and highlights the very useful normative support that the VGGTs can provide to bolster such efforts. We believe that using these two sets of guidelines as the compass for moving forward is the best way to uphold the human rights based approach to fisheries and in so doing address challenge of poverty and food insecurity that we face in our fishing communities.

In particular we see the Global Strategic Framework for Implementation of the SSF Guidelines presented in agenda point 9 as the primary sphere within which such issues should be addressed in the future. Importantly the GSF is based on and upholds the human rights based approach which provides the normative foundation upon which fishing communities can allocate and manage fishing rights through community led systems, develop markets, ensure food security in fishing communities and importantly these can be achieved while also protecting the environment, promoting biodiversity and strengthening sustainable fisheries practices into the future. In this sense, the work that we are already doing and are proposing to continue in the context of the GSF is not only about protecting human rights and the tenure rights systems that both the SSFG and VGGTs help operationalize at the local level. It is also about increasing capacity, sharing knowledge and recognizing small-scale fishers' duties as protectors of our marine and inland fisheries environments.

Given the interconnected nature of the land, fisheries and forest resources that fishing communities rely on to survive and thrive, we feel that the human rights based approach provides an appropriately integral and broad framework under which all programs dealing with tenure rights and allocation of resources, conservation initiatives, knowledge sharing and capacity building should be subsumed.

In summary, we both recognize the value of the contributions made in the context of rights based approaches to fisheries here today, as well as the finite nature of the resources (in terms of time, energy and funding), which we have at hand to tackle these issues. For these reasons, we feel it would be most efficient to strengthen our existing work on tenure rights, capacity building and knowledge sharing in the context of the GSF, and we invite you to do the same.