SFACT

SUSTAINABLE FISHERIES AND COMMUNITIES TRUST

Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust

Annual Impact Report | **2024**

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Abbie Topping

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© Muhammad IQbal

Contents

A Word from our Founding Trustee 3
About Us 4
Our 5-Year Strategy 5
Our Programmes 6
Where does our funding go? 7
Accelerating Coastal Conservation and Development 8
Advancing Education 11
Supporting Technical Capacity and Facilitation 16
Our Team and Our Partners 22
Conclusion 23
Contact Us 24

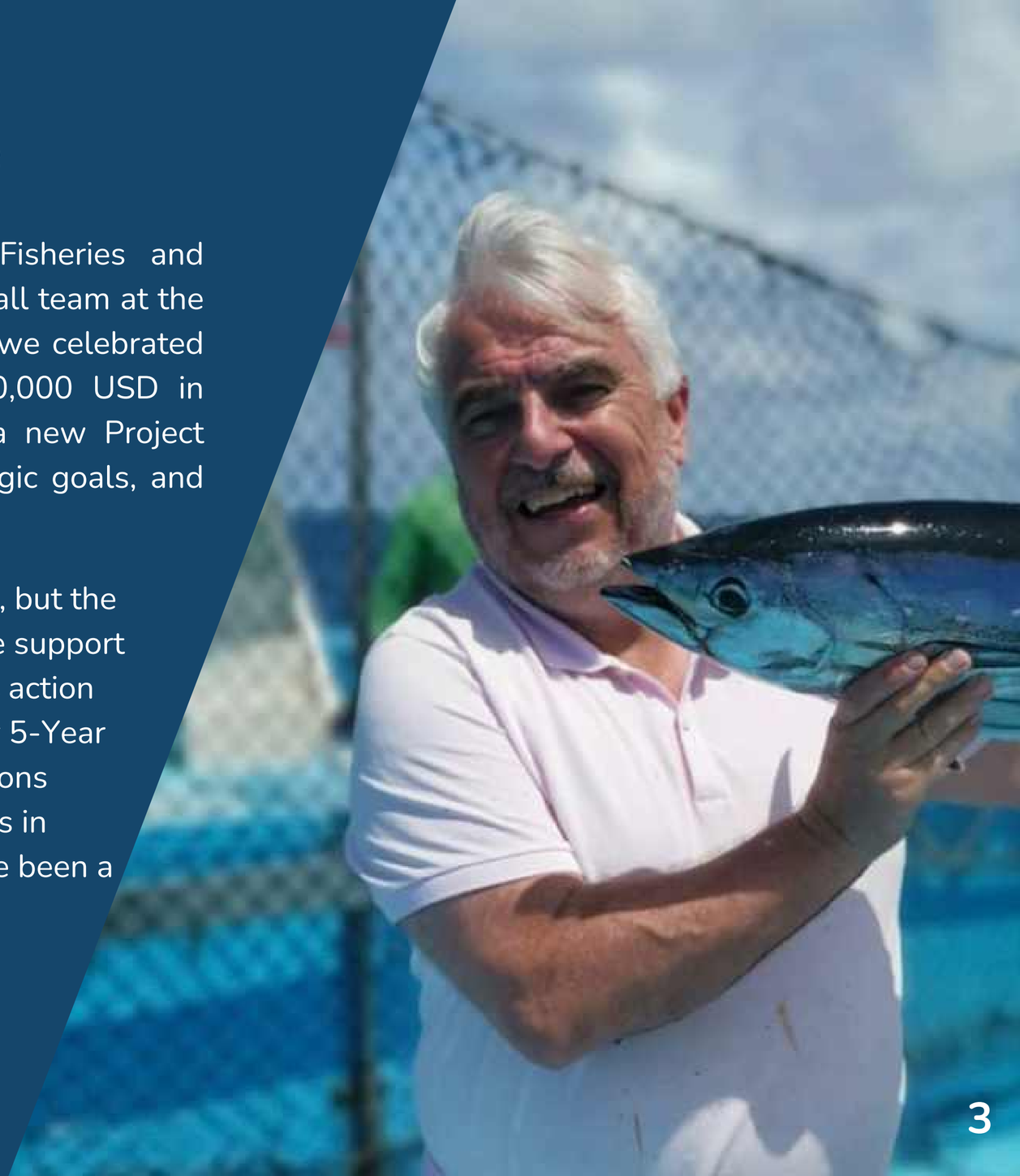
A Word from our Founding Trustee

Founded in 2020, we are proud of how far Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust has come in its first four years. With just a small team at the helm, momentum within the charity continues to build. In 2024, we celebrated multiple achievements, including awarding a cumulative 2,500,000 USD in grants and scholarships over the last four years, welcoming a new Project Coordinator, and making significant progress towards our strategic goals, and keeping our focus to the Indian Ocean region.

As with any new venture, we have encountered teething problems, but the passion of both the Trustees and staff to advocate for and facilitate support of the vulnerable coastal communities that benefit from grassroots action has enabled us to overcome challenges and push forward with our 5-Year Strategy. We are fortunate to be partnered with leading organisations around the world, including top universities and government bodies in Indian Ocean Coastal States. Their knowledge and experience have been a great contribution in SFACT's achievements to date.

We invite you to explore our second annual report, and celebrate our progress in 2024.

John Burton



About Us

Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust (SFACT) was founded in 2020. Now four years on, we have been focusing specifically on the Indian Ocean region, but our mission, vision and purpose remain the same.

Our mission is to protect and improve the livelihoods of communities in vulnerable Coastal States in the Indian Ocean through advocacy, to empower those communities through education and to conserve marine ecosystems through local, grassroots programmes.

SFACT's vision is for all coastal communities that rely on healthy marine ecosystems to have access to the resources they need, and the capacity to sustainably defend that resource.

Our purpose is to educate and enable small-scale fisheries in vulnerable Coastal States in the Indian Ocean to enjoy secure and sustainable livelihoods while protecting the marine environment for future generations.

Our 5-Year Strategy

By 2027, SFACT aims to:*

Fund educational knowledge through awarding postgraduate scholarships to 30 students.

Strengthen our relationship with educational institutions globally by establishing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ten universities.

Increase our impact by securing match funding for every 1 USD invested by SFACT.

Help to scale the capacity of local partners to benefit 50,000 people in coastal communities.

*These symbols are seen throughout our annual report, to highlight where projects are contributing to our strategic aims.

© Alberto Capparelli

Our Programmes

Our work at SFACT is separated into three core programmes: Accelerating Coastal Conservation and Development, Advancing Education, and Supporting Technical Capacity and Facilitation, to facilitate the aims set out in our 5-Year Strategy.

Why the Indian Ocean

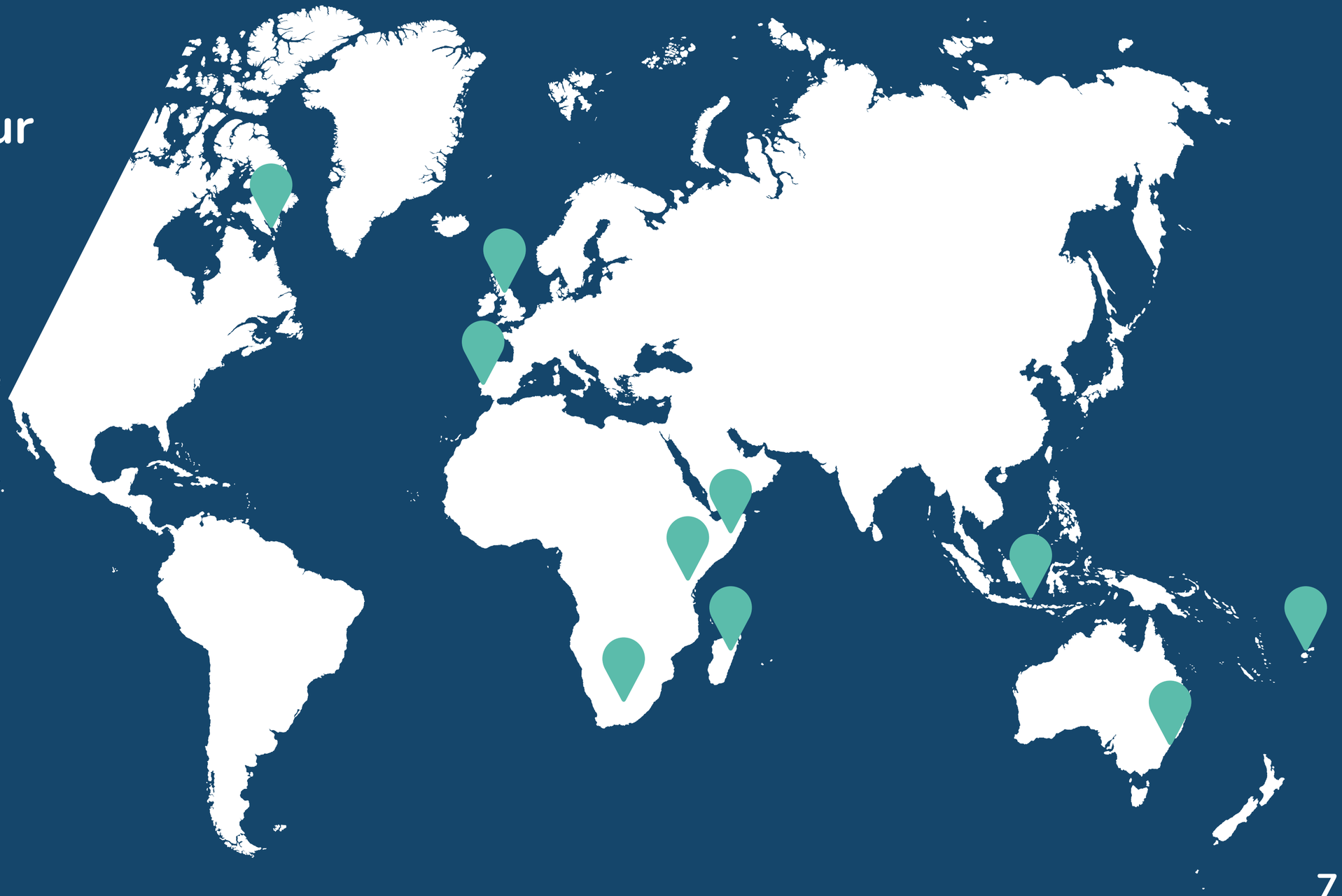
SFACT focuses on the Indian Ocean region specifically. This area hosts a vast number of biodiverse marine ecosystems, yet this is juxtaposed with rife industrial fishing, overexploitation of stocks and high levels of bycatch. Coastal communities in the Indian Ocean are heavily reliant on healthy marine ecosystems, but often due to a lack of support and resources, coastal conservation and sustainable development is hindered.

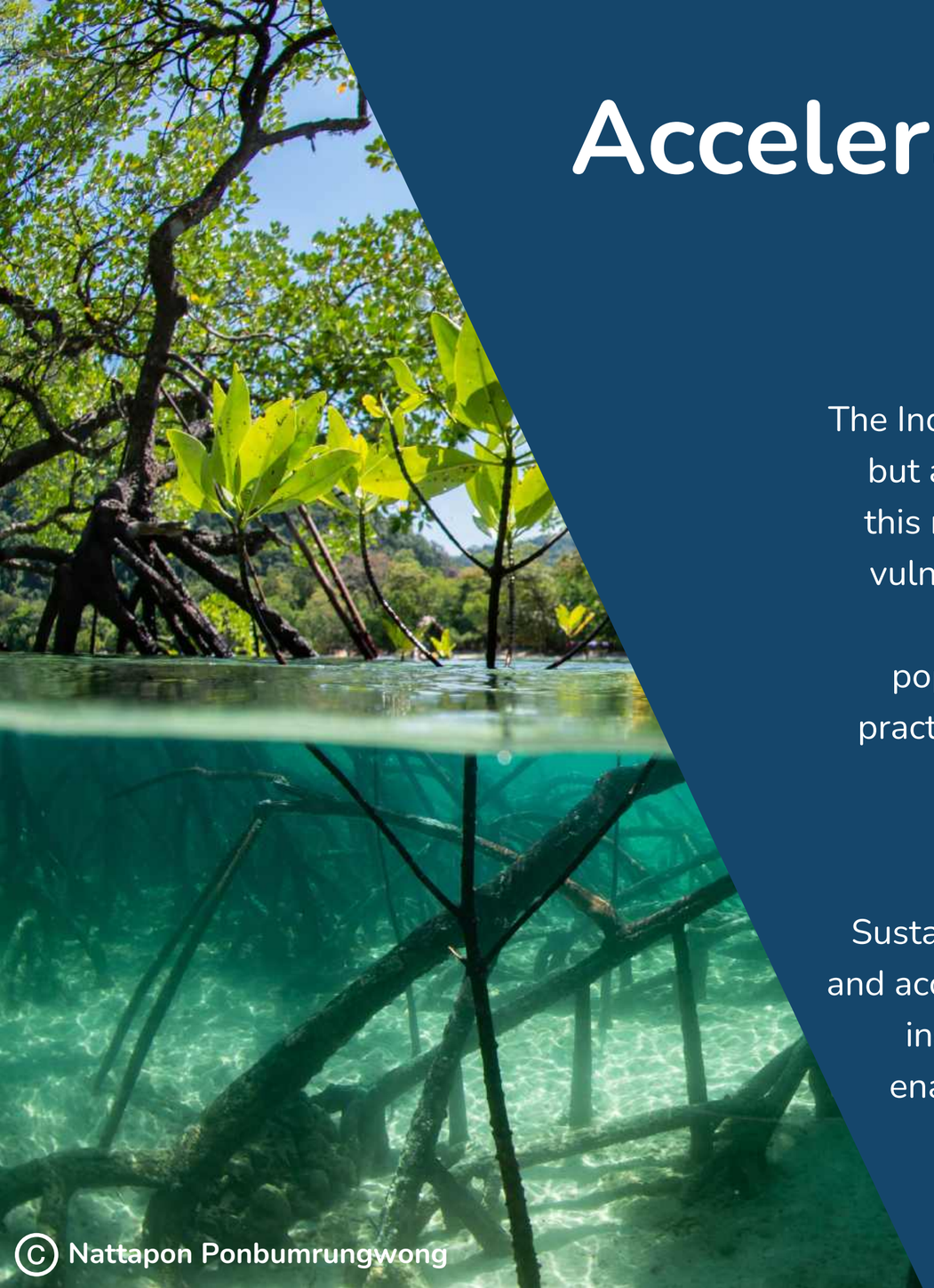
In terms of advancing education, we prioritise Indian Ocean nationals to build capacity in these vulnerable Coastal States, while increasing research efforts and contributions to the global knowledge base on the fisheries from this region. Similarly, in terms of technical facilitation, Indian Ocean coastal communities don't receive enough resources or support, therefore SFACT provides the funds for Indian Ocean nationals to receive the necessary training and technical support, allowing them to protect themselves and the natural resources in this region.

© Silas Baisch

Where does our funding go?

The projects that we fund are spread all over the world, however they all focus on making positive progress on the Indian Ocean through research, facilitating education or enhancing coastal development.





© Nattapon Ponbumrungwong

Accelerating Coastal Conservation and Development

The Indian Ocean is home to some of the most biodiverse marine ecosystems in the world but a large number of its many seafood stocks are overfished. Industrial fishing is rife in this region, and has an enormous impact on ocean health, with high levels of bycatch of vulnerable species such as seabirds, cetaceans, sharks and rays. Many of these bycatch species are already classed as endangered or vulnerable, and the reduction in their populations is damaging the structures of marine ecosystems. If unsustainable fishing practices continue, biodiversity loss will reach irreversible levels, and the Coastal States and their communities will lose their livelihoods.

Developing Coastal States worldwide have struggled to make progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 14b (SDG 14b), often due to a lack of support, resources and access to advice to engage in improvement projects and sustainable development. By increasing resources through grant-making to on-the-ground programmes, SFACT is enabling positive progress towards SDG 14's targets for Indian Ocean Coastal States. We'd like to share some of the great projects we have supported in 2024.

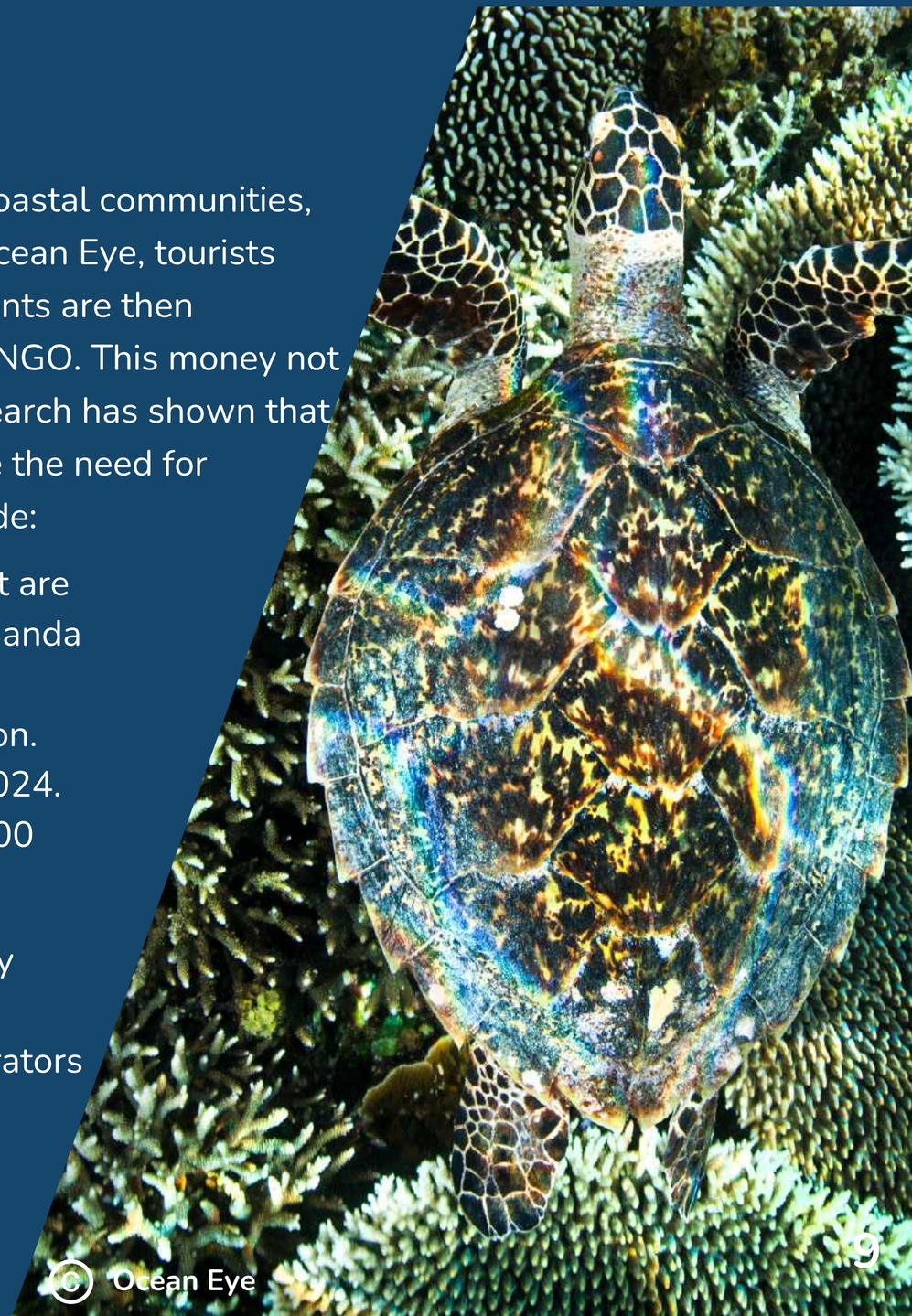
Ocean Eye

Indonesia

Ocean Eye facilitates micropayments from sightings of marine wildlife back to the coastal communities, helping to address biodiversity loss, the climate crisis and global inequality. With Ocean Eye, tourists visiting marine wildlife will make small payments per animal sighting. These payments are then transferred directly and transparently to the coastal community or a locally trusted NGO. This money not only benefits the local communities but also the marine wildlife as Ocean Eye's research has shown that people are willing to pay to see these rare species in the wild, which could minimise the need for poaching and the demand within the illegal pet trade. Their recent milestones include:

- Set up community projects with local partners in four key areas of Indonesia that are popular for marine biodiversity-based tourism: Raja Ampat, Alor, Komodo and Banda Archipelago.
- Established an MOU with local NGO supporting community-level implementation.
- Received the Blue Economy Innovation Award in Almería, Spain in November 2024.
- Secured backing from two Indonesian tourism associations, representing over 100 liveaboard operators, facilitating wider adoption.

The Ocean Eye project remains on track with efforts continuing to strengthen industry engagement, enhance community benefits, and increase visibility within the tourism sector. Looking ahead, they aim to expand collaborations with high-end tourism operators in biodiversity-rich regions, and to increase long-term commitment and financial sustainability.



Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy
Madagascar

Madagascar has some 200,000 small-scale vessels operating in coastal fishing communities. However, many of these small-scale fishers face the increasing challenge of declining catches and competition for local resources. These communities rely on fishing as a livelihood and for sustenance, yet most fishers are limited by their use of traditional, non-motorised wooden canoes. Restricted to nearshore waters, they often see reduced yields from overfished areas. Recognising this issue, SFACT has partnered with the Ministry of Fisheries and Blue Economy to launch a pilot project aimed at empowering these fishers through motorisation, enhanced safety and extended fishing opportunities.

- Fishers are logging data on catches, fishing areas, and species to inform an evidence-based approach for expansion. The project is just the beginning and is a great example of how empowering local communities with sustainable tools and knowledge can make a real difference in both livelihoods and environmental conservation.
- Additional equipment, including long-range binoculars to help fishers spot seabirds (and, in turn, fish beneath the waves), was also distributed. This initiative has created enthusiasm among fishers, who are already seeing the benefits of enhanced capabilities and opportunities.

The Minister expressed his heartfelt gratitude to Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust (SFACT) for their funding of this important initiative to support the small-scale fishermen of Madagascar.

© SFACT

Advancing Education

We are proud to offer funding for postgraduate research and training in sustainable small-scale fisheries and advocacy. Our grantees are leading scholars specialising in subjects within the Indian Ocean region, whose research and training aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We prioritise the higher education of Indian Ocean nationals to build capacity in vulnerable Coastal States, while increasing research efforts in the region and contributing to the global knowledge base on the fisheries from this region.

In 2024 we established *Memorandums of Understanding with four* universities as well as taking our scholar total from 14 to 19.

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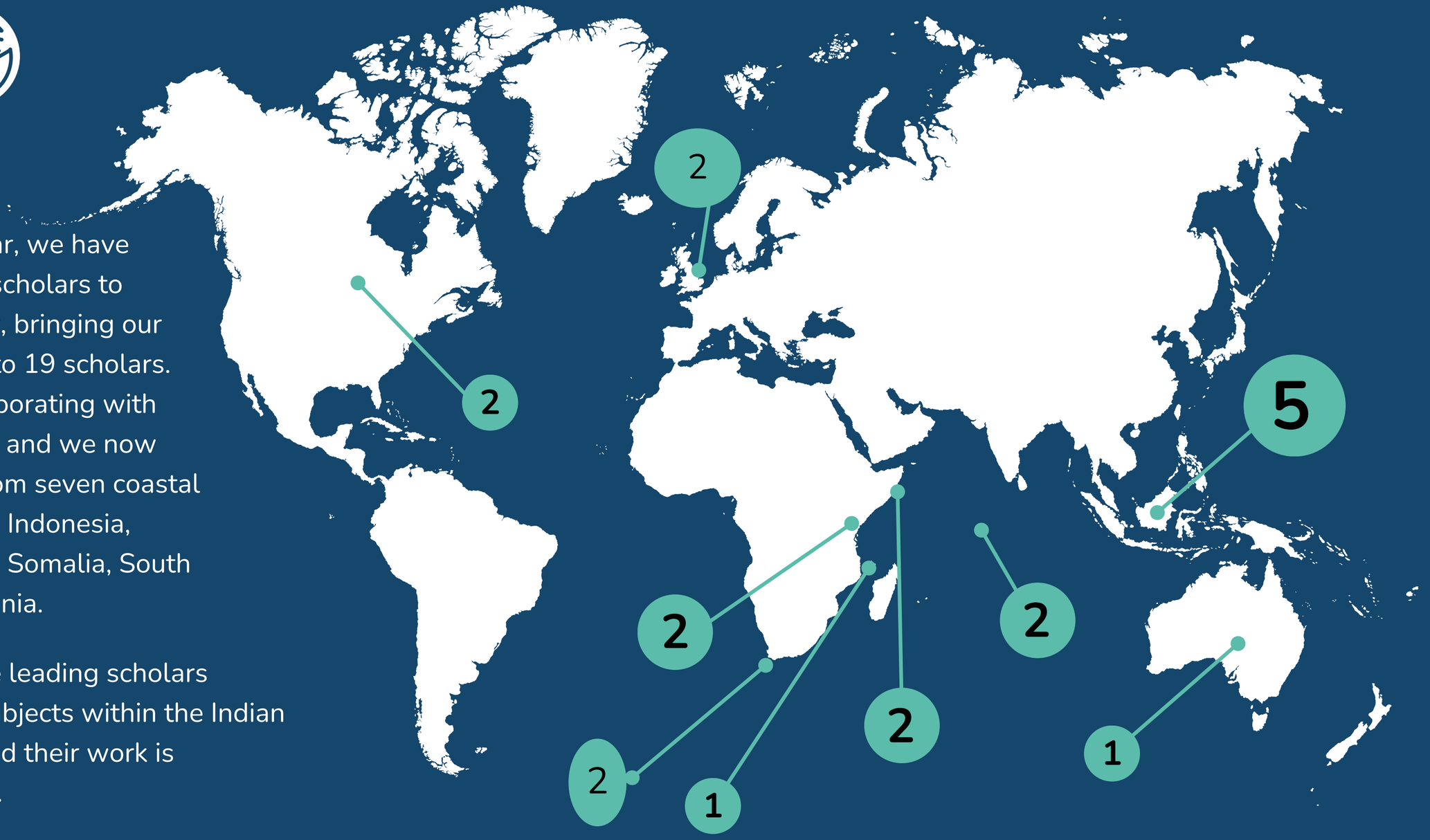
Scholars

Over the last year, we have funded six new scholars to attend university, bringing our current total up to 19 scholars. SFACT are collaborating with nine universities, and we now have scholars from seven coastal states: Australia, Indonesia, Kenya, Maldives, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania.

Our grantees are leading scholars specialising in subjects within the Indian Ocean region, and their work is incredibly varied.



The locations of our scholars around the world, 15 are located in Indian Ocean Coastal States

Meet our newly funded scholars

Indonesia: This year, five new PhD scholars have begun impactful studies that contribute to sustainable fisheries governance, species conservation and economic optimisation: **Trian Yunanda, Muhammad Anas, Tono Amboro, Putuh Suadela and Aris Budiarto.**

Putuh Suadela is studying Indonesia's tuna longline fishing capacity in the Indian Ocean. Her research aims to refine fleet licensing processes and optimise fishing permits to prevent overcapacity while ensuring compliance with regional fisheries regulations. Addressing overcapacity is critical for maintaining stock sustainability and supporting Indonesia's commitments in international fisheries management.

Muhammad Anas is investigating the sustainability of thresher shark fisheries in southern Java. His study assesses the impact of overexploitation and habitat degradation on this vulnerable species. By identifying biological gaps and evaluating current management strategies, his research aims to inform conservation policies and promote responsible shark fisheries.

South Africa: Sethabile Mkhize started her Masters in early 2025, titled 'The relationship between and impacts of small-scale fisheries on endangered marine species in the uThukela Marine Protected Area'. Studying at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Sethabile is exploring the recent implementation of MPAs in the KwaZulu-Natal area and the change in legislation, policies and practices that now govern small-scale fisheries. This study seeks to understand the emergence of new state citizen relationships with regard to these activities within and adjacent to a Marine Protected Area, the perceptions and responses of small-scale fishers to new conservation spaces in the region, and the need for greater participation, learning and knowledge production by all stakeholders around the governance of small-scale fisheries.

Lulu Middleton: SFACT PhD Scholar Completes Research—Have Mangroves Been Overlooked for Their Potential to Support Gendered Food and Nutrition Security in Indonesia. A summary from Lulu below.

There has been growing recognition of the role of aquatic foods in supporting food and nutrition security in low to middle-income countries. Globally, coastal areas, including mangroves, are known to provide a range of benefits to communities as a source of food, income and provision of other ecosystem services. This is particularly important as Indonesia is home to the greatest diversity of mangroves globally. Aquatic foods found in and around mangrove systems are nutrient-rich. Yet the specific contribution of mangroves to food and nutrition security has been overlooked whilst much of the mangrove research focuses on blue carbon, conservation and management. This PhD research aimed to fill this gap by investigating the contribution of mangroves to gendered food and nutrition security in Kubu Raya Regency, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The research utilised a mixed method case study approach using focus group discussions, participatory mapping, household surveys and weighed dietary records with communities in two villages to address three main objectives:

1) To investigate the role of mangrove forests as the gendered food system,
2) To evaluate the gendered food and nutrition security benefits derived from mangrove livelihoods and,
3) To quantify the nutrient contribution that aquatic mangrove foods make to mangrove fishers' household dietary requirements.

This PhD research provides the first in-depth local case study advancing the knowledge of mangrove food systems and how they contribute to food and nutrition security through a gendered lens in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that mangroves are important gendered food systems that are vital for household earning activities and nutrient intake. Mangroves as a food system need to be considered more comprehensively within wider national and international aquatic food systems research and discourse as well as mangrove management and conservation strategies.

© Human Dignity Group

Human Dignity Group Fiji

At sea, there is often a lack of regulation and monitoring which can result in several human rights issues including forced labour, physical and emotional abuse and slavery. The Human Dignity Group, which is based in Fiji, is working to address these issues by fighting against human trafficking and for seamen's and women's rights.

Their work takes many forms, from supplying new clean mattresses to the crew of a tuna longline vessel and assisting injured crew or widowed families in applying for compensation and to facilitating fishers to attend the Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA).

Another year of funding: 2024—2025:

SFACT approved funding for another year for several Fijians to attend the FMA to gain their Basic Sea Safety certificate. The academy teaches them skills such as first aid, personal safety and firefighting, and completion of the course provides fishers with a Seaman's Employment Record Book – a logbook to record their experiences at sea. This is a co-funded project with IFFS.

Supporting Technical Capacity and Facilitation

A challenge faced by many vulnerable Coastal States is a lack of support and resource to partake in decision making that impacts their communities directly. By being excluded from the conversation, the needs of the communities go ignored. This leads to exploitation by distant water fleets and excludes small-scale fishers from fair market access.

SFACT provides the funds for Indian Ocean nationals to receive the necessary training and technical support that allows them to protect and restore the natural resources that fall within their jurisdiction. It also allows for sustainable development within their communities, and technical advancements that facilitate that development.

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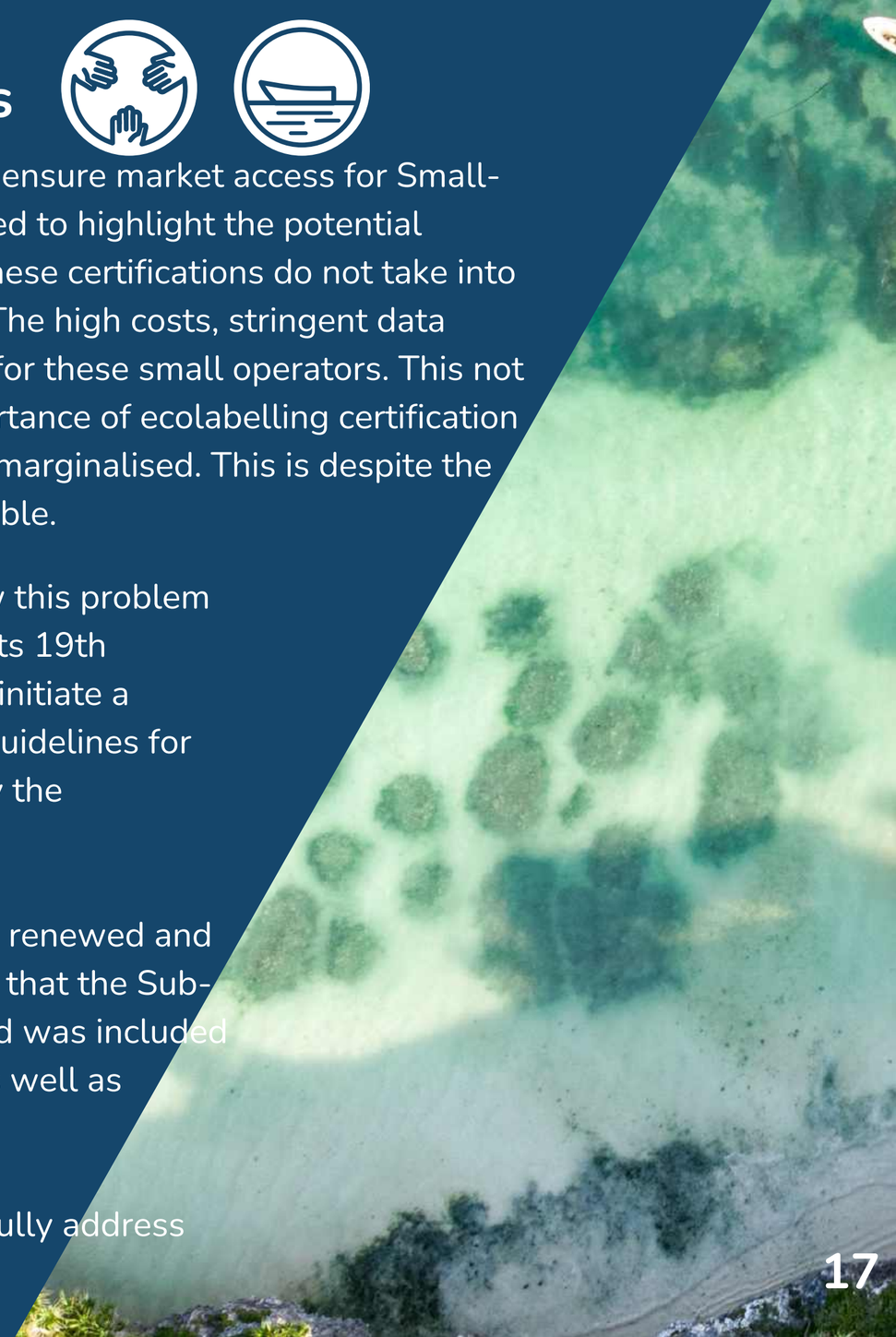
FAO Ecolabelling Guidelines and Small-Scale Fisheries

SFACT has supported the International Pole and Line Foundation (IPNLF) in work aiming to ensure market access for Small-Scale Fisheries, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 14b. In particular, this work aimed to highlight the potential market access barrier placed on small-scale fisheries by ecolabelling certifications, where these certifications do not take into account the differing circumstances between industrial and small-scale fishing operations. The high costs, stringent data requirements and complex standards necessary for certification are frequently out of reach for these small operators. This not only restricts their market access but also exacerbates economic disparities. Given the importance of ecolabelling certification for access to high value markets, this can result in small-scale fisheries being economically marginalised. This is despite the fact that small-scale fishing methods are often, by nature, ecologically and socially sustainable.

SFACT and IPNLF therefore worked in partnership with the government of Pakistan to draw this problem to the attention of the UN FAO's Committee on Fisheries' Sub-Committee on Fish Trade at its 19th Session in Bergen, Norway in September 2023. In particular, the Sub-Committee agreed to initiate a review of the FAO's Ecolabelling Guidelines to bring these in line with the FAO Voluntary Guidelines for small-scale fisheries and other recent developments in international law and policy, notably the Sustainable Development Goals.

At the 36th Session of the Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in July 2024, this partnership was renewed and expanded to include the government of Somalia. Together, the team worked hard to ensure that the Sub-Committee's call for a review of the Ecolabelling Guidelines received adequate attention and was included in the COFI report. This included making statements during debate in the main assembly, as well as hosting a 'Speaker's Corner' side event where the issue was discussed in depth.

SFACT's next steps are to follow up to ensure a timely review is undertaken which should fully address and integrate the varied contexts of small-scale fisheries into the Ecolabelling Guidelines.



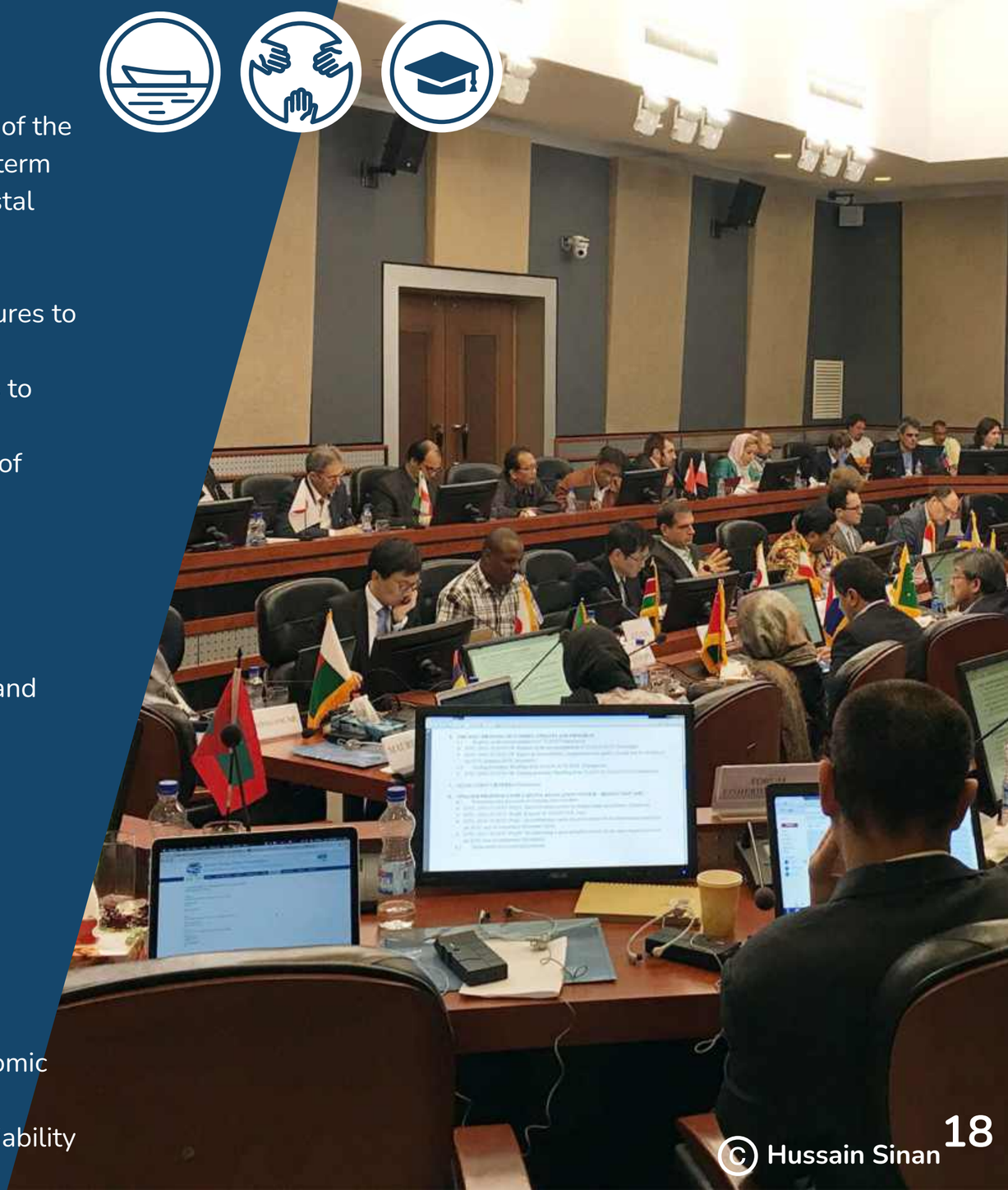
Coastal State Alliance & SFACT

The Sustainable Fisheries and Communities Trust is actively supporting the establishment of the Indian Ocean Coastal States Tuna Alliance (CSA), an initiative aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of tuna fisheries in the Indian Ocean and safeguarding the livelihoods of coastal communities.

Focus areas:

- Sustainable fisheries management: Advocating for science-based, precautionary measures to conserve tuna populations and ecosystems.
- Regional cooperation: Strengthening collaboration among Indian Ocean Coastal States to tackle shared challenges such as overfishing and bycatch reduction.
- Economic benefits: Enhancing market access, value addition and equitable distribution of profits to support coastal communities.
- Fisheries governance: Promoting transparent policies, data-driven decision making and regulatory enforcement.
- Research and data sharing: Facilitating cooperative research on tuna migration, stock assessments, and ecosystem changes.
- Capacity building: Supporting training programmes for scientific research, monitoring, and enforcement.
- Stakeholder engagement: Ensuring active participation of local fishing communities, indigenous groups, and small-scale fishers in policy decisions.
- Enforcement and compliance: Strengthening efforts to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.
- Climate adaptation: Addressing climate change impacts on tuna stocks and marine ecosystems.
- Funding and sustainability: Establishing a dedicated financial mechanism to support research, conservation and fisheries management projects.

SFACT remains committed to fostering international cooperation, ensuring equitable economic benefits, and advocating for sustainable fisheries management practices. Through its involvement in the CSA, it aims to amplify conservation efforts and secure the long-term viability of tuna fisheries for future generations.



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Human Rights At Sea International

Human Rights at Sea International (HRASI) has been working closely with SFACT since 2019, focusing on delivering international justice projects relating to protection of the health, safety and well-being of Fisheries Observers, as well as highlighting unacceptable abuse towards fishers.

The continuing international socialisation of the co-funded ‘Death at Sea’ film for which SFACT has been a core sponsor, has seen public showings in New York, London, Thailand, Indonesia and France. The campaign for justice for the family of the deceased Kiribati Fisheries Observer, Eritrara Aati Kaierua, continues.

Moving forward, Human Rights at Sea International will continue to work closely with SFACT around matters concerning investigations, assessments and involvement in coastal communities and small-scale fisheries.

“SFACT has been a long-term friend of the human rights at sea narrative, a core funder of the former HRAS charity, as well as a backer of work undertaken by the team at Human Rights at Sea International. In short, the global human rights narrative in the maritime environment has much to do with the generous philanthropic support from SFACT.”
David Hammond, Founder Human Rights at Sea, Executive Director Human Rights at Sea International.

© HRASI

Sustainable small-scale fisheries access to international seafood markets; Dr Cristina Pita and Mr Alexander Ford.

Portugal

Global seafood markets and large retail chains are becoming increasingly important for small-scale fisheries. Dr Cristina Pita and Mr Alexander Ford, linked to the Centre for Environmental and Marine Studies (CESAM) at the University of Aveiro in Portugal, are studying the barriers small-scale fisheries encounter when trying to access markets. They have investigated if multistakeholder improvement programmes, trusted intermediaries and sustainability labels are relevant and accessible to small-scale fisheries globally. The study explores elements such as market governance, infrastructure and information and communication technology, that impact how seafood markets are accessed.

Their research has now come to an end with the final report being completed at the end of 2024, awaiting publication.

The final draft report has showcased a range of market access challenges for small-scale fisheries: lack of actors connecting retail to small-scale fisheries, lack of consistency and quantity of production, logistics and infrastructural challenges, certification issues, and access to information.

The report provides thoughts on improving international market access for small-scale fisheries; value chain facilitators, dedicated small-scale fisheries marketplaces, certification for small-scale fisheries.

SFACT has co-funded this project with The Fishmongers Company.

© Ilya Nesolenyi

IOTC: Objection withdrawal Indonesia

Indonesia took a strategic step toward sustainable fisheries following the withdrawal of their objection to Resolution 21/01 on an Interim Plan for Rebuilding the Indian Ocean Yellowfin Tuna Stock in the IOTC Area of Competence. The decision was formally communicated through a letter from the Director General of Capture Fisheries (DGCF), Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF), to the Executive Director of IOTC, Dr Paul de Bruyn, on March 6th 2025.

The IOTC resolution which entered into force on 17 December 2021 has objectives to maintain stocks in perpetuity and with high probability, at levels not less than those capable of producing states' maximum sustainable yield as qualified by relevant environmental and economic factors including the special requirements of developing States in the IOTC area of competence.

The resolution initially received objection from six States including Indonesia, due to their concern on acceptance of their data by the IOTC discrepancies. Later, with the support of the IOTC Secretariat and facilitated by SFACT, Indonesia has undertaken a comprehensive review of the methodology and re-estimation of their data since 2021. SFACT played a significant role by providing support to MMAF, especially DGCF, in improving and restructuring Indonesia's data of tuna for IOTC.

These review and re-estimated processes have been thoroughly evaluated and subsequently endorsed by both the Working Party on Data Collection and Statistics and the Scientific Committee in 2024. Furthermore, Indonesia has now the re-estimated data set, which provides a robust scientific basis. This will significantly contribute to the formulation of reliable fisheries management measures for tuna resources in IOTC.

"This remarkable decision demonstrates Indonesia's strong commitment and spirit among the majority of IOTC state members to support the sustainability of tuna stock," said John Burton, the Chairman of SFACT.

Our Team

In 2024, SFACT was led by four Trustees, John Burton, Louise Nicholls, Momo Kochen and Editrudith Lukanga. Between them, the Trustees have more than 80 years of experience engaging with key stakeholders and Coastal States in the Indian Ocean. Their strong relationships with government and ministry officials place them in the perfect position to advocate for these Coastal States and use their vast network and expertise to improve livelihoods.

The Trustees are joined by the rest of the team who bring their statistical and scientific expertise to the table, and work to make SFACT's ambitions a reality.

Abbie Topping — Projects Coordinator
Ellie Matthew — Communications Coordinator
Beatrice Kinyua — Research Consultant
Maïa Perraudeau — Legal Consultant

Our Partners

© Quang Nguyen Vinh

Conclusion

In year 2 of our 5-Year Strategy we have continued to make excellent progress towards our first two strategic aims. Nineteen scholars are enrolled at leading universities, and SFACT has established four MoUs with educational institutions. We are looking forward to continuing this progress and keeping up momentum over the subsequent years.

We will be focusing our attention on the second two strategic aims from 2024 onwards, and expect that the positive impact for coastal communities via SFACT-funded projects will consistently increase as the years go by. We will also be searching for new areas where match funding can be secured, to maximise the overall impact of the great work being carried out by our grantees. We look forward to a brighter future for coastal communities and marine ecosystems in the Indian Ocean

John Burton

Funding 30 scholarships	MoUs with 10 universities	Securing match funding	Benefitting 50,000 people
67%	50%	6%	49%

Our progress towards our strategic aims

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