

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development (Life Below Water)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, first established in 2015, contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (originally eight Millennium Development Goals) in the hopes of building a global partnership to improve human lives and protect the environment. In recognition of modern challenges and solutions, global poverty became inextricably linked to health and education, economic growth, inequality, and the like. Of the 17 SDGs, Goal 14 takes into consideration Life Below Water, specifically targeting the conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. SDG 14 addresses plastic/marine pollution, ocean warming, eutrophication, acidification, and the topic of this briefing: overfishing. For context, 90% of the world's fishers are employed in small-scale fisheries who need greater support due to the pandemic and as such, overfishing effectively threatens livelihoods. When fisheries are run sustainably, they offer opportunities to reduce hunger and improve nutrition, alleviate poverty, generate economic growth and ensure better use of natural resources. Additionally, as the fastest-growing food sector with the potential to produce the fish, they require help to meet the demands of a growing population

Among national policies and targets under SDG 14 is 14.4: by 2020, the UN aims to effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices as well as implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield. Indicators of this goal include a proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels. Moreover, goal 14.6 aims to prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies that would contribute to overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of negotiations regarding this issue. Indicators of this goal include a degree of implementation of international mechanisms aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Goal 14.7 states that by 2030, there needs to be an increase in the economic benefits to Small Island developing States as well as least developed countries deriving from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, tourism and aquaculture. Indicators of this goal include sustainable fisheries as a proportion of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries. Goal 14.b aims to provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets, effectively initiating a growth in multiple sectors of the economy.

Indicators of this goal include a degree of application of a legal and institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries.

The historical evolution of SDG 14 involves the regional contribution to world fisheries and aquaculture production, concerning the following countries: China, Asia (excluding China), Americas, Europe, Africa, and Oceania. Aotearoa, under the umbrella of the Oceania continent, has the smallest contribution among every other continent, while the Americas ranks generally in the middle range, indicating a greater success of implementing SDG 14 in Aotearoa; the least developed countries (LDCs) have proven to be increasing their consumption by a much smaller percent compared to developed countries. The United States' engagement with SDG 14 must take into account a Western age of high mass consumption which encompasses marine resources such as fish; a characteristic of UN development decade of 1960s has been relying heavily on an evolutionary theory of human development, which unfortunately does not take into account the idea collective vs individual development, an idea that is lacking in some regions and abundant in others.

Aotearoa's employment of SDG 14 has involved engineering a more sustainable future for commercial fishing; rules of fishing practices discourage the catching of smaller fish in an aim to better protect marine biodiversity and regulate commercial fishing activity as unintended bycatch of smaller fish can have a large impact on the sustainable goals of fish stocks. Government projects have explored innovative ways to allow smaller fish to escape from the netting and New Zealand advisory panels have made recommendations on date-driven approaches to balanced fishing. Unlike the United States' engagement with the Sustainable Development Goals, Maori and indigenous people's knowledge and understanding of conservation biology and resource management have contributed greatly to the solutions in place. Primarily the Maori principle of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) in an environmental context has been applied to the challenges generated from overfishing. This type of cultural employment has proven beneficial as the weight of Maori political power and influence can empower sustainable developments such as marine resource conservation. Aotearoa is affected more greatly than the U.S. by unsustainable fishing practices as it is a remote island and as such, dependent on their fishing industry.

Source List

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