Developing Jurisdictional Initiatives for the Seafood Sector: Summary Guidelines

Acknowledgements

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This guidance document will be updated as additional information, knowledge, and implementation experience lead to learnings in the field.

Jurisdictional Initiatives for the Seafood Sector

Over the past 25 years, seafood certification, ratings, and improvement (CRI) efforts have been effective at bringing awareness to environmental and social issues in seafood production (i.e., wild-capture fisheries and aquaculture) and improving their sustainability performance in many parts of the world. While CRI approaches are impactful and critical to continue, their current framework of working with individual fisheries or farms is not designed to achieve the scale of improvement needed in global seafood production, nor do they effectively engage many of the world's small-scale fisheries and farms and local communities who may not be incentivized by export market demand or cannot afford the costs associated with certification. In addition, these market-focused interventions alone are proving insufficient to fully address critical systemic issues that can be barriers to long-term environmental sustainability and social responsibility, such as cumulative environmental impacts, labor rights, climate change impacts, and biodiversity loss, which often can only be achieved through policy changes. Therefore, there is an opportunity for new approaches that aim to address systemic barriers at scale while engaging seafood sector stakeholders broadly in improvement efforts, as complementary to CRI approaches.

Frameworks for jurisdictional initiatives (JIs) have been developed by the nongovernmental organization (NGO) community in recent years to drive improvements at scale for environmental challenges in terrestrial commodities such as soy, palm oil, and timber (often called jurisdictional approaches (JAs)). These initiatives have provided added value to credible certification efforts by addressing not only environmental but also additional social and economic barriers to sustainability at a jurisdictional level or within the boundaries of a management system. Noting the successes in applying JAs to terrestrial commodities, recent efforts have focused on evaluating the applicability of these approaches to seafood commodities.

The JI concept is still nascent for fisheries and aquaculture, and there is a need for greater clarity around the key elements of successful JIs for seafood. Guidance for practitioners or companies is also needed to clarify what makes these initiatives for fisheries and aquaculture impactful and credible, and how to measure progress. For JIs to become more mainstream, it is critical to define what a credible JI for seafood should encompass to help ensure the greatest impact on aquatic ecosystem health and human well-being. This guide aims to provide some clarity on the rationale and importance, the process and key elements, and the engagement of key stakeholders for the establishment of a robust seafood JI.

We define seafood JIs as place-based initiatives in key seafood commodity-producing regions that utilize policy and market-based approaches to drive holistic improvements in seafood production at relevant ecological and political scales (Kittinger et al. 2021, Figure 1). JIs aim to achieve positive environmental, social, and economic outcomes in seafood production, such as achieving environmentally sustainable harvesting practices, promoting equity and safe and decent working conditions, and enhancing the economic profitability of

those involved. Through the application of ecosystem-based management (EBM), JIs also seek to manage, restore, and/or protect critical habitats, threatened species, and biodiversity by addressing cumulative impacts, as well as to increase ecosystem and climate resilience. The success of JIs relies on a robust and inclusive multistakeholder dialogue and collaboration to align goals and incentives among government, market, and producer actors, and with local communities and Indigenous peoples (IPs).

Figure 1. Jurisdictional initiatives (JIs) simultaneously utilize governance reform and market-based approaches to drive holistic improvements in seafood production at a jurisdictional scale. By combining these approaches, JIs can deploy the considerable resources and innovation of the private sector and the regulatory authority of governments to drive seafood sustainability across entire production geographies.

These initiatives are designed to be long-term engagements that drive systemic changes at ecologically and politically relevant scales, and rely on long-term efforts such as policy reform, public-private partnerships, and trust-based community engagement. As such, JIs can be particularly effective at driving alignment and collective action by government, IPs, local communities, the private sector, and civil society groups toward a shared vision and agenda for seafood production across a seascape. Locally driven and locally defined through a multistakeholder forum, JIs provide an opportunity to improve inclusivity and democratize planning and management. This allows for engagement of smallholders who might not participate in certification due to cost and capacity constraints.

We recommend developing a JI if stakeholders desire to increase the resilience of the ecosystem or tackle more systemic social and environmental drivers rather than focusing solely on the sustainability of a single fishery, farm/group of related farms, or supply chain. This would mean tackling issues that are not often or not fully addressed in established CRI efforts, such as

ecosystem-level biodiversity, climate resilience, regional social issues (such as lack of decent work or equity), and industry/cross-industry cumulative impacts. Seafood JIs are complementary to CRI efforts and may occur before or after application of other mature and credible market-based tools, depending on political will and economic conditions. A JI could help address risks around the continued effectiveness of traditional CRI efforts, such as lack of government engagement at all levels.

Elements that help ensure success of a JI include setting the appropriate political and ecological scale, enabling legal frameworks, strong engagement and commitment from the government at relevant levels (e.g., national, regional, or local), strong commitment from other critical stakeholders (e.g., research institutions, local communities, producers, producer groups, and supply chain companies), a public reporting framework, traceability and transparency, and a viable pathway for financing the initiative (Figure 2).

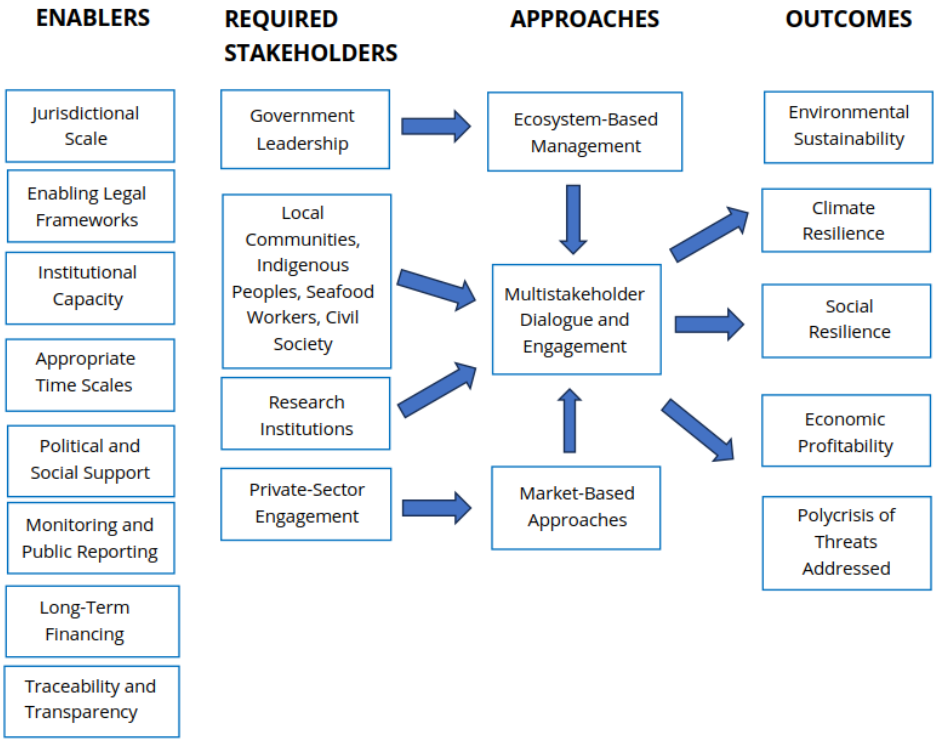

Figure 2. Elements of successful jurisdictional initiatives for seafood

JIs have the capacity to benefit many stakeholders throughout a region. Participation may benefit producers by addressing risk to their livelihoods (e.g., decline in fish populations and poor water quality), providing opportunity to organize into a more cohesive collective, promoting dialogue to resolve disputes and reach agreements regarding management of resources, helping ensure safe and decent work and community well-being, reducing reputational risks by demonstrating industry-wide progress in an ecosystem, obtaining equitable distribution of benefits, and obtaining a market incentive from suppliers and end buyers who are investing in these initiatives. The major benefits that these initiatives are meant to create for local communities and IPs are

platforms to engage and eventually secure improved socio-economic equity, continued dialogue with policy-makers and private actors (ensuring full and equitable participation and democratizing planning and management of resources), and potential access to financing through public-private partnerships. Governments can address risks from climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and unethical human rights and labor practices that threaten the long-term health of marine and aquatic resources, thereby increasing the stability of nationally important food products for domestic consumption or export. Governments can also meet their national and international commitments and increase their reputations as ones that manages their ocean and aquatic resources in ways that improve biodiversity, increase climate resilience, and protect the rights of fishers, farmers, and local communities. Similarly, suppliers and end-buyer partners can reduce potential local community risks, operation risks, and supply chain volatility. Participation in JIs can also help businesses deliver on their sustainability commitments, reduce leakage issues, and improve value-chain efficiency. When supported by robust monitoring and evaluation systems, JIs may also provide companies with a way to credibly claim positive impacts as part of larger-scale improvements.

All credible seafood JIs seeking to drive change need to have a strong monitoring framework in place, with metrics relevant to the jurisdiction that will enable stakeholders to assess progress against the initiative's targets and milestones. The most effective metrics will be tied directly to performance against environmental, social, and economic outcomes at the jurisdictional level. However, given that a JI can span 20 years, it is also recommended to include some pathway indicators that are not direct conservation outcomes but capture important initial steps believed to lead to measurable outcomes over time as well as process indicators that capture progress in JI development. The appropriate metrics for each specific initiative will depend on the local context but should tie to overall biodiversity, climate, social, and economic goals of the effort (e.g., fish stock biomass) and pathway goals focused on better management/policies and information to support effective implementation of those policies (e.g., precautionary management, effective enforcement).

There are a variety of claims that participants can utilize to communicate with internal and external stakeholders, including claims about process, objectives of the initiative, risk management, investment, actions being implemented, current performance status, and trends over time. To the extent possible, claims should have associated objective and measurable criteria so they can be verified. Stakeholders making claims should make the information publicly and easily accessible (e.g., on their website, in sustainability reports, or through public reporting by the JI itself). No single stakeholder group should make attribution claims (i.e., we are responsible for a specific performance outcome), as it is often difficult to show a direct cause-and-effect relationship, and it disregards the influence of others in achieving the outcomes. However, stakeholders can make claims about their specific contributions. It is important to note that seafood buyers and other stakeholders participating in a JI should not claim premature or augmented successes. These initiatives span a significant timeline, and associated claims should

appropriately reflect the improvement journey over time. In addition, claims made by seafood companies or by producers to obtain market access will require strong traceability systems in place to ensure the integrity of products across the supply chain and reduce the risk of greenwashing in some marketplaces.

All effective JIs will have a progress framework with impact outcomes and an action plan with time-bound targets and milestones, as well as a monitoring and reporting framework to monitor and report on processes followed (including processes to ensure inclusivity) and progress against the time-bound milestones and performance improvements within the jurisdiction. Effective JIs will also have adequate capacity to manage and analyze the data. ISEAL has developed best practice guidance for these frameworks that should be followed.

Credible seafood JIs must also have sound verification frameworks that can assess the validity of different aspects of the JI's progress. These include validation of structural outcomes, action claims, and performance claims. To drive credibility of JIs, it is important to manage the expectations of stakeholders about their inability to make *performance/outcome* claims for quite some time, given the long timeframe of JIs. Stakeholders will need to focus first on *structural claims*, which highlight the progress in establishing the structures and systems for an effective JI, and *action claims*, which relate directly to actions companies may take to support development and progress in a JI. Different levels of verification are required for each type of claim due to the nature of the respective claims. Verification of the performance data and of the monitoring process helps build trust in the quality and reliability of the claim. The degree and level of independence of verification needed will depend on the claims being made, the track record of the JI, the level of transparency of the data, and the trustworthiness of the data providers. ISEAL has also developed guidance for verification that should be followed.

Learnings from relatively early-stage JIs (primarily terrestrial) show the following:

- Geographic boundaries need to align with the scope of environmental degradation and decision-making authority, capacity, and local frameworks.
- A coordinating backbone organization is necessary.
- A strong common vision and multiple, balanced objectives matter.
- Strong community engagement and stakeholder participation are critical.
- Meaningful engagement with Indigenous populations and local communities is key.
- Government engagement is a key driver.
- Private-sector actors are crucial for success.
- Strong partnerships with producer cooperatives or associations can boost success.
- Robust, transparent, and collaborative multistakeholder development processes and decision-making platforms are needed.
- Technical partners are needed to support blended finance.
- Transparency and traceability are crucial for verification of market claims.

Conclusion

As governments, seafood companies, and civil society organizations around the world seek opportunities to improve seafood production systems and commit to place-based ecosystem approaches, opportunities for seafood JIs are greater than ever. Initiatives that tackle systemic barriers to sustainable production are an important tool for working toward a future where ocean ecosystems can continue to support the people and businesses who depend on them. By bringing stakeholders together (such as IPs and local communities, government representatives, civil society organizations, and seafood supply chain companies) to implement and support these initiatives, we can deliver significant conservation outcomes by addressing environmental, social, and economic barriers to environmental sustainability and social responsibility at relevant political and ecological scales. We hope this guide will help you join these efforts.