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Re: Ratification of the Cape Town Agreement for the Safety of Fishing Vessels

Honourable Minister,

Fishers have been waiting for 45 years for an international treaty protecting their lives at sea to enter into force. Only 4 months are left to meet the deadline set by countries in the Torremolinos Declaration signed in 2019.

Adopted by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) in 2012, the **Cape Town Agreement for the Safety of Fishing Vessels** aims to make every commercial fishing vessel a safe workplace from stem to stern. It sets safety standards for construction and related seaworthiness, heating, ventilation of machinery spaces, fire-safety regulations, survival crafts, emergency procedures and radiocommunications. The Cape Town Agreement mostly applies to new fishing vessels of 24m in length and over, capable of operating on the high seas.

If the protection of seafarers' safety at sea has been identified as an international priority since 1914 (two years after the *Titanic* disaster) with the adoption of the first Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea, no similar text is protecting the safety of fishers. The 2012 Cape Town Agreement is the third attempt in this respect, following the two failed attempts of the 1977 and 1993 treaties which never entered into force.

In order to boost the ratification of the Agreement, the IMO organised a Conference on Fishing Vessel Safety and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing in October 2019 in Torremolinos, Spain, the largest United Nations event ever organised on fisher safety. 51 States decided to sign the Torremolinos Declaration to express their commitment to ratify the Cape Town Agreement by the target date of October 2022, which will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its adoption by the IMO. In February 2022, 6 States, including Kenya, committed to ratify the Agreement at the One Ocean Summit held in Brest, France. Only a month later, Kenya realised its commitment and became a Party to the Agreement.

22 States at a minimum must ratify the Cape Town Agreement to ensure its entry into force. States also have to declare their fleet of fishing vessels of 24m in length and over when ratifying, which has in total to amount to - when combining all figures declared by every States – a number of at least 3,600 fishing vessels. To date, 17 States have ratified and declared a combined fleet of 1,925 fishing vessels.

The Cape Town Agreement is one of the three international treaties which aim to tackle IUU fishing and poor labour standards, together with the FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA), and the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (C.188). Whereas C.188 and PSMA are already in force, the Cape Town Agreement is the missing link which could strengthen international law, since catch control, decent working conditions and safe vessels are three complementary and indivisible conditions to end illegal fishing activities. The SEA Alliance is also calling on States to ratify and implement ILO C.188 and FAO PSMA where they have not done so already.

Consumers themselves are supporting sustainable seafood more than ever, with authoritative market research indicating that consumers around the world are demanding higher levels of environmental sustainability and

social responsibility. The entry into force of the Cape Town Agreement would therefore provide a direct answer to consumers' expectations by helping to assure them that fishers' lives are not put at risk on unsafe vessels when going to sea.

The IMO Secretary-General recently urged States to take action to bring into force the Cape Town Agreement, emphasising that “we cannot afford to be complacent when it comes to addressing the safety of fishers and fishing vessels”.<sup>1</sup> Today, as the deadline set out in the Torremolinos Declaration fast approaches with only 4 months to go to the target date, we call on you to make fisher safety a priority and ratify the Cape Town Agreement by October 2022, as the international community cannot fail for a third time in history to protect fishers' lives at sea.

We thank you in advance for keeping us updated on your progress towards ratification and remain at your disposal to discuss this matter further if that would be of interest.

Yours Sincerely



Andy Hickman  
Head of SEA Alliance  
On behalf of SEA Alliance member companies

**Information about the Seafood Ethics Action Alliance:**

*The Seafood Ethics Action (SEA) Alliance was established by retailers and seafood businesses to address human rights risks in global seafood supply chains. We are seeking to accelerate improvements in human rights and labour standards by implementing effective supply chain due diligence, advocating for improved regulation and enforcement, and sharing responsibility for changes that are needed throughout the supply chain. Our participating companies are responsible for more than 70% of UK retail seafood sales, and have global operations and supply chains.*

*The logos of our participating companies are listed below:*



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/pages/CTARatificationUrged.aspx>