



2025 FIP Review Funders Memo

As we share the 2025 FIP Review, we would like to reflect on the evolution of FIPs, celebrate their measurable contributions to the sustainable seafood movement, and pose questions as we move forward.

Fishery Improvement Projects (FIPs) were born in the early 2000s in response to very real threats to collapsing fisheries and demand for sustainable product outstripping supply in the early days of sustainability commitments from the seafood industry. FIPs began as focused interventions predominantly in large, industrial fisheries (e.g., whitefish, salmon). Over the last two decades there has been significant growth in this field, resulting in more than 300 FIPs across all types of fisheries and in more than 60 countries. Few other marine conservation interventions have scaled to this same extent. The constituency of the FIP movement has also grown over that same timeframe. We have many types of organizations implementing FIPs—ranging from international and local NGOs to for-profit consultancies, government agencies, and industry leaders. There are also strong Communities of Practice in two regions of the Global South learning from each other's experiences and further iterating the model. We have seen the emergence of digital infrastructure to support transparency and reporting. And finally, industry appears to be paying for an increasingly greater share of FIP costs, which has likely allowed the FIP landscape to maintain progress despite reduced philanthropic funding.

This third global FIP review continues to highlight demonstrated impacts over a 10-year time horizon. FIPs are recognized as an effective tool for increasing coordination to support more effective fisheries practice and management. From providing a structured pathway to increase government engagement (Indonesia, Costa Rica), providing centralized information management (Peru, US), and supporting greater inclusion of fisher knowledge and perspectives in fisheries management processes (China, Indonesia, Mexico), FIPs provide a platform for participants to discuss priorities and engage in activities in an organized fashion. FIPs may also help generate or uncover new data that provides better insight into stock status and ecosystem health. FIPs help identify the specific data gaps and then fill those gaps by providing a framework to hone data collection needs. The quality of data is also often improved through the FIP process, as a result of greater engagement from industry, academic, and other experts. In multiple cases, FIPs – through the convening platform they create – also improved trust in the data, as there is greater understanding

and transparency around who collects what information. Finally, FIPs generate important and useful social data that provides better insight into the working conditions of the fishery, including performance against metrics associated with the Human Rights and Social Responsibility Policy (HRSRP). Seventy-six percent of all FIPs have published a social policy statement, 92% report their vessel lists, and 75% have demonstrated that a grievance mechanism is available to all fishers.

Despite – and in some cases because of – these signals of success, the FIP landscape continues to shift, resulting in new challenges and open questions about how the field should evolve moving forward. A decade ago, comprehensive FIPs were the gold standard for fisheries seeking to reach certification; more recently, alternative approaches aim to take on that role. Certification rates among FIPs have been low, with just 10% of all FIPs achieving certification. Since 2020, 11 of the 14 FIPs that achieved MSC-certification were for tuna fisheries, suggesting that the FIP-to-certification model may only be effective in certain contexts. Many comprehensive FIPs no longer seek certification as an end goal. This, in addition to the high percentage of FIPs certified with conditions, has prompted the community to explore alternative models. Some of these alternatives share characteristics with the FIP model and use analogous structures to drive improvement (“FIP-adjacent models”). Others differ significantly from FIPs as they operate at larger scales and require more time (“place-based alternatives”).

FIPs today are also seeking additional or even alternative end goals as they work toward sustainability. Up until about 2015, FIPs – many of which were associated with industrial salmon or whitefish fisheries – were solely focused on attaining maximum sustainable yield (MSY) of a single target stock. The incentives and standards associated with certification and ratings processes provided a pathway to more lucrative Western markets. In the intervening decade, FIPs have evolved their end goals to focus on fisheries as part of a broader socio-ecological system, in which other factors such as human rights, climate resilience, and marine ecosystem protections matter.



Although FIPs might be fit for purpose for some end goals, the 2025 FIP Review highlights the limitations of the model in addressing human and labor rights concerns. While the FisheryProgress Human Rights and Social Responsibility Policy (HRSRP) provides a framework through which FIPs can detect human rights risks, current FIP practitioners lack the necessary expertise to develop social work plans that address human rights concerns. The HRSRP adds additional expenses and capacity demands that pose further challenges for implementers working towards compliance. The 2025 FIP Review finds that just one-third of all FIPs required to report their social work plans have done so. A growing body of evidence suggests that a voluntary improvement model is inappropriate to advance mandatory human rights obligations, as FIPs cannot demonstrate improvements against human rights laws – “they are either compliant or they’re not.” As a result, FIPs can – and have been – used to “fair wash” serious issues of labor exploitation and human rights issues, as seen with the UK Nephrops FIP and Indonesia tuna FIPs highlighted in the 2025 Greenpeace report.

Given the challenges surfaced in this 2025 FIP review, we wanted to highlight a few of our key questions as we consider the future of this work:

1) What are the implications, if any, for FIPs to shift toward a continuous improvement approach as opposed to a linear approach with a clear off-ramp?

The patterns of FIP progress ratings suggest that FIPs achieve regular improvements over their lifespan, with varying degrees of frequency. FIPs frequently flip between grades A and C for years before going inactive. FIPs appear to be undergoing infrequent, but regular, improvements over long periods of time without ever achieving a final goal or off-ramp. This trend lends credence to the notion that FIPs may be using a continuous improvement approach, rather than a linear progression toward completion.

2) As FIPs have broadened their focus and geographic footprint, what is driving this expansion?

Are the shifts responsive to seafood markets’ evolving expectations or a reflection of the wider scope of issues that FIPs are aiming to engage? FIPs are in more countries, span more fisheries types/commodities, and seeking a greater diversity of objectives than ever before. Understanding why and who is driving the growth in FIPs (and where they are truly best suited as an intervention) will be important to reduce unintended consequences and best direct resources.

3) Given that FIPs are not designed to address human and labor rights issues, what discussions does the field need to have about the boundaries for inclusion of equity issues in FIPs and the complementarity of FIPs with other interventions?

CEA observed several social inequities in FIPs, from fishers who are unaware of being part of a FIP, to numerous first-mile participants noting that they did not feel the distribution of costs and benefits was fair. Nevertheless, initiatives by FIP implementers (e.g., SmartFish, ABALOB, Blue Ventures, CI) and other stakeholders such as Fair Trade, demonstrate the potential of intentionally designed FIPs to strengthen fisher livelihoods and deliver tangible returns to fishing communities.

4) In looking at the infrastructure that surrounds and amplifies the impact of FIPs, what adaptation is possible and what are the risks if certain elements fall away?

What is needed to ensure next generation platforms can maintain the gains achieved and address the weaknesses with current infrastructure? How can the FIP field sustain and strengthen the shared infrastructure that underpins transparency, learning, and implementation, while closing the most important gaps in accountability and impact measurement?

The 2025 Review offers a useful moment not just to reflect, but to move forward with purpose. FIPs have helped create real momentum for fisheries improvement around the world, and the field now has stronger institutions, more local leadership, and better tools than it did a decade ago. The task ahead is to build on that foundation thoughtfully by sustaining successful work, addressing gaps, and supporting a more durable ecosystem of approaches that can meet the challenges ahead.