Sustainable Fisheries PARTNERSHIP

Lessons learned from the implementation of three mahi-mahi fishery improvement projects (FIPs) in Latin America

April 2026

Why this briefing matters for industry

Mahi-mahi is one of the most commercially important pelagic species in the world, and the Southeast Pacific is at the heart of its global supply. Ecuador and Peru alone account for nearly two-thirds of the worldwide wild catch of mahi-mahi (FAO, 2025). If your company sources mahi-mahi – whether for retail, food service, or distribution – there is a high probability that it originates from one of these fisheries.

That matters for two reasons:

These fisheries face real sustainability challenges: declining target stocks; high levels of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and governance gaps that affect the long-term reliability of supply. These are not abstract environmental concerns – they are supply-continuity risks.

The way these fisheries improve, or fail to improve, is partly a function of decisions made by seafood companies. Market signals from buyers, sourcing commitments, and procurement policies are among the most powerful drivers of change available. The fisheries covered in this brief were created, in large part, because companies like yours sent a signal that sustainability matters.

This briefing is designed for seafood buyers, sourcing managers, sustainability leads, and supply-chain executives who want to understand what makes a fishery improvement project (FIP) more or less likely to succeed in Latin American and other Global South contexts – and what role their company can play. It draws on interviews with 31 stakeholders across three mahi-mahi FIPs in Ecuador, Peru, and Costa Rica, conducted between November 2025 and February 2026, combined with a review of existing literature on FIP performance globally.

This is not a technical or scientific report. It is a practical guide to help companies make better decisions about when and how to engage with FIPs as part of their sourcing strategy.

The four key things you will find in this briefing:

1. What conditions need to be in place for a mahi-mahi FIP to get off the ground
2. What factors drive success once a FIP is underway
3. Why FIPs stall or underperform, and what warning signs to look for
4. What seafood companies can do differently to increase the likelihood of success.

What we looked at

This briefing is based on a study of three mahi-mahi fishery improvement projects (FIPs) operating in Latin America: one each in Ecuador, Peru, and Costa Rica. Together, these three cases represent a range of starting conditions, governance contexts, and levels of maturity – from a FIP launched in 2013 to one that began in 2021 – making them a useful basis for identifying patterns and lessons that are relevant across different situations.

To gather evidence, we combined two sources of information. First, we reviewed existing research and documentation on FIP performance globally, with a particular focus on lessons learned from FIPs implemented in Global South contexts. Second, between November 2025 and February 2026, we conducted interviews with 31 stakeholders directly involved in or familiar with these three FIPs. Interviewees included representatives from the fishing industry, governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and academia. Interviews were designed to capture perceptions of what worked, what did not, and why – covering motivations, barriers, success factors, and shortcomings.

One important note on the data: because the three FIPs differ in size, age, and number of active participants, the percentages cited throughout this brief reflect the distribution of responses across all interviews combined, not a statistically representative sample of each fishery individually. They should be read as directional evidence – a reliable indication of which factors matter most – rather than as precise measurements. Where findings are specific to one country or FIP, this is noted explicitly.

The three mahi-mahi FIPs covered in this brief

The three FIPs covered in this brief operate in different countries, under different governance conditions, and at different stages of maturity. Understanding these differences is important: a FIP that has been running for over a decade offers different lessons than one that is just finding its footing. The table below summarizes the key facts about each FIP, followed by a brief profile of what makes each case relevant for industry.

At a glance

	Ecuador (ASOAMAN)	Costa Rica	Peru (WWF)
FIP lead	ASOAMAN	Federación Nacional de Cámaras de la Industria Palangrera, Artesanal y Afines	WWF Peru / Peru Mahi Alliance
Start date	October 2021	April 2019	November 2013
Gear type	Longline	Longline, pole (green stick)	Longline
FIP stage	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 4
More information	FisheryProgress	FisheryProgress	FisheryProgress

What does the FIP Stage mean for your sourcing decisions?

FIP Stages are a standardized way of tracking how far along a fishery is in its improvement journey, as reported on FisheryProgress.org. For a seafood buyer, they offer a quick signal of where a fishery sits on the risk-to-progress spectrum:

Stage 3, FIP Implementation, means the FIP has a workplan and commitments in place, and implementation is underway. Improvements are being pursued but have not yet been independently verified. This represents a credible commitment, but progress should be actively monitored.

Stage 4, Improvements in Fishing Practices or Fishery Management, means that verified, measurable improvements in fishing practices or management have already been achieved. This represents a lower sourcing risk and a stronger basis for procurement commitments. Ecuador's ASOAMAN FIP (Stage 3) is the youngest of the three, having launched in 2021. Peru's and Costa Rica's FIPs (both Stage 4) have been operating for longer and have achieved documented improvements. This does not mean Ecuador is a weaker investment – early-stage FIPs often represent the greatest opportunity for buyer engagement to make a difference – but it does mean that the level of verification and demonstrated progress differs.

Ecuador - ASOAMAN FIP

(since 2021)

Ecuador is one of the world's largest exporters of mahi-mahi and a critical origin for many global supply chains. The ASOAMAN FIP is led by a fishing industry association based in Manta, one of the country's main fishing ports, and focuses on the longline fleet. As the most recently launched of the three FIPs, it is still in the implementation phase, working to address stock management deficiencies and IUU fishing challenges. Ecuador's context also includes governance complexities, including limitations in state capacity and enforcement, that make industry engagement particularly important as a driver of change.

Costa Rica - Large Pelagics FIP

(since 2019)

Costa Rica's FIP covers a broader set of target species beyond mahi-mahi, including swordfish and yellowfin tuna, using both longline and green stick (pole) gear. Led by the National Federation of Longline Fishing Industry Associations, it has reached Stage 4, meaning verified improvements in fishing practices or management are already documented. Costa Rica's relatively stronger institutional framework compared to other countries in the region has contributed to this progress, offering useful lessons about the enabling role of governance.

Peru - Mahi Alliance FIP

(since 2013)

Peru's FIP is the oldest and most mature of the three, having operated for over 12 years under the leadership of WWF Peru and the Peru Mahi Alliance. Its Stage 4 status reflects a long track record of stakeholder engagement, technical support, and documented improvements. Peru is also one of the world's leading mahi-mahi producing nations, making this FIP particularly significant for global supply chains. Its longevity makes it the richest source of lessons about what sustains a FIP over time – and what challenges persist even in well-established improvement processes.

Why these three cases together?

No two fisheries are identical, and the lessons from one context do not automatically transfer to another. But taken together, these three FIPs – spanning 12 years, three different national governance environments, and two different stages of FIP maturity – offer a uniquely practical basis for understanding what drives and what limits FIP performance in Latin America. The sections that follow draw on all three cases to identify patterns that are relevant for any company sourcing mahi-mahi from the region, or considering engagement with a FIP in a Global South context.

What helps a FIP get started

Starting a FIP is harder than it looks. Even when the motivation is clear and the need is evident, turning that intent into an operational improvement project requires overcoming a set of predictable barriers. Understanding what drives FIP creation - and what gets in the way - is essential for any company that wants to engage effectively from the outset.

What motivates FIP creation

Across the three mahi-mahi FIPs studied, the primary drivers of FIP creation were market access and certification, cited equally in 72.4% of responses. In practical terms, this means that the fishing industry in Ecuador, Peru, and Costa Rica did not create these FIPs primarily out of environmental concern – they created them because their buyers and markets required it, or because they saw certification as a pathway to better prices and more stable commercial relationships.

This is an important finding for industry. It confirms that buyer signals work. When seafood companies incorporate FIP participation or sustainability commitments into their procurement criteria, they create a direct incentive for fishing industries to organize, invest, and improve. The reverse is also true: where buyer demand for sustainability is absent or inconsistent, the motivation to sustain a FIP weakens.

Beyond market access, other significant motivating factors included the decline of target fish stocks and the resolution of critical management deficiencies, such as the need to address IUU fishing – both of which represent supply-continuity risks that responsible buyers should already be tracking. These factors suggest that FIPs in this region are not just responding to market pressure, but also to genuine ecological urgency that, if unaddressed, will affect the long-term availability of mahi-mahi from these origins.

What gets in the way at the start

Despite clear motivations, the early stages of a FIP are consistently the most fragile. The interviews identified four barriers that most frequently affect FIP inception:

1

Lack of funding

This was the single most commonly cited barrier. Starting a FIP requires resources for technical assessments, stakeholder coordination, workplan development, and early monitoring activities. In Global South contexts, where fishing industries are often composed of small and medium-sized operators with limited capital, this funding gap is rarely filled by the industry alone. Without an external source of financial support – whether from buyers, NGOs, development finance, or government – many FIPs struggle to move beyond the planning stage.

What this means for buyers: Companies that source from a fishery but do not contribute financially to its FIP are effectively transferring the cost and risk of improvement to their suppliers. Co-financing a FIP – even partially – is one of the highest-leverage actions a buyer can take to increase the probability of success.

2

Lack of government support

This was the second most frequently cited barrier. FIPs operate within regulatory and management frameworks set by governments. Where national fisheries authorities are absent, under-resourced, or disengaged, FIPs face a structural ceiling: they can improve practices within the supply chain, but they cannot substitute for the management decisions that only governments can make. In Latin American mahi-mahi fisheries, limited state capacity and inconsistent political will were recurring themes across all three cases.

What this means for buyers: Before committing to a FIP, assess whether there is a minimum level of government engagement – not necessarily leadership, but at least recognition and willingness to participate. A FIP operating in complete isolation from government is unlikely to achieve the management-level changes needed for long-term sustainability.

3

Insufficient number of FIP participants

FIPs depend on collective action. A FIP that covers only a small fraction of the active fleet or supply chain has limited ability to drive systemic change and may struggle to generate the data, compliance, and market signals needed to influence government policy. In the early stages, recruiting a critical mass of participants – across the fishing, processing, and trading sectors – is essential to establish credibility and momentum.

What this means for buyers: Ask your suppliers whether their FIP covers a representative share of the fishery. A FIP with very low industry coverage is a warning sign – not necessarily a reason to disengage, but a reason to ask harder questions about the plan to expand participation.

4

Lack of knowledge about how to initiate a FIP

A significant number of respondents identified unfamiliarity with FIP processes as a barrier, particularly in contexts where FIPs are a relatively new tool. This knowledge gap affects both fishing industry actors, who may not know what a credible FIP looks like, and government officials, who may not understand how FIPs relate to their own management responsibilities.

What this means for buyers: Companies with experience in FIPs in other origins can add real value by sharing knowledge, connecting local actors with technical facilitators, and helping to set realistic expectations about timelines and process. This is a low-cost form of engagement that can significantly accelerate the early stages of a FIP.

A practical checklist for evaluating a FIP at inception

Before committing to support or source from a FIP in its early stages, consider the following:

- Is there a clear and documented motivation for the FIP, shared by the main industry actors?
- Is there a funding plan that covers at least the first 24 months of operation?
- Is there a minimum level of government recognition or engagement – even if not full leadership?
- Does the FIP cover a meaningful share of the active fishery, or is there a credible plan to expand coverage?
- Is there a technical facilitator with relevant experience in this fishery or region?
- Are the key elements in place: multi-stakeholder participation, public commitment, clear objectives, a workplan, and a reporting mechanism?

If the answer to three or more of these questions is “no” or “unclear,” the FIP may need additional support before it is ready for formal procurement commitments – but that does not mean disengagement is the right response. It may mean that your company’s involvement at this stage could be the difference between a FIP that takes hold and one that does not.

What helps a FIP succeed over time

Getting a FIP started is one challenge. Keeping it on track through changes in government, market fluctuations, funding gaps, and the inevitable friction of multi-stakeholder processes, is another. The interviews conducted for this brief identified a consistent set of factors that distinguish FIPs that make sustained progress from those that plateau or lose momentum. None of them are surprising in isolation, but together they point to a clear model of what durable FIP success looks like in practice.

The three factors that matter most

Dedicated technical support

1

The single most important factor cited across all three FIPs was the availability of dedicated technical expertise. This means having individuals or organizations with deep knowledge of the specific fishery – its biology, its governance context, its supply chain dynamics – who are actively engaged in supporting the FIP on an ongoing basis. Technical support is not a one-time input at the design stage; it is a continuous function that includes data collection, stakeholder facilitation, workplan adaptation, and interface with government processes.

In Global South contexts, where local technical capacity is often limited and institutional knowledge is fragmented, this function is particularly critical. FIPs that had access to consistent, high-quality technical support were better able to navigate setbacks, adapt their workplans to changing conditions, and maintain credibility with both government and market actors.

What this means for buyers: When evaluating a FIP, ask not just whether a technical facilitator exists, but whether they have the capacity, continuity, and fishery-specific knowledge to sustain that role over time. A FIP with strong administrative coordination but weak technical depth is at higher risk of stalling when difficult decisions need to be made.

Stakeholder commitment

2

The second most important factor cited was the depth and breadth of commitment from the key actors involved in the FIP. This goes beyond signing a Memorandum of Understanding or appearing on a participant list. Genuine commitment means that fishing industry associations, processors, exporters, government officials, and NGO partners are actively investing time, resources, and institutional capital in the FIP's success – and that this investment is sustained even when progress is slow or conditions are difficult.

Across the three cases, FIPs that maintained strong stakeholder commitment shared a common characteristic: participants had a clear and tangible stake in the outcome. Whether that stake was market access, certification progress, regulatory compliance, or reputational benefit, the presence of a concrete incentive kept actors engaged through the inevitable difficult periods.

What this means for buyers: Your company's ongoing engagement – not just at the point of sourcing decisions, but through participation in FIP governance, attendance at stakeholder meetings, and public acknowledgment of FIP progress – is itself a form of stakeholder commitment that strengthens the FIP. Buyers who disengage after an initial sourcing commitment remove one of the most powerful incentives for continued industry participation.

Coordination and communication among stakeholders

3

The third most frequently cited success factor was the quality of coordination and communication among FIP participants. Multi-stakeholder processes are inherently complex, and in fisheries contexts they often bring together actors with different interests, different levels of technical knowledge, and different relationships with government. FIPs that invested in structured communication – regular meetings, clear reporting lines, shared information systems, and transparent decision making – were better able to maintain alignment and resolve conflicts before they became obstacles.

This factor is closely linked to the role of the technical facilitator: in practice, the coordination function and the technical function are often performed by the same organization, and the quality of both depends on the same underlying capacity.

What this means for buyers: Look for evidence of active coordination in a FIP's public reporting. Are progress reports published regularly on FisheryProgress? Do they reflect input from multiple stakeholder groups, or do they read as a single organization's account? Consistent, multi-voice reporting is a reliable signal of genuine coordination.

Two factors that matter less than expected

Two factors that might intuitively seem important for FIP success were cited less frequently than the operational factors above: political will and market influence.

This does not mean these factors are irrelevant – both appeared in the data and both matter in specific contexts. But it does suggest that, at least in these three Latin American mahi-mahi FIPs, operational and organizational excellence – having the right technical support, the right stakeholder commitment, and the right coordination mechanisms – was more predictive of success than the broader external environment.

For buyers, this is an encouraging finding: it means that FIP success is not entirely dependent on factors outside your control, such as government priorities or global market conditions. The factors that matter most are ones that engaged supply-chain actors can directly influence.

What sustained success looks like in practice

Across the three FIPs, the clearest pattern of sustained success emerged where three conditions reinforced each other over time:

> A technically capable facilitator who maintained continuity and adapted the workplan as conditions changed

> A core group of committed stakeholders with a tangible stake in the outcome and the organizational capacity to act collectively

> A structured coordination process that kept actors aligned, managed conflict, and maintained transparency with both government and market actors.

Where these three elements were present simultaneously, FIPs demonstrated the ability to absorb external shocks, including regulatory changes, market disruptions, and political transitions, without losing momentum. Where one or more were absent, even well-designed FIPs struggled to maintain progress.

A practical checklist for monitoring a FIP you already support

If your company is already sourcing from or supporting a FIP, use these questions to assess whether it has the conditions for sustained success:

- Is there a dedicated technical facilitator with continuity, not just a project coordinator?
- Are the key industry, government, and NGO stakeholders actively participating, or has engagement become nominal?
- Are progress reports published every six months on FisheryProgress, and do they reflect genuine multi-stakeholder input?
- Has the FIP workplan been updated in the last 12 months to reflect current conditions?
- Can your suppliers articulate what specific improvements have been achieved, and what the next milestones are?
- Does your own company's engagement go beyond the sourcing decision to include participation in governance, public acknowledgment of progress, and/or co-investment in specific workplan activities?

If the answer to two or more of these questions is "no" or "unclear," it may be worth requesting a direct conversation with the FIP lead or technical facilitator to understand whether the FIP has the conditions it needs to continue making progress.

Why FIPs stall or underperform

Not all FIPs deliver on their promise. Some plateau after initial progress. Others lose momentum when funding runs out or key actors disengage. A few never move beyond the planning stage. Understanding why FIPs stall or underperform is as important as understanding what makes them succeed, particularly for buyers who need to make informed decisions about where to invest their leverage and which sourcing commitments are realistic over what timeframe.

The interviews conducted for this brief identified a consistent set of factors that contribute to FIP underperformance across the three Latin American mahi-mahi cases. Some of these are structural, rooted in governance conditions that are difficult to change quickly. Others are operational and therefore more directly addressable by engaged supply-chain actors.

The three main reasons FIPs stall

Lack of funding

1

The most frequently cited factor contributing to FIP shortcomings was, again, the lack of financial resources – this time not just at inception, but as a sustained constraint throughout implementation. FIPs in Global South contexts face a chronic funding gap: the fishing industries involved are often composed of small and medium-sized operators with limited capacity to self-finance improvement activities, while external funding from NGOs, development finance institutions, or government programs is inconsistent and often short-term.

When funding runs out, the consequences are predictable: technical facilitators reduce their engagement, data collection activities are suspended, stakeholder meetings become less frequent, and the FIP loses the operational momentum it needs to maintain credibility with both government and market actors. In the worst cases, a FIP that appeared to be progressing can effectively become dormant while still appearing active on FisheryProgress.

What this means for buyers: A FIP's public profile on FisheryProgress does not always reflect its operational reality. Look beyond the Stage designation and check the date of the most recent progress report, the specificity of the activities reported, and whether the workplan has been updated recently. A FIP that has not published a substantive update in over six months may be experiencing funding or engagement difficulties that are not yet visible in its public profile.

Lack of political will

2

The second most frequently cited factor was the absence or inconsistency of political will at the government level. This manifests in different ways across the three cases: In some contexts, fisheries management agencies lack the resources or mandate to engage meaningfully with FIP processes. In others, political transitions bring changes in priorities that disrupt ongoing improvement efforts. In others still, the regulatory framework itself creates barriers to the management changes that a FIP's workplan requires.

This is one of the most structurally challenging factors for supply-chain actors to address directly. Buyers cannot substitute for government, and FIPs cannot create political will where it does not exist. However, coordinated market signals – particularly from multiple buyers acting collectively rather than individually – can elevate the visibility of a fishery's sustainability status and create external pressure that influences government priorities over time.

What this means for buyers: Where political will is identified as a barrier, consider whether your company's engagement could be part of a coordinated industry response rather than an isolated sourcing decision. Collective buyer action – through industry platforms, pre-competitive sustainability coalitions, or joint communications to government – is significantly more effective than individual company pressure in influencing public policy.

Weak governance

3

Closely related to political will, but distinct from it, weak governance refers to the structural limitations of the fisheries management system itself: inadequate data collection, limited enforcement capacity, unclear or overlapping jurisdictions, and the absence of the legal and institutional frameworks needed to translate FIP commitments into binding management changes. In Latin American mahi-mahi fisheries, weak governance was a recurring theme across all three cases, manifesting in different forms depending on the national context.

Weak governance creates a ceiling for FIP ambition. A FIP can improve practices within the supply chain – traceability, documentation, handling standards, bycatch reduction – but it cannot substitute for the stock assessments, harvest control rules, and enforcement mechanisms that only a functioning government management system can provide. Where governance is weak, FIPs tend to make progress on the supply-chain dimensions of sustainability while struggling to achieve the management-level changes needed for long-term stock health.

What this means for buyers: In weak governance contexts, set realistic expectations about the pace and scope of FIP progress. A FIP operating in a challenging governance environment that is making consistent incremental progress on supply-chain improvements is more valuable than its Stage designation alone might suggest. Conversely, a FIP in a stronger governance context that is not making progress despite favorable conditions warrants closer scrutiny.

Less frequently cited but worth noting

Two additional factors appeared in the data less frequently but are worth flagging for buyers evaluating specific FIPs:

Stakeholder group challenges, including conflicts of interest between different supply-chain actors, difficulties in maintaining participation across a fragmented fishing sector, and tensions between short-term commercial interests and long-term sustainability goals. These are particularly relevant in fisheries with a large number of small-scale operators, where collective action problems are more acute.

Inadequate FIP leadership, which was identified as the least frequently cited factor, but potentially the most consequential when it does occur. A FIP led by an organization without the credibility, technical capacity, or stakeholder relationships needed to drive the process is unlikely to overcome the other barriers identified above, regardless of how favorable the external conditions are.

The compounding effect: when multiple factors align

The most significant risk is not any single factor in isolation, but the compounding effect when multiple barriers are present simultaneously. A FIP facing funding constraints, weak government engagement, and leadership challenges at the same time is in a qualitatively different situation from one facing only one of these issues. In the cases studied, the FIPs that struggled most were those where structural governance weaknesses were compounded by operational gaps, particularly the absence of sustained technical support and inconsistent stakeholder commitment.

For buyers, this means that risk assessment should be multidimensional. A single red flag may be manageable; multiple red flags appearing together – especially if they include both structural and operational dimensions – should prompt a more fundamental conversation about whether the FIP has the conditions it needs to deliver on its commitments.

Context matters: non-traditional risk factors in Global South FIPs

Beyond the factors identified in the interviews, FIPs operating in Global South contexts can face additional challenges that are less commonly discussed in standard FIP guidance but are highly relevant for buyers conducting supply-chain due diligence. These include:

- **Informal economy dynamics:** Where significant portions of the catch move through informal channels, FIP coverage and traceability are inherently limited, regardless of the formal commitments made by participating actors.
- **Institutional instability:** Political transitions, regulatory reforms, and changes in government priorities can disrupt multi-year improvement processes in ways that are difficult to anticipate or mitigate.
- **Capacity constraints at the community level:** In fisheries dominated by small-scale operators, the organizational and administrative capacity needed to participate meaningfully in FIP processes – attending meetings, maintaining records, reporting data – can be a genuine barrier, not just a training gap.

These factors do not invalidate the value of FIPs in these contexts. But they do mean that realistic timelines, flexible workplans, and sustained external support are not optional features of a well-designed FIP – they are essential ones.

A practical checklist: warning signs to watch for

Use these questions to identify whether a FIP you are evaluating or currently supporting may be at risk of stalling:

- Has the FIP published a substantive progress report on FisheryProgress in the last six months?
- Is there an active, funded technical facilitator currently engaged with the FIP?
- Has the workplan been updated in the last 12 months?
- Is there evidence of active government participation, not just nominal endorsement?
- Does the FIP cover a meaningful share of the fishery, or has participation declined since inception?
- Are there signs of stakeholder fatigue – reduced meeting attendance, delayed reporting, or loss of key participants?
- Is FIP leadership organizationally stable, with sufficient capacity and credibility to drive the process?

If two or more of these indicators are absent or unclear, the FIP may be at risk of stalling. This does not necessarily mean disengagement is the right response; in some cases, targeted support from buyers at precisely this moment can be the difference between a FIP that recovers and one that goes dormant. But it does mean that a more active conversation with the FIP lead is warranted before making or renewing sourcing commitments based on FIP participation.

What this means for seafood buyers and supply-chain companies

The evidence from these three mahi-mahi FIPs points to a clear conclusion: the decisions that seafood companies make about how, when, and how deeply to engage with FIPs are among the most consequential variables in determining whether those FIPs succeed or fail. This is not a peripheral finding – it is the central lesson of this briefing.

Market access and certification were the primary motivations for creating all three FIPs studied. That means these improvement processes exist, in large part, because companies like yours sent a signal that sustainability matters. The question is not whether your company has influence over these fisheries. It does. The question is whether that influence is being used deliberately and effectively.

This section translates the findings from the previous sections into practical implications, organized by the type of engagement that is most relevant at each stage of a FIP's lifecycle.

If you are evaluating whether to source from a FIP fishery

The existence of a FIP is a positive signal, but it is not sufficient on its own to validate a sourcing decision. Before committing, consider:

- Verifying the FIP's operational status, not just its Stage designation. Check FisheryProgress.org for the date and substance of the most recent progress report. A FIP that has not published a substantive update in over six months may be less active than its profile suggests.
- Assessing the governance context. A FIP operating in a weak governance environment can still make meaningful progress on supply-chain improvements, but it is unlikely to achieve management-level changes quickly. Set your expectations – and your timelines – accordingly.
- Asking your suppliers directly what role they play in the FIP, what specific improvements have been achieved, and what the next milestones are. Suppliers who cannot answer these questions clearly may not be as engaged in the FIP as their sourcing documentation suggests.
- Using the checklists of this briefing as a practical due diligence framework before making formal sourcing commitments.

If you are already sourcing from a FIP fishery

Sourcing from a FIP fishery without active engagement is a missed opportunity and, in some cases, a risk. The evidence from these three cases suggests that buyer disengagement after an initial sourcing commitment removes one of the most powerful incentives for continued industry participation. Consider:

- Making your engagement visible. Publicly acknowledging your company's sourcing from a FIP fishery – in sustainability reports, procurement communications, or industry forums – reinforces the market signal that motivated the FIP's creation and helps sustain stakeholder commitment.
- Participating in FIP governance where possible. Attendance at stakeholder meetings, participation in workplan reviews, or representation on FIP steering committees gives your company direct visibility into the FIP's operational reality and increases your ability to identify and respond to early warning signs.
- Using the checklist in the section "What helps a FIP succeed over time" to periodically assess whether the FIP has the conditions it needs for sustained success, and initiate a direct conversation with the FIP lead if you identify gaps.
- Considering co-financing specific workplan activities. Even modest financial contributions to targeted activities – data collection, stakeholder coordination, technical assessments – can have a disproportionate impact on a FIP's ability to maintain momentum through funding gaps.

If you are considering launching or co-leading a FIP

For companies with significant sourcing volume from a fishery that does not yet have a FIP, or where an existing FIP has stalled, direct leadership or co-leadership of a new FIP is the highest-leverage form of engagement available. It is also the most demanding. Before committing, consider:

- Assessing whether the enabling conditions are in place. The evidence from these three cases suggests that FIPs are most likely to succeed where there is a minimum level of government engagement, a critical mass of industry participants willing to commit, and access to dedicated technical support. Launching a FIP without these conditions is possible, but it requires a longer timeline and a higher level of sustained investment.

- Planning for the full lifecycle, not just the launch. The most common failure mode identified in this brief is not a failed launch – it is a FIP that gets started but loses momentum when initial funding runs out or early enthusiasm fades. A credible FIP launch plan should include a multi-year funding commitment, a clear technical support arrangement, and a stakeholder engagement strategy that goes beyond the founding members.

- Connect with organizations that have experience facilitating FIPs in Global South contexts, such as Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), or other members of the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions (CASS). The knowledge gap identified in this brief – unfamiliarity with FIP processes and requirements – is one of the most addressable barriers, and experienced facilitators can significantly accelerate the early stages of a FIP.

Across all stages: five principles for more effective industry engagement

Regardless of where your company sits in relation to a specific FIP, the evidence from this brief points to five principles that should guide industry engagement in mahi-mahi FIPs, and in Global South FIPs more broadly:

1 Treat FIP engagement as a supply-chain investment, not a compliance exercise.

FIPs that receive sustained, substantive engagement from buyers consistently outperform those where buyer involvement is limited to sourcing decisions. The return on that investment – in supply continuity, reputational benefit, and long-term fishery health – is real, but it requires treating FIP engagement as a strategic priority rather than a box to check.

2 Use your leverage collectively, not just individually.

Individual buyer pressure has limited impact on government priorities and systemic governance challenges. Coordinated action – through industry platforms, pre-competitive sustainability coalitions, or joint communications – is significantly more effective. Where multiple companies source from the same fishery, there is a strong case for aligning engagement strategies and presenting a unified market signal.

3 Set realistic expectations about timelines and scope.

FIPs in Global South contexts operate under structural constraints – governance gaps, funding limitations, capacity constraints – that make rapid progress difficult. A FIP that is making consistent incremental progress under challenging conditions is more valuable than its current Stage designation suggests. Unrealistic timelines create pressure that can undermine the trust and stakeholder commitment that FIPs depend on.

4 Stay engaged through difficult periods.

The evidence from these three cases suggests that buyer disengagement during periods of slow progress or operational difficulty is one of the most damaging things a company can do to a FIP it has previously supported. Sustained engagement, even at a reduced level, during difficult periods sends a signal that the market commitment is genuine and long-term, which is essential for maintaining the stakeholder commitment that drives FIP success.

5 Invest in the enabling conditions, not just the outputs.

The factors that most consistently predict FIP success – dedicated technical support, genuine stakeholder commitment, and structured coordination – are not outputs that can be purchased directly. They are enabling conditions that need to be built and sustained over time. Companies that invest in these conditions, by co-financing technical support, participating actively in stakeholder processes, and helping to build local organizational capacity, are investing in the foundation that makes all other FIP activities possible.

A final word

The mahi-mahi fisheries of Latin America are at a critical juncture. The improvement processes documented in this briefing represent years of investment by fishing communities, government agencies, NGOs, and supply chain companies. That investment is fragile: it depends on continued engagement, continued funding, and continued market signals that sustainability matters.

The companies that source from these fisheries have more power to protect and accelerate that investment than any other single actor. The evidence from this briefing suggests that the most effective way to use that power is not through procurement policies alone, but through sustained, substantive, and strategically coordinated engagement with the FIPs that are working to make these fisheries more sustainable — one workplan milestone at a time.

Sustainable Fisheries
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If you'd like to learn more about the lessons learned from the implementation of three mahi-mahi fishery improvement projects (FIPs) in Latin America, please email teddy.escarabay@sustainablefish.org.