

Small-Scale Fisheries Livelihoods Port Sustainability, Governance and Compliance

Policy-Critical
Perspectives for
ASEAN Members

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- I'll like to thank the organisers for inviting me this event.
- My name is Francisco Blaha and I'm an independent fisheries advisor
- I have been involved in fishing since I was 17. As a fisherman, deck officer, fisheries observer, fisheries scientist, factory QC, R&D Manager, Fishery Industry Officer at FAO Rome and a Consultant.
- I have an MSc in Fisheries Biology (1991), an MSc in Food Science (2000) and a Rhodes Scholar in law and policy of the Sea (2023)
- I work on the interphase of fishing operations with policy, science, infrastructure developments and labour rights.
- I'm based in New Zealand, and have as clients the EU, WB, FAO, UNIDO. ADB, FFA, NZ MFAT and others



Framing the Challenge

- Small-scale fisheries underpin food security in ASEAN.
- Fishing ports are social centres, economic multipliers and governance hubs.
- Sustainability failures now trigger market exclusion.
- Livelihood security increasingly tied to compliance capacity.



The Structural Problem

- Fragmented governance (ports, fisheries, health, environment, commerce, tax).
- Informality in landings and reporting.
- Weak enforcement capacity.
- Compliance often donor-driven, not locally embedded.



Indonesia – Bitung

- Major small-scale landing hubs
- Improvements in catch documentation and VMS rollout
- Persistent challenges: informal landings, middlemen dominance
- Lesson: traceability reforms must start with small-scale actors



Philippines – General Santos

- Export-oriented tuna supply chains
- Strong buyer-driven traceability systems
- Small municipal fishers often excluded from premium markets
- Governance gap between national compliance and local ports



Vietnam – IUU 'Yellow Card'

- EU yellow card exposed port-level compliance weaknesses
- Port inspections and catch documentation strengthened
- Enforcement uneven across provinces
- Market pressure can catalyse reform—but at high livelihood risk



Environmental Pressures

- Waste and plastic leakage into coastal ecosystems
- Fuel handling and oil spills
- Sewage and animal waste risk on food safety
- Climate-driven infrastructure vulnerability



Climate Risk and Infrastructure Deficits

- Sea-level rise and storm surge damage landing sites.
- Limited cold storage resilience.
- Disruption cascades into income instability.
- Investment often reactive, not risk-informed.



Governance Reform Priorities

- Integrated port-fisheries management frameworks
- Transparent fee and revenue systems
- Digital tools adapted to small-scale fleets (i.e. mobile phone based)
- Community involvement and co-management mechanisms



Compliance and Market Access

- Food safety system underpin seafood trade.
- IUU regulations increasingly condition export eligibility.
- Labour standards under growing scrutiny.
- Traceability as both opportunity and barrier.
- Risk of marginalizing informal small-scale actors.



Finance and Policy Alignment

- Align port investments with blue economy strategies
- Use blended finance for resilience upgrades
- Targeted subsidies for small-scale compliance tools
- Embed sustainability in port master planning





My takeaways for ASEAN Policymakers

- Compliance cannot be imposed—it must be co-designed
- Small-scale fishers need institutional support, not penalties
- Ports are social and governance nodes, not just infrastructure
- **Sustainable ports = *resilient livelihoods + market stability***



Closing Reflection

- *Small-scale fisheries ports are frontline social, climate and governance spaces.*
- *Without reform, they risk exclusion further from increasingly demanding markets.*
- *With smart governance, they can anchor resilient blue economies and social equity.*

Thank You!

Questions?

*“I am not young
enough to know
everything”*

Oscar Wilde

