Dear Reader,

ABALOBI ICT4FISHERIES is an African-based, fisher-driven social enterprise with global reach. Our mission is to contribute towards thriving, equitable and sustainable small-scale fishing communities in South Africa and beyond, through the joint development of technology. Our approach focuses on achieving tangible milestones, driven by a suite of mobile apps, that relate to seafood traceability, fully documented fisheries, fair and transparent supply chains, and community cohesion and entrepreneurship as important precursors to launching longer-term ecological improvement actions associated with a transition towards ecological sustainability.

In rethinking the notion of sustainability in the context of the small-scale fisheries sector, ABALOBI has chosen to take a radical approach to disrupting and re-inventing seafood supply chains and related food systems in South Africa.

As a disruptor, we believe in transparency. We invite you to engage with this manifesto, which outlines our organisation’s Theory of Change and strategic approach, and how we intend on forging ahead to further our mission in driving social and environmental change.

Kind regards,

Dr Serge Raemaekers
Founder & Managing Director: ABALOBI
Contents

Contents ............................................................................................................................... 1
What is ABALOBI? ............................................................................................................. 2
ABALOBI’s mission ........................................................................................................... 2
Small-scale fisheries – who are they & why are they important? .................................. 2
Small-scale fisheries in South Africa ................................................................................. 3
Our achievements thus far ............................................................................................... 3
Infographic: Driving change in fisheries ......................................................................... 5
Our understanding of sustainability ............................................................................... 6
A new approach to small-scale fisheries & fisheries rebuilding ................................... 7
Fisheries improvement ................................................................................................... 9
Theory of Change .......................................................................................................... 10
Next steps in the ABALOBI programme of work ......................................................... 11
Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 11
A social enterprise is an organisation that develops, funds and implements solutions to social, cultural and/or environmental issues. In this approach, the organisation generates income from business activities and reinvests its profits back into driving its mission, in order to ensure sustainability and maximise impact.

ABALOBI ICT4FISHERIES is an African-based, fisher-driven social enterprise with global reach. Our mobile app suite and programmes include an electronic Catch Documentation and Traceability platform, a MARKETPLACE for Seafood with a Story, and an integrated digital transactional system. We work with small-scale fishers on the human-centred design of this platform, and undertake capacity-building towards community entrepreneurship and improved Safety-at-Sea. We operate the ABALOBI MARKETPLACE with fishers and their partner organisations to achieve transparent, equitable and responsible supply chains, with the intention of catalysing small-scale fisheries improvement and sustainable fisheries management. Uptake of the technology happens through a careful and participatory co-design process, and a grassroots but globally connected advocacy movement by fishers using ABALOBI.

We have undertaken to contribute towards thriving, equitable and sustainable small-scale fishing communities in South Africa and beyond. We aim to do this by building and implementing a community of practice, through regular interaction, around a low-cost, shared information and communication technology (ICT) platform. With our sights set on the collective global efforts to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), our work is specifically aligned with SDGs 1, 12, 13, 14 and 17.

Small-scale fisheries, including traditional and artisanal fisheries, play a principal role in food security, poverty alleviation, equitable development and sustainable resource utilisation. It is thought that nearly half of the global catch of marine resources originates from small-scale fishers, yet the contribution of small-scale fisheries remains largely invisible in the economies of many countries. Further:

- Many small-scale fishing communities are characterised by high levels of poverty and vulnerability
- Women in small-scale fisheries face distinct marginalisation in that much of their labour remains invisible
- Marketing arrangements tend to favour the interests of the buyer, with fishers having little to no control over pricing
- Fishers are often indebted to marketers and remain price-takers, with few opportunities to break through this cycle of dependency and marginalisation
- Fishers have very limited access to basic accounting tools, formal credit schemes, micro-finance and other financial services such as insurance and savings products
- Crucially, despite their great wealth of Local Ecological Knowledge, small-scale fishers are rarely consulted and their knowledge is seldom effectively incorporated into fisheries policy decision-making and management processes as set out in the internationally adopted Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, and as a result, small-scale fisheries continue to be regarded as data-limited.

ABALOBI perceives coastal communities and their small-scale fisheries as instrumental in the fight to preserve the health of our oceans and seafood stocks. As such, we believe concerted efforts must be directed towards the recognition of traditional fishing rights, self-empowerment in the market, and equal participation in decision-making.
In South Africa we work with small-scale fishers to enable this vision, in accord with the Policy for the Small Scale Fisheries Sector in South Africa, the Marine Living Resources Act, the Constitution of South Africa and the United Nations’ International Small-scale Fisheries Guidelines.

The vulnerability of the small-scale fisheries sector in South Africa has been exacerbated by decades of marginalisation through colonisation and apartheid, and subsequent post-apartheid commercial fisheries reforms which paid very little attention to the plight of small-scale fishers. ABALOBI identifies structural and distributional inequalities – characteristics of the South African economy (and many global economies) – that situate small-scale fishing communities in positions of poverty, and food and nutrition insecurity, despite living in a country with considerable natural wealth. ABALOBI, as a social enterprise, engages with small-scale fishers with the specific intention of aiding them to participate meaningfully in the economy.

In 2015, ABALOBI embarked on the journey of co-designing technology with small-scale fishers, seeking approaches for fishers to collect reliable data, and to benefit from the use of such data in terms of improved accounting and fisheries management. In 2017, we built the first prototype of ABALOBI MARKETPLACE, and in November of that year, fishers from the west coast of South Africa utilised the platform to sell directly to a Cape Town-based restaurant, initiating South Africa’s first Restaurant-Supported Fishery. What followed was a groundswell From Hook to Cook movement.

ABALOBI MARKETPLACE has since grown organically to encompass nine fisher groups from small-scale fishing communities between Lambert’s Bay and Arniston, impacting the livelihoods of close to 300 fisher families. Several times a week, weather dependent, these fishers supply fully traceable, seasonal and local Catch of the Day, via ABALOBI MARKETPLACE, to 160 participant chefs in the Cape and Johannesburg.

The platform facilitates electronic payments directly to the fishers, with full transparency on the return they receive. In addition, there is full transparency on the component of the selling price allocated to a logistics fee that covers delivery of the fish to the chef’s door. This degree of transparency in value chains is unusual yet critical if we are to enable small-scale fishers to realise a fair value for their catch and build tangible market incentives for responsible fishing practices.
ABALOBI has successfully worked with chefs to develop a market appetite for lesser-known, undervalued species. Chefs participating in the From Hook to Cook movement have undertaken to honour the local ecosystem, adapting their menus to represent what the sea yields on any given day during a particular season. This ensures market access for the diversity of species in the Basket of Resources that small-scale fishers harvest using low-impact and traditional fishing methods. These species have the Agulhas and Benguela current ecosystems in their makeup, as expressed in their seasonal flavours. Each catch is delivered with its traceability code – the QR code that travels from the fishers’ logbook through the value chain, to the patron.

Several traditional coastal products, developed and prepared by fisherwomen, have also begun to be sold through the co-development of ABALOBI PANTRY – representing and preserving the coastal cultural ecology and proud heritage of the many small-scale fishing communities dotted along our coast.

While a movement by chefs has emerged, so have changes in fishing communities and practices taken place. Data collected through the platform shows that the overall financial well-being of fisher families has improved, opening opportunities for debt repayment, vessel maintenance and enhanced Safety-at-Sea, improved food and nutrition security, and schooling.

As the fishers who use ABALOBI MARKETPLACE now engage in the market from a position of choice and transparency, their fishing practices have begun to shift back towards a more diverse Basket of Resources – placing less pressure on ‘higher value’ species that are considered over-exploited. As the fishers are able to obtain better prices for high-quality, traceable Catch of the Day, the general trend in fishing practices has begun to shift towards a decrease in fishing effort.
We believe **true sustainability** takes into account ecological, social and governance considerations – that only when all of these are addressed in a holistic manner, can a fishery be regarded as moving towards or achieving sustainability. ABALOBI supports **responsible** fishing practices and small-scale fisheries’ supply chains that aim to address the ecological, social and governance components. As such, and regardless of existing labels, it can be argued that there are no fully sustainable fisheries in South Africa yet, despite some good efforts underway. Based on the hypothesis that sustainable development can only occur through an integrated ecological, social and economic pathway, it is high time to rethink sustainability.

Accordingly, ABALOBI supports small-scale fishers to achieve:

- Well-managed resources – healthy stocks and ecosystems
- Fair and equitable fisheries value chains with a low-carbon footprint
- Thriving local coastal communities who emphasise low-impact fishing methods
- Evidenced-based and participatory fisheries management.

We cannot begin to evaluate sustainability without first implementing **traceability**. ABALOBI’s approach critically broadens the sustainability lens to include socio-economic and governance elements along with the conventional ecological components – all of which we believe are crucial to providing a framework for long-term responsible fisheries management with and for small-scale fisheries.

**Our understanding of sustainability**

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**SPOT THE DIFFERENCE**

Two fish labelled ‘sustainable’. They look the same; except ...

**Fish #1** is not traceable. It could be by-catch from a trawl fishery. It could have been caught recreationally and sold, which is illegal. If it was caught by a small-scale fisher, the chances are that the fisher obtained a very low price for their catch. And this likely meant the fisher had to fish very hard to break even – because the real margins are made higher up in the supply chain. With very limited catch data, we simply won’t know. This fisher may sometimes be forced to bend the rules to make ends meet, to be able to take care of their family. The fisher has no visibility and recognition in the market; no voice.

**Fish #2** is fully traceable. The full story behind this fish is known – including the what, where, when, how and who. It was caught by a small-scale fisher using low-impact fishing methods. The fisher obtained a fair and transparent price for their fish, rendering them able to support their family and maintain their boat. The fisher does not have to catch very large volumes of fish in order to make a reasonable profit. This fisher is proud of their trade, helps to maintain a premium quality product in the supply chain, and embraces their key role in the stewardship of our oceans. This fisher collects vital fisheries data via ABALOBI, and wants to share this data towards improved fisheries management.

**Full Traceability** and the integration of **Human Dimensions** in fisheries supply chains are essential if we are to achieve sustainable fisheries. We need to look **beyond** the fish, to the fisher, and assess all elements of a fishery. It is time to widen the lens on sustainability.
A new approach to small-scale fisheries & fisheries rebuilding

Post-apartheid fisheries transformation, consumer seafood purchasing guides and other market approaches implemented over the last two decades have largely failed to create meaningful incentives for positive change in fishing communities and improvements in the status of resources that these communities traditionally harvest. In this timespan, very few species have transitioned from being classified as ‘ecologically unsustainable’ to ‘ecologically sustainable’, as market forces have overpowered intentions of curbing consumer demand and organisational efforts have yet to be accompanied by a strategy to secure livelihoods. At the same time, fisher communities have experienced deteriorating socio-economic conditions, plagued by: the same market forces and unfair supply chains; unintended consequences of non-participatory initiatives; infiltration by organised crime and rampant poaching; and increased competition over resources with commercial and recreational fisheries, all within the context of Climate Change.

Our technology has the ability to showcase to fishers that it can make economic sense to spread harvesting effort across a range of marine species. The next step in this pathway is to engage stakeholders to realise how, with small-scale fishers, we can improve the status of critical fish stocks. In order to rebuild stocks, we must allow fishers to play an integral role in decision-making, to share their catch data and to channel their harvests through traceable value chains. In the current regulatory environment, this is not possible without market support and positive incentives.

It is an urgent time for change. As such, ABALOBI has chosen to take a radical approach to disrupting and re-inventing seafood supply chains and related food systems in South Africa. The ABALOBI approach focuses on achieving tangible milestones, driven by technology, that relate to seafood traceability, fully documented fisheries, fair and transparent supply chains, and community cohesion and entrepreneurship as important precursors to launching longer-term ecological improvement actions associated with a transition towards ecological sustainability.

It is thus critical that restaurants, like consumers, do not disengage from species that are considered ‘ecologically unsustainable’, but rather that they would find a meaningful way to contribute towards transitioning these species towards an ecologically sustainable state. Although this is seemingly a complicated journey to navigate, it is a vital one if we are to join fishing communities in the fight for the health of our oceans and seafood stocks.
**Current reality in small-scale fisheries**

**Catch**
- No visibility
  - Fishers as price-takers
- Overfishing
  - Web focus on high value species and volume
- Overpowering market forces
  - Including competition with other sectors
- Deteriorating socio-economic conditions
  - Survival
- No participation
  - No involvement in consumer guides

**Market**
- Few connections to traditional fishers
- No seasonal flows
  - Strong emphasis on imported seafood
- No transparency
- Quality concerns
- No opportunity to contribute to change

**DISENGAGED SOCIETY = UNSUSTAINABLE**

**ABALOBI intervention**

**Catch**
- Empowered fishers
  - Own identity in the market
  - Fair prices
  - Own data
- Improved financial well-being
  - Reduced
- Decreased fishing effort
  - Increased focus on a range of species
- Stewardship potential activated
  - Positive market incentives

**Market**
- Direct connection to traditional fishers
- Seasonal flows
  - Emphasis on local, small-scale catch
- Quality
  - Ensured by traceability and direct connection to fisher
- Opportunity to be change agents

**ENGAGED SOCIETY = RESPONSIBLE**

**TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY**

**Community-level Fisheries Improvement Project**

**Industrial including by-catch**
- Commercial
- Recreational (illegal to sell)

**Empowerment to action plan and fisheries improvement**

**Fair, transparent, fully documented, and traceable supply chain**

**Prerequisite to catalysing fisheries improvement**

**Increased demand in traceable, small-scale catch**

**Prerequisite to catalysing fisheries improvement**

**Increased demand in traceable, small-scale catch**

**Empowering fisheries, own identity in the market, fair prices, own data**

**Fast, transparent, fully documented, and traceable supply chain**

**Full transparency and traceability**

**Community-level Fisheries Improvement Project**
ABALOBI is about to formalise the first Community-level Fishery Improvement Project (FIP) in South Africa. A FIP is a multi-stakeholder effort to improve the sustainability of a fishery and its associated supply chains. While FIPs vary in scope and nature, to be considered as such, a FIP must meet a number of requirements pertaining to participation, funding, transparency and rigour. In order to benchmark the small-scale fisheries we work with, internationally recognised ecological, social and governance standards will be used in combination with locally identified indicators of progress, and Action Plans will be developed with fishing communities, chefs and stakeholders. These Action Plans will track fisheries progress against an agreed set of milestones.

This approach does mean a limited proportion of ‘flagged’ species appear on ABALOBI MARKETPLACE, inevitably as small-scale fishers rely on a Basket of Resources for their livelihoods and require time to gear themselves up to tackle the reasons why the species they harvest have been assigned a flagged status by others. Consequently, ABALOBI strongly encourages consumers not to disengage, but rather to ascertain whether a species was harvested legally by small-scale fishers. This can be done by checking whether there is an ABALOBI QR code available for the fish on offer, as verifiable permits are linked to every unique ABALOBI QR code. Channelling these species through a fully traceable supply chain and Community-level FIP is the only objective approach to drive change in these fisheries and how we can ultimately move them from ‘flagged’ to ‘safe’.

05
MOVING TO BEING RECOGNISED AS A FISHERY THAT IS ‘UNDER IMPROVEMENT’
- Real-time progress tracking
- Data-driven decision making
- Transparent and grassroots process

04
COMMUNITY-LEVEL FISHERIES IMPROVEMENT PROJECT WORKPLAN
- Participatory approach
- Multi-stakeholder project
- Supply chain components

03
COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF A REDEFINED CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY
- Ecological Component
- Social and Economic Component
- Governance Component

02
HUMAN DIMENSIONS OF SMALL-SCALE FISHING COMMUNITIES
- Conservation International Social Scorecard
- FairTrade Fisheries Standard
- FishForward2 Human Dimensions CAM

01
ECOLOGICAL SUSTAINABILITY BENCHMARKS
- Local Ecological Knowledge
- Risk-based and data-limited frameworks
- Marine Stewardship Council Pre-assessments
- WWF-SASSI Species Assessments

Community-Level Fisheries Improvement Project (C-FIP) Approach
Enabling small-scale fishers to record their own catches and visualise their data collectively, coupled with the development of a fully traceable, storied seafood offering – to enable them to engage in the market from a position of power and increase the value of their livelihoods – will ultimately catalyse fishers’ engagement in adaptive fisheries management and promote thriving, sustainable and equitable small-scale fishing communities.

Further:

- Communities can only be sustainable when there is gender equity, respect for human rights, and dignity for all.
- Increased financial well-being, collective action and secure market access for small-scale fishers will ultimately open the door for fishers to work with other stakeholders on the rebuilding of fish stocks and in conservation efforts.
- Improved income and fair prices will promote coastal custodianship and decrease fishing pressure.
- Access to infrastructure including improved cold chain management will lead to improved quality, which in turn will improve value and decrease fishing pressure.
- Increased demand for traceable, responsibly caught local seafood will lead to improved value of the catch and promote sustainable management of the small-scale fishery.
- Enhanced awareness of Eating with the Ecosystem will increase demand for seasonally-appropriate seafood, which will promote responsible fisheries management.
- Access to information will enhance decision-making capacity and facilitate small-scale fisheries improvement practices.
- Increased income and livelihood options will promote food and nutrition security.
- Increased control over income and access to financial services will facilitate sustainable practices among small-scale fishers.
- Inclusion of women and recognition of their work will strengthen local livelihoods and enable value addition, thereby improving local food security.
ABA LOBI's next steps are to emphasis further the important stewardship role that fishers, chefs and other stakeholders have with regards to South Africa’s marine resources and coastal communities.

Over the next year we intend:

- To work with key chefs who are prepared to question current supply chains, and play their role in re-inventing food systems one step at a time. We hope to bring chefs closer to our programme, as we have done with small-scale fishers, and develop a Chefs of ABA LOBI network.
- To expand our work throughout South Africa, particularly in the Eastern Cape.
- To further our work with fisher groups to stimulate sustainable social structures (such as associations and co-operatives) through organisational and small business development, quality control, cold chain and logistics learnership, and data feedback and engagement workshops.
- To engage fisherwomen on the supply and further co-development of the ABA LOBI PANTRY and spotlight the multifaceted roles women play in the current Restaurant-Supported Fishery and intended Community-Supported Fishery.
- To ensure our platform is accessible to the public via a Community-Supported Fishery, at the fishing community level and through an urban supply model to promote and raise awareness about ethical food systems.
- To formalise our Community-level Fishery Improvement Project and track its progress publicly on https://fisheryprogress.org/
- To co-develop simple and relevant financial services for fishers, to secure their livelihoods and families.
- To improve scalability and platform inter-operability for work in fisheries around the globe, and extend to small-scale agriculture and Community-Supported Farming initiatives.
- To work with WWF-SASSI to seek incorporation of social impact assessments into the SASSI listing process, such that the characteristics of small-scale fisheries – and the very real needs of small-scale fishers whose livelihoods depend on the sea – are not excluded.
- To broaden the lens on sustainability to integrate the Carbon Footprint of supply chains
- To release an external evaluation that independently demonstrates our ecological, social and governance impact.

In order to see small-scale fishing communities thrive, we have to honour the ecological and social value of their trade, particularly in a context where many of the world’s fishing stocks have been over-exploited and are in need of recovery. ABA LOBI harnesses market sentiment to drive social and environmental change. A secure, diverse and responsible MARKETPLACE can catalyse small-scale fishers engagement in the adaptive management of their fisheries. Increased financial well-being, collective action and secure market access for small-scale fishers will ultimately open the door for them to work with other stakeholders on the rebuilding of marine stocks, as well as in the conservation of our marine environment. ABA LOBI empowers fishers to develop positive market partnerships, enables chefs and restaurants to be effective change agents, and encourages individuals to ask meaningful questions about seafood. This is the journey that ABA LOBI has embarked upon.