ICCA Consortium Statement on the CBD COP17 Agenda Item 18(c): Marine and Coastal Biodiversity and Island Biodiversity

Statement by the ICCA Consortium at the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in Yerevan, Armenia

By the **ICCA Consortium**

As Parties advance implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), the ICCA Consortium calls for greater recognition and support of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities as rights-holders, knowledge-holders, and custodians of marine and coastal territories of life.

Across the world, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities govern, sustainably use, conserve, and care for marine and coastal territories through diverse governance systems, customary laws, knowledge, and practices. Yet many of these territories remain unrecognized in national conservation frameworks, while facing increasing pressures from industrial fishing, extractive economic activities, pollution, and other forms of unsustainable development that threaten their rights, livelihoods, and governance systems.

In considering recommendation 28/6 of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) of the CBD, we emphasize three priorities.

1. **Marine conservation must recognize and respect the diversity of governance systems and customary rights**

We welcome the recognition in paragraph 14 of the need to address the qualitative elements of Target 3 of the KM-GBF, particularly effective conservation and equitable governance, and urge Parties to retain this language.

Target 3 implementation must recognize three complementary pathways: protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), and Indigenous and Traditional Territories, with free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Marine and coastal territories of life should not be required to become protected areas or OECMs for their conservation contributions to be recognized.

This includes recognizing customary marine tenure, traditional fishing grounds, customary sustainable use, and the rights and contributions of small-scale fishing communities, including through locally managed marine areas and other community governance

arrangements. Conservation must respect existing rights and governance systems, rather than displacing or restricting them.

2. **Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities' full and effective participation in marine biodiversity processes is a must, with their knowledge and rights respected**

We strongly support retaining the explicit reference to the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in paragraph 12, as well as their representation in the proposed Informal Advisory Group on marine biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction.

We also urge Parties to retain references to diverse knowledge systems in paragraph 9(b), and to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) in the provisions concerning traditional knowledge.

Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities must be recognized not merely as sources of information, but as rights-holders with their own knowledge systems, institutions, and decision-making processes. The use of their knowledge, including in Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA) processes, must respect their rights, community protocols, and knowledge sovereignty.

3. **Implementation must translate recognition into effective support for marine and coastal territories of life**

We encourage Parties to ensure that scientific guidance, monitoring, and reporting recognize and support community-led conservation and monitoring, respecting Indigenous and community data governance and sovereignty.

The contribution of marine and coastal territories of life to biodiversity conservation should not depend on their formal designation as protected areas or OECMs, or their inclusion in national or global databases.

At the same time, recognition alone is insufficient if industrial fishing, extractive activities, and other pressures continue to undermine customary governance, sustainable livelihoods, and the rights of custodians. Implementation of the Framework must address these threats and provide accessible support and resources for community-led conservation.

The ICCA Consortium urges Parties to strengthen the proposed decision by ensuring equitable governance, full and effective participation, respect for customary rights and diverse knowledge systems, and effective support for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities conserving marine and coastal biodiversity.

Marine and coastal territories of life are already conserving biodiversity. The challenge for CBD COP17 is not to create new categories for them, but to recognize, respect, protect, and support the governance systems and collective responsibilities through which their custodians continue to care for the ocean.