



## **FOURTH REGULAR SESSION**

3-7 December 2007

Tumon, Guam, USA

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### **OPENING STATEMENT BY CHAIR OF FFC TO THE 4<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE WCPF COMMISSION**

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**WCPFC4-2007/DP28**

**5 December 2007**

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates and representatives from members of the Commission, representatives from Observer and Non-Government Organisations and the Secretariat of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, I am making this statement on behalf of the seventeen members of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency.

Mr Chairman, let me first of all thank you for your leadership in directing the work of the Commission over the past 12 months. We would also like to thank the Executive Director and Staff of the Secretariat for your hard work throughout the year in servicing the meetings of our Commission and its subsidiary bodies and for producing high quality papers to advance our work.

This is the fourth time we have met as a Commission since its establishment three and half years ago. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the United States and welcome them to the Commission this year as a full member. The work to get a regional fisheries management framework in place for the region really began 31 years ago when at their 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting in Port Moresby in 1977, leaders of the South Pacific Forum issued a Declaration on the Law of the Sea calling on Pacific Island Countries to take advantage of international developments by claiming exclusive economic zones. The Commission therefore represents the latest chapter in regional co-operation and a new threshold in international fisheries management.

Mr Chairman, FFA Members feel that some members of the Commission have not engaged in the Commission's work to date in the most constructive manner. This has delayed us making progress on an effective and robust MCS framework and on conservation and management measures that respond to the recommendations of our Scientific Committee, particularly with regard to bigeye and yellowfin tuna.

FFA Members fervently believe that if the Commission is to achieve its objectives, some real and tangible progress towards the finalisation of the MCS framework must be made at this Session of the Commission. We note that for us this means agreement on a Conservation and Management Measure for the Regional Observer Programme and an associated implementation plan consistent with the Convention text, as well as real progress on the final steps to implement the Commission's VMS.

Mr Chairman, fisheries has many important dimensions for the livelihoods and cultural heritage of Pacific Islanders and members of the Commission. We must work constructively to ensure that we can address the many critical issues before us that beset the effective management and long-term future of our fisheries resources.

Mr Chairman, with stocks declining elsewhere in the world the fishery in this region faces the real prospect of becoming oversubscribed. This underscores the need for the Commission to make some real progress with regards to the issue of allocation, and the manner in which we address the issue of non-members is a key component of this issue. Only then will our Commission have a sound basis on which to develop and implement effective conservation and management measures.

Mr Chairman, in May this year Pacific Fisheries Ministers met in Wellington and amongst the decisions they adopted in terms of the development aspirations of small island States included confirming “the long standing position of FFA members that the right to determine who fishes in our waters and to develop our domestic industries within sustainable limits, is the most basic exercise of sovereign rights and we will not consider any outcomes that prejudice that right”.

In this regard, Fisheries Ministers called for an “orderly restructuring and reduction of distant water fleets” and “expressed concern that at a time when some fishing States are using their economic power to block the domestic development aspirations of Pacific Island Members, cooperating non-member status in the Commission could be abused by fishing companies using Flag States with no connection to the region, to undermine the efforts of FFA members to ensure long-term conservation and sustainable use of the tuna resources”.

Most recently Mr. Chairman, Pacific Forum Leaders at their 37<sup>th</sup> Summit adopted the Vava’u Declaration on Pacific Fisheries Resources entitled “Our Fish, Our Future” in which they committed FFA Member Governments to the conservation and sustainable management of highly migratory tuna resources by amongst other things:

- Fully implementing without delay the conservation and management measures developed and endorsed by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC);
- Seeking the urgent adoption of additional measures by the WCPFC to address over-fishing of bigeye and yellowfin, including a reduction in longline catches and addressing purse seine fishing, and specific steps to reduce the catch of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin;
- Recognising the aspirations of small islands developing states to develop their domestic fisheries and calling on developed member countries of the Commission to implement measures to support such endeavours.

At the conclusion of the Forum Leaders meeting this year, the Vava’u Declaration was conveyed to high level representatives of many of the other countries seated around this table. The Declaration, along with other relevant considerations, will inform our engagement in the work of the Commission this week and beyond.

Mr Chairman, FFA Members have come to this Session of the Commission with a commitment to make real progress on the issues before us. The international community is watching with keen interest to see whether we will live up to the commitment we have made to be responsible stewards of the world’s largest tuna stocks. This Session of the Commission will represent a watershed for us all and test our resolve as to whether we can fulfil our responsibilities and obligations. In this vein, we would like to work with you Mr Chairman and other members of the Commission with a sense of urgency and in the spirit of trust to make real progress.

Thank you Chairman.