



## **FOURTH REGULAR SESSION**

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### **STATEMENTS BY KIRIBATI ON THE LICENSING OF SOUTH AMERICAN VESSELS**

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**WCPFC4-2007/DP29**

**5 December 2007**

Statement by Mr Peter Tong, Secretary for Fisheries and Marine Resources Development

Mr. Chairman, thank you for giving me the floor to say a few words under this topic.

Mr. Chairman, I hasten to raise the issue on the subject of Kiribati licensing certain South American flagged vessels to fish in the Kiribati national waters and within the WCPFC area as it has been flagged yesterday by Australia and I know it will be raised again under topics to come.

The last few months and since we licensed the 9 Spanish owned but South America flagged vessels, has been very difficult and challenging period for us. We have received notice from the current Chair of the Commission and we had also been constantly pressured by our development partners through their diplomatic offices to do something about this matter. I assure you Mr. Chairman, we took heed of their advice and we sought ways forward to resolve the issue.

Political events in Kiribati did not help much in terms of timing and policy decision but we managed to seek advice from the FFA Secretariat and consult with our Spanish partner AGAC, prompting the relevant authorities in the flag states to apply for a Cooperating Non-member status in the Convention. I believe, Mr. Chairman that the Secretariat has those applications and it is our sincere hope that they will be presented to the Commission for their consideration at its next meeting in December. However, we seek your indulgence Mr. Chairman and that of this Committee to take time if appropriate, to consider before the Commission's meeting.

Mr. Chairman, our situation in this matter is peculiar and I'll explain why. As you may be aware, the main fishing ground of these vessels is in the EPO area but they sometimes venture to the Central Pacific and into Kiribati eastern EEZ. As you are aware, part of that EEZ is actually outside the supposedly eastern boundary of the WCPFC area of 150°E. In any case these vessels would have been fishing the tuna stock that migrated through our EEZ and catch them in the EPO area. In fact some of these vessels had been on the FFA register and we have licensed them to fish in our EEZ since 1999 even before the establishment of the WCPFC. There we do not see this as a new arrangement. We believe that by absorbing them as Cooperating Non-members, would work in our favour as the fleet's data would then be available to the Commission and we

can monitor their efforts in and around their intended fishing grounds. After all, the stock we manage and the fish is one and the same.

As all are currently fishing in the EPO area, they have 100% observer coverage and all have VMS on board, the necessary conditions for compliance with the WCPFC requirements.

We have also consulted on the possibility of re-flagging these vessels but due to certain trade rules and regulations, this option will in fact work against the economics of their marketing operation.

On the conservation aspect, their presence should not pose a threat to the tuna stock of the Commission as they do not represent an increase in fishing efforts in the Central Pacific where they have been fishing historically. Also the application of the VDS starting in December would ensure that we allocate only what we have been allocated globally and within the management measures of the scheme. License revenue is very significant to us smallest members of the Commission and we see the opportunity that a wider range of fleets could bring to bid-up the value of our EEZ and of the resource therein.

In concluding Mr. Chairman, let me put this across to you and you may not agree with it. But in my limited experience with the way the Commission has been working so far, it seems that we the smallest and most vulnerable members of the Commission have been the hardest hit and the least to benefit from some of the arrangements and rules concluded under the auspice of this Commission and we ask no more than better understanding of our special situation and problems.

Thank you Chairman.

Statement by Mr Tebao Awerika, Senior Assistant Secretary for Fisheries and Marine Resources  
Development

Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present the case of Kiribati on this contentious issue.

Let me begin by conveying an apology to members of the Commission around the table on what seem to be a disregard of established CMMs, the backbone on which this Commission was built.

Mr. Chairman, after having said that I wish to highlight to the Commission that this same topic was addressed by the Secretary for Fisheries and Marine Resources Development from Kiribati during the recent TCC3 held in Pohnpei earlier this year. At TCC3 the Secretary touched on the difficult economic situation Kiribati is in and the position it took when issuing the licenses to the vessels. A copy of the statement is provided for members' information.

Without directly quoting the same issues addressed by the Secretary, I wish to state that in rectifying the situation Kiribati is pleased to learn that the applications submitted by concerned flag states showed outstanding track records with IATTC, the RFMO they are members of and the vessels licensed are not on any IUU list. Submitted catch records and other required documents were confirmed by the Commission's science authorities to be sufficient.

Mr. Chairman, let me add that in issuing the licenses, Kiribati was mindful of its commitments as a Commission member and made the necessary provisions by incorporating in its MTCs agreed to CMMs. In addition, Kiribati restricted the area of fishing activities to be confined within its EEZ. This measure was taken as Kiribati felt that it must in order to serve the interest of its people given the economic situation that country was in. In addition the partnership provided an opportunity to advance Kiribati's fishery development aspirations.

Kiribati firmly believes by confining the activities within its EEZ jurisdiction it has exercised its sovereign right as a coastal state. In this context, Kiribati regretted that it was silent during the deliberations the led to the formulation of paragraph CMM 2004 01 A1(b) that explicitly prohibits vessels flying non member state flags from fishing in the Commission area. This paragraph may need to be revisited with a view to amendment it as Kiribati believes it undermines the sovereignty of the coastal states.

Mr. Chairman, the advent of the Vessel Day Scheme could provide a workable solution and I urge distinguished delegates to consider most seriously applying this scheme or other workable solutions in this unique case.

Kiribati firmly believes that the basis upon which it licensed the South American vessels touched on the very basic need to address its internal economic situation and acted within its boundary as a sovereign state.

Everything that Kiribati could do it has done and now seeks the understanding of distinguished delegates to decide on how best to move this important issue forward.

Mr. Chairman, thank you.