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MARSHALL ISLANDS – STATEMENT ON WCPFC4-2007/DP07

WCPFC4-2007/DP33

7 December 2007

Statement by the Honorable John M. Silk, Minister of Resources & Development, Republic of the Marshall Islands

On

RMI Draft Proposal – “Aspirations of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)”
WCPFC4/2007/DP07

As members are probably aware, the Republic of the Marshall Islands has submitted a draft proposal for consideration at this Fourth Session of the WCPFC. The draft proposal entitled “Aspirations of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)”, which has been tabled for the Commission’s consideration under WCPFC4/2007/DP07, seeks to further highlight and expand the recognition of the aspirations of SIDS. Before I proceed, I wish to acknowledge, with gratitude, the statement of support conveyed by Tuvalu, on behalf of all FFA Members earlier during the brief discussion on the “Resolution on the Reduction of Overcapacity”. I would also like to thank the others who have voiced support for development aspirations of SIDS.

The draft proposal before us calls on developed Members of the Commission to seriously consider and recognize the development aspirations of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in their efforts to further develop their respective domestic fisheries. Further, the proposal aims to call for an orderly restructuring and reduction of Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) fleets operating in the Convention Area in order to accommodate the needs of SIDS. The Marshall Islands is of the strong view that it is the DWFNs who are creating overcapacity in the region and not the small island developing states who, in all reality, have meager fleets that do not even add up to even half of each DWFN fleet. Our draft proposal then is critical in an application of management measures on those that have added to fishing capacity in our region.

The draft proposal reflects our grave concerns with how some developed CCMs continue to abuse and misinterpret the current existing “Resolution on the Reduction of Overcapacity” (Resolution 2005-02) to their own advantage all the while neglecting to even consider or recognize the exemption clearly stated in Paragraph 2 of the said resolution .We strongly feel that it is only logical that we submit the current draft proposal for consideration at this Session given the complex interrelated issues at play and the adverse impacts that we, as a small island developing state, have come to experience and continue to suffer even at this early stage in the WCPFC process.

Mr. Chairman,

As a Small Island Developing State member of the Commission, the Marshall Islands has come to find itself caught in the crossfire of competing interests versus the need for effective conservation and management measures all the while not losing sight of the development aspirations of Small Island Developing States and above all the sovereign rights of coastal states as clearly stipulated in the Convention. The impending concern that we have is that of being overlooked and left behind in this already long and arduous process. We all must take a serious look at the current trends and how they influence our decision-making and consequently the effects they have on our national interests in this the last remaining viable tuna fishery in the world. It would be remiss of me not to also stress the need for solidarity in our efforts. As expected, more and more we have come to witness the formidable establishment of competing blocs within the Commission. As one of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement on Fisheries of Common Interest, the Marshall Islands is very much concerned about the way the tip of the balance tends to be outweighed by the interests of our developed counterparts around the table.

Mr. Chairman,

All we are asking is that we be given the opportunity to enjoy a greater economic benefit from our tuna resources. Ironically, in that effort we are being forced to clarify the issue of whether or not SIDS are entitled to develop their domestic fisheries as explicitly stipulated under the exemption put forth in Resolution 2005-02. More specifically and of utmost importance to us is our entitlement as a small island developing State under Part 8 of the Convention entitled “Requirements of Developing States”. Article 30, Paragraph 1 clearly states that the Commission shall give full recognition to the special requirements of developing State Parties to the Convention, in particular small island developing states, and of territories and possessions, in

relation to conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks in the Convention Area and development of fisheries for such stocks.

For us, the recurring question we have had to grapple with in our difficult experience with the application of Resolution 2005-02 has been centered on the whole notion of SIDs aspirations to reap sustainable economic benefits and returns from our very own tuna resources. We firmly believe in our right to further develop our domestic fishery while being totally conscious of the need to balance capacity to achieve such endeavor. Recent shifts in paradigms are taking shape around the region and we feel that it is only timely that such shifts take into consideration the special needs of SIDs. The Marshall Islands fully affirms and swears by the long standing position of FFA members that the right to determine who fishes in our waters and to develop our domestic fisheries within sustainable means, is the most fundamental exercise of our sovereign right and we will not stand idle and subject ourselves to any unfair actions that prejudices and robs us of that right.

For a small island nation with limited resources and one that is particularly dependent on our tuna resources, if we cannot develop our fishery, we certainly cannot develop our nation. I wish to further echo the sentiments raised by the FFC Chair in his opening statement especially with regards to his reference to The Vava'u Declaration appropriately dubbed "Our Fish, Our Future". On that note, it is only fitting that I strongly put forth our case for recognition of our sovereign rights as coastal states and traditional custodians of our tuna resources and our desire to develop our domestic fisheries.

In our view, this contentious issue and its implications, which have had considerable adverse impact on the Marshall Islands, and potentially all SIDS, is one that could potentially make or break our domestic development efforts and related future aspirations to further augment those efforts with regards to development of a viable domestic fishery and onshore facilities which are vital not only for the Marshall Islands economy but for our food security and sustainable livelihood. Hence, the high level of seriousness which we attach to it and other related cross-cutting issues.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, we find it very ironic that this Commission is giving serious consideration to applications for CNM status from countries outside the region. Thus, we are forced to ask ourselves, if not us then certainly, why them?

Mr. Chairman,

We remain grateful for your efforts in attempting to reconcile and balance the interests of developed CCMs with the aspirations of SIDS to develop their domestic fisheries. Unfortunately, we could not support the proposed way forward as agreed in Apia last year given the fact that there was already some concerns being expressed with regards to the Commission's supposed involvement in CCMs' internal affairs. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful. Along these lines, the Marshall Islands welcome the efforts by the WCPFC on seeking a way forward on the issue through ongoing engagement and dialogue to resolve the issue of meeting fishing development aspirations and rights of SIDS while keeping a check on capacity increase. We remain optimistic that some sort of concession can be made in the very near future on the part of DWFNs in duly recognizing the legitimate rights and development aspirations of small island developing states.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.