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DISCUSSION PAPER: INCORPORATING CLIMATE CHANGE WITHIN WCPFC

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United States of America

INCORPORATING CLIMATE CHANGE WITHIN WCPFC

Discussion Paper Prepared by the United States of America for the Nineteenth Regular Session of the Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean

WCPFC has already recognised the importance of preparing the region for the emerging impacts of climate change through its adoption of Resolution 2019-01 “Resolution on Climate Change as it relates to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.”

Climate change is leading to shifts in the distribution and abundance of global fisheries, altering ecosystems and affecting livelihoods and food systems worldwide. The impact of climate change will be felt heavily in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and shifting tuna stocks may result in uncertain food and economic security. Climate change is a global, urgent issue that requires expedited action by those charged with managing shared natural resources. Climate-related impacts are already felt throughout the world, and are disproportionately affecting certain regions. Within the Pacific Ocean, island countries are affected by climate change via sea level rise, flooding, coastal erosion, and storm surges, among other impacts.

The Fourth National Climate Assessment of the United States, including Pacific territories, describes the impact of rising sea temperatures and decreasing nutrients to tuna abundance and distribution within the western and central Pacific Ocean. Declines in fishery yields due to shifts in abundance and growth of tuna species have the potential to impact economies and livelihoods throughout the region.

In 2021 the UN General Assembly Sustainable Fisheries Resolution A/RES/76/71 called on Regional Fisheries Management Organizations to consider climate change in carrying out their work. Indeed, the 18th Regular Session of the Scientific Committee (SC18) discussed a suite of candidate indicators for monitoring ecosystem and climatic trends across the WCPO, and recommended making “Ecosystem and Climate Indicators” a standing agenda item of the Ecosystem and Bycatch Mitigation theme session. This provides a mechanism for annual discussions on the science of climate change and its effect on ecosystems and fisheries managed by the Commission. However, WCPFC can do more.

The United States strongly supports SC18’s recommendation as a crucial first step. In addition, the United States proposes similar specific action be undertaken by the Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) and the Northern Committee (NC) to establish standing agenda items related to climate such that each of the Commission’s key subsidiary bodies may discuss the broader implications of climate change in the WCPFC Convention Area. Such concerted action by SC, TCC, and NC will strengthen the Commission’s ability to foresee and implement appropriate management actions for affected fish stocks, ultimately aiding the communities that rely on them. To this end, the United States suggests the following decision from WCPFC19:

Recognizing the urgency of developing a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on highly migratory fish stocks in the Convention Area, and any related impacts on the economies of CCMs and food security and the livelihoods of their people, in particular Small Island Developing States and Participating Territories, the Commission tasks TCC and NC to include Climate Change as a standing agenda item and to prioritize discussion of how best to incorporate climate change information and analyses in their work.