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The Chairman, distinguished delegates and representatives from members of the Commission, representatives from Observer and Non-Government Organizations and the Secretariat of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, ladies and gentlemen, Good Morning!

On behalf of the Philippine delegation, I would like to express our deepest appreciation and sincere gratitude to the Korean Government for hosting this 5th Regular Session of the WCPFC, and to the people of Busan for their warm welcome and hospitality.

Mr. Chair, I will be brief and will focus on major issues confronting the Philippines, which we believe are vital to the sustainability of the country's tuna industry.

While the Philippines agrees to some of the conservation and management measures to ensure the sustainability of tuna stocks and its associated species in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, we feel that the proposed 3-month annual ban on FAD fishing in EEZs and high seas, and the total closure of the high seas unduly constrain the Philippine fleets, comprising mostly of small and medium scale purse seines. These vessels have always contributed substantially to our nation's socioeconomic development, have generated national income and employment, and most importantly have been indispensable in providing the protein requirements of millions of Filipino people. The proposed measures will not only have adverse economic effects on our fishing industry, but will also disrupt our food and nutritional needs. We strongly request for the Commission to ensure that the impacts of proposed measures are carefully analyzed prior to its implementation, without undermining the food and job security requirements of CCMs.

The Philippines strongly supports the reduction in fishing effort through the rational use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs). As a responsible member of the Commission, the Philippines is already in the process of developing and implementing its FADs' management plan, which contains some of the following provisions: the conduct of FADs inventory, limiting FADs deployment from 100 units to 25 units per vessel, and the removal of excess FADs. We are developing a program to reduce our bigeye tuna catch

by 30%. In fact, we stopped issuing new licenses for catchers since 2004 and we intend to keep this.

The Philippines also supports the Commission's plan to develop High Sea Vessel Day Scheme (HS VDS), which will limit the total number of fishing days for purse seine fishing vessels in the high seas. The Philippines believes that the introduction of VDS will not only ensure the biological sustainability of the tuna stocks, but will also provide a more genuine and quantifiable economic benefits by providing fishermen with flexibility over the rate and timing of their fishing.

The Philippines welcomes the Draft Conservation and Management Measures (CMM) on regulation of transshipment at sea. The draft reflects our previous concern to regularize and institutionalize the exemption granted by the Commission to the Philippines and to other similar countries from the ban on at-sea transshipment. Rest assured that we will actively participate in shaping a final agreement on the regulation of transshipment.

The Philippines is highly interested in establishing Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) as a tool to effectively support Monitoring, Control and Surveillance activities, and in compliance with CMM 2007-02. We have commenced the implementation of national program for the implementation of VMS. Consultations have been conducted to inform fishing operators about the implementation of VMS, and initial support to ICT infrastructure and facilities are now in place. We are currently waiting for the approved standards and specifications guidelines to further operationalize our system and to ensure compatibility with the standards set by the Commission. Thus, it is our hope that at the course of the meeting, we would be able to forge an agreement on the proposed draft on VMS standards, procedures and specification.

The Philippines recognizes the importance of Regional Observer Program (ROP) in the provision of reliable and timely scientific data, as well as in monitoring the implementation of conservation and management measures adopted by the Commission. It is for this reason that the Philippines is fervently pursuing for the implementation of the ROP. We noted that discussions on the status and outstanding issues contained in CMM 2006-07 are progressing, however, we would like to request the Commission to include capacity-building programs for regional observers as part of the discussion of the Intersessional Working Group on a Regional Observer Program (IWG-ROP).

Finally, we hope that this meeting will provide meaningful results on some of our main concerns. Thank you.