



SIXTH REGULAR SESSION
Papeete, Tahiti, French Polynesia
7-11 December 2009

COOK ISLANDS – OPENING STATEMENT

WCPFC6-2009/DP25

7 December 2009

Submitted by Cook Islands

Mr Chairman, fellow delegates

Iorana

May I first of all express our sincere gratitude to the People of French Polynesia for hosting us in this beautiful part of Polynesia.

Fortunately, the Cook Islands delegation will have an opportunity after this meeting to see more of Tahiti and indeed be able to visit our cousins and other family before returning to Rarotonga.

Mr Chairman, as everyone is well aware, the Cook Islands is a small island country responsible for the management of a large and important part of the South Pacific Ocean and its related fisheries.

We are increasingly challenged by the fact that we are situated at the Eastern boundary of the Commission Area and that we are part of the last remaining great tuna fishery. Even though we expend enormous energy and resources to try to ensure our stocks are responsibly managed, it seems greater resources are being used to thwart this responsible management effort.

Mr Chairman last year in Pusan we reported two incidents of IUU fishing in our waters and subsequently negotiated resolutions for both. At that time we resolved that any further cases of illegal fishing would need to be dealt with in a much more severe manner. As it has turned out, at the very time we were resolving the two aforementioned cases, vessels belonging to member countries sitting around this table, had just begun an extensive campaign of illegal fishing in our zone.

This type of systematic, cynical and orchestrated plundering cannot and must not continue. It represents a direct affront to the People of the Cook Islands who depend on fish as a source of protein, undermines our management efforts and in short amounts to “stealing the food off the table of not only today’s generation but also tomorrow’s children”.

Mr Chairman, our aim in fisheries management is to ensure sustainable exploitation and to ensure that benefits from this, are maximized for our people. We want to develop a fishing industry and we consider

that developing strategic relationships with foreign partners is an important way to achieve this. Therefore Mr Chairman we are quite open to foreign partners operating in our waters, but only ask that they knock and come in through the front door, rather than sneaking in through the back window.

And, Mr Chairman, while I'm on the issue of high seas pockets, the Cook Islands will be seeking firm restrictions on fishing access to the eastern pocket at this meeting, in order to effectively combat the increasingly prevalent IUU fishing activity generated from this enclave. We will also be seeking full VMS coverage of our EEZ in particular with respect to Commission vessels that enter our zone. We are also interested Mr Chairman, in exploring a system of applying sanctions by the Commission on members whose vessels repeatedly violate established management measures.

In closing Mr Chairman when we started out on this journey of shared responsibility in the management of tuna resources, we fully expected this Commission to be strong and effective to ensure the resources which are so important to us all, are properly managed. Mr Chairman it is our hope that in the course of this week, this Commission is able to take decisions that live up to our expectations for the benefit of all that sit around this table.

We are here to play our part, and look forward to working with you and fellow members, in meeting our responsibilities for our mutual benefit.

Thank you Mr Chairman.