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Tuvalu Opening Statement for WCPFC12

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Tuvalu Opening Statement - WCPFC 12, Bali, Indonesia (3-8 Dec. 2015)

Hon. Elisala Pita, Minister for Natural Resources

Madame Chair, honourable Ministers, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, good morning and Talofa to you all. I am pleased once again to be attending this Commission meeting in Bali, and would like to express my thanks to the Government of Indonesia for hosting the meeting.

My purpose in making this statement is to draw to your attention, for the third year in a row, to the critical importance of the decisions made at this meeting to a small fishery-dependent state like Tuvalu, and the negative impacts they can have on us.

As I have told you before, our nation is small, remote, and weighed down by the diseconomies of isolation. We have only 26 square kilometres of land but a million square kilometres of ocean, so our fishery resources are fundamentally important to us – we have almost nothing else. Tuvalu's fishery revenues finance our schools, our hospitals, and, increasingly, the welfare of our outer island communities.

Madame Chair, I fear I am repeating myself when I tell you now, as I did last year, that I remain extremely concerned about the results of decisions taken by this Commission.

Last year in Apia Samoa we agreed, through CMM 2014-01, to maintain the 4th month of FAD closure, or equivalent measures, originally agreed in 2013 as a way to conserve bigeye. Tuvalu, like other PNA countries, has been rigorously implementing the 4th month FAD closure. Because purse-seining in Tuvalu is highly FAD-dependent, this has greatly reduced the profitability and attractiveness of fishing in Tuvalu waters, and compromised our fishery revenues. A report from SPC, produced earlier this month, confirms that the profitability of fishing on free schools in our waters is currently 22% less than

on FADs – and it also confirms that the level of bigeye taken in these FAD sets is low compared to other areas.

And, once again, as we did last year, we have learned that other WCPFC coastal states have failed to impose the FAD closure in their waters, DWFN longliners did not deliver the bigeye catch reductions they committed to, and bigeye catches in the high seas have continued to increase.

One again, Chair, the way that this measure has been implemented – or, should I say, not implemented – has increased the disproportionate burden on Tuvalu, one of the smallest and most fragile economies in the world. I am becoming weary of telling this Commission that our people do not understand why Tuvalu should subsidise the fishing vessels of developed countries, or those nations who appear to have no intention of controlling their fleets.

Chair, this year PNA is proposing a revision to CMM 2014-01, which will address some of these issues by prohibiting transshipment of frozen bigeye at sea, limit purse-seining in the high seas, and tighten up the FAD closures by prohibiting pre-dawn sets by purse-seiners. Taken together, these changes will reduce loopholes that are currently being exploited by some Commission members to evade the controls they have agreed to. I hope and expect that members of this Commission will recognise their responsibilities and accept the refinements that we have proposed. If they do not, Chair, then Tuvalu will have no alternative but to reconsider its position in regard to continued implementation of the FAD closures. We cannot continue to accept a disproportionate burden from Commission CMMs if other members refuse to share at least part of it.

Chair, other management measures also continue to be manipulated by members of this Commission to the disadvantage of SIDS. This applies in particular to the development of national fishing capacity by Pacific Island coastal states. Tuvalu is still struggling to develop its own domestic purse-seine fleet in order to participate more fully in the harvesting of our own fishery

resources. For four years now we have been trying to expand our fleet from just one to two vessels, which does not seem unreasonable for a state where DWFN currently harvest 60,000 tonnes of fish each year.

Until just a few weeks ago the construction of our second vessel continued to be blocked by certain Commission members on the pretext that it would be inconsistent with WCPFC capacity management measures – in exactly the same way that the construction of our first vessel was blocked. I would stress, Madame Chair, that the recent unblocking of this process was not because these CCMs suddenly decided to respect and abide by the measures of this Commission. It was because, at the request of Tuvalu, PNA threatened to prohibit fishing in PNA waters by vessels of the CCMs concerned. We will be watching the behaviour of these CCMs carefully from now on, and we will not agree to capacity management measures through this Commission until we are convinced that they have truly adopted policies and processes consistent with SIDS legitimate rights to develop their own fisheries for their own benefit.

I will close by once again reminding this Commission of Article 30 of the WCPF Convention, which describes the collective obligation of members to consider the disproportionate burden that management measures might place on small-island developing states. Tuvalu remains determined not to carry a disproportionate share of this burden while developed countries evade their responsibilities.

Madame Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I wish you well in your deliberations. During your discussions I hope you will remember that this fishery takes place primarily in the Pacific Islands, and must be managed in a way that provides benefits to the people of that region. And I hope and pray that at next year's Commission meeting I can make a more positive statement, which congratulates members for addressing these issues in a responsible and positive way.
