



Statement to the SIDS Conference on behalf of Fisheries Ministers of PSIDS

Context

The 15 SIDS in the FFA membership include some of the smallest island states in the world in terms of population and land area, and are highly vulnerable to natural disasters and economic shocks. However, they are also ‘large ocean states’ and are custodians of the resources of exclusive economic zones that comprise an area of over 20 million km². These EEZs make up a large part of the western and central Pacific Ocean, and support the world’s largest tuna fishery with annual catches of 1.6 million tonnes per annum. This makes a substantial contribution to global food security, providing 40% of the global supply of tuna for canning (a nutritious, economical and shelf-stable product which is mainly consumed in the developed world). The three tuna species which provide 95% of this catch are harvested within sustainable limits. However, although this fish is caught in Pacific Islands EEZs, around two-thirds of it is taken by foreign vessels, and only about 10% is processed onshore in the region where it is caught.

As Pacific Island countries, we have a high dependence on fisheries for food security; but rely mainly on small-scale inshore fisheries to provide for these needs. Per capita consumption of fish in some atoll countries is among the highest in the world and in all countries exceeds the global average. Participation in fishing, both for subsistence and to derive income, is very high in coastal communities. Unfortunately these inshore resources are under pressure in many areas, and high value export species have been severely depleted. As a result of population growth, it is expected that many countries will face a deficit in local fish supply in the next 20 years of around 100,000 tonnes in total. In the longer term, climate change is also expected to reduce the production potential of these inshore fisheries.

We recognize that access to development assistance appears to have driven much of the debate during the preparatory process. However, in the case of our oceanic resources, Pacific SIDS simply call for effective recognition of our sovereign rights and privileges as already provided for in international law to sustainably manage the pelagic resources in our region in a way that enables us to contribute fully to our own development. With that, Pacific SIDS would be able to be true partners with the

international community in the responsible management and sound economic maximization of the regional tuna resources and global tuna value chain and markets.

Of course that is not to say that we do not need the assistance of our international friends. We very much need continued assistance and cooperation, but it should be focussed on building our capacity to directly participate in the regional fisheries management process, and more importantly, mechanisms for us to seize the opportunities for sustainable economic development that we are presented through our fisheries resources.

To recap, for tuna fisheries, our priority at this conference is for the full recognition of our rights under the international law of the sea. There are innumerable international agreements already in force related to fisheries and oceans that embrace these concepts, but what is required from this meeting transcends that text. It must drive concerted actions amongst the global community. We have some specific recommendations to provide.

Oceanic Fisheries Priorities

The PSIDS oceanic fisheries initiatives that we would like to see embraced and actioned by the international community include:

- **Zone-based management:** recognition of the rights of coastal States to control the disposition of fishing opportunities within their own waters, and to develop their own fisheries within and adjacent to their own waters according to precautionary limits that ensure the biological and economic sustainability of highly migratory and straddling fish stocks. Most RFMOs still compile fisheries catch and fisheries trade statistics by the flag of the catching nation and allocate fishing opportunities based on flag catch history, but in this region WCPFC has taken the first steps to recognise, in its Tropical Tuna Conservation and Management Measure, zone-based management of the purse-seine fishery by Pacific SIDS. FFA members will shortly be introducing a zone-based cooperative management scheme for south Pacific albacore tuna, and proposing similar recognition at WCPFC11 here in Samoa in December.
- **Best-practice management:** We want to see regional tuna fisheries managed according to agreed target and limit reference points, using harvest control rules. And we want to see Target Reference Points for the Western Pacific tuna fisheries that are NOT overfished to be set at more stringent levels than those which achieve “Maximum Sustainable Yield” – levels which are in accord with the full wording of Articles 61 and 119 of UNCLOS and take into account the need to maintain economically as well as biologically sustainable fisheries, and the special requirements of SIDS. Maximum Sustainable yield simply does not maintain stocks at a level where it is viable for SIDS to

participate more fully, and often remove economic opportunities to achieve greater financial returns from the resources we own.

- **Overcapacity:** Global overcapacity that exists in tuna fisheries must be addressed in the context of rights-based management, particularly the rights of coastal States and SIDS to determine the allocation of fishing opportunities within their own EEZs. This overcapacity is actually distant water developed country fishing overcapacity, not SIDS overcapacity. We fear that moves within RFMOs to limit numbers of vessels by flag fishing state will lock out the ability of small island state regions to develop fishing opportunities in their own waters, at their own pace. FFA members intend to manage the amount of fish that can be produced through formal, recognised zone-based limits on catch and effort, rather than flag-based limits on the number of vessels. If foreign vessel operators wish to keep building vessels then they must recognise that these vessels will be increasingly competing for a limited number of fishing opportunities, and that in the FFA region we will allocate these limited fishing opportunities according to the degree of domestic economic benefit that vessels provide.
- **High seas management:** Although we would prefer to see better fisheries management on the high seas of our region, in the continued absence of sufficiently effective management we wish to see wider recognition of the value of targeted closures to fishing activity of certain high seas areas, particularly high seas pockets where IUU fishing appears to be occurring. The SIDS that are Parties to the Nauru Agreement have since 2009 required vessels that are licenced to fish in their waters not to fish in the two high seas pockets of the tropical western Pacific, and FFA Ministers agreed last year to make it a condition that EEZ-licenced vessels must not fish in the eastern high seas pocket between Cook Islands, Kiribati and French Polynesia. However these closures are not currently recognised by the WCPFC. Because these areas can be fished by non-Pacific Island licenced vessels this results in a disproportionate burden of conservation on PSIDS. We would like to see the international community recognise that targeted area closures are a legitimate fisheries management mechanism for combatting IUU fishing, even if such closures include high seas areas.
- **And, to bring this list to a close, we would also like to see those members of the international community that are most vocal about supporting the fisheries development aspirations of Pacific SIDS being more consistent in applying their support, not only in their international development agendas, but also in their approach to regional fisheries management and trade negotiations. All too often we have seen developed-country fisheries negotiators undermining the good work of their development officials. This has become most obvious to us at WCPFC meetings, where FFA members consistently put forward proposals for more effective tuna fisheries conservation measures that protect our fisheries and provide opportunities for our development, while other**

nations consistently veto or otherwise undermine these measures, or their main elements. RFMO members who block such agreements in order to maintain or increase their fishing on the high seas are definitely not contributing to our development. They are siphoning off our shared fish for their own benefit.