

## **THE VAVA'U DECLARATION ON PACIFIC FISHERIES RESOURCES**

### **“OUR FISH, OUR FUTURE”**

We, the Leaders of the Pacific Islands Forum, meeting at Vava'u in the Kingdom of Tonga:

RECOGNISING that our regional fisheries resources remain a key driver for sustainable economic growth in the region, especially for small island states, and that they must as a consequence be supported by responsible and effective stewardship;

RECALLING the commitment by Leaders under the Pacific Plan to maximise sustainable returns from fisheries by developing an ecosystem based fisheries management planning framework; encouraging effective fisheries development, including value-adding activities; and collaboration to ensure legislation and access frameworks are harmonised;

ALSO RECOGNISING the aspirations of Pacific Islands countries to strengthen their engagement in sustainable fisheries and to maximise the flow on benefits from both domestic fisheries and foreign fishing operations in the region;

RECALLING in this context our 2004 call for closer Ministerial oversight of Pacific fisheries issues;

NOTING with appreciation and deep concern the report on the current state of Pacific fisheries provided to us by the current Chair of the Forum Fisheries Committee, at the request of the Committee's 64th Meeting, held at Ministerial level;

COGNISANT of the significant economic opportunities which the regional fisheries resource offers to all our members, and of the comparatively low returns on the resource being achieved by countries in the region;

SEIZED by the scientific advice that over-fishing of two key regional tuna species – bigeye and yellowfin tuna – now places stock levels in jeopardy;

CONSCIOUS therefore of the imperative need for us to take immediate and decisive collective action to ensure that, within the next three to five years, we secure our peoples' future livelihoods, regional food security, and environmental sustainability of our seas and their ecosystems;

HEREBY reaffirm the importance of fisheries to the economies of all Pacific Forum countries, and commit ourselves to:

- PROMOTING DOMESTIC FISHERIES, in particular the development of national tuna industries, in the context of a phased introduction of rights-based management arrangements supported by an appropriate management and regulatory framework;

- **DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT OF COASTAL/INSHORE FISHERIES** and aquaculture to support food security, sustainable livelihoods and economic growth for current and future generations of Pacific people;
- **MAINTAINING REGIONAL SOLIDARITY** among Forum member countries in managing the region's tuna stocks;
- **STRENGTHENING OUR SUPPORT** for the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and other regional fisheries bodies as they intensify their efforts in applying a long-term strategic approach to Pacific fisheries, and in tuna species in particular, to ensure that these resources are effectively managed so as to provide enduring economic, social and cultural benefits;
- **UPHOLDING AND STRENGTHENING** the existing regional and national arrangements, agreements and conservation measures that protect this essential resource; and

CONSISTENT with our earlier calls for the sustainable utilisation of fisheries resources, and with our concerns regarding food security for future generations, we further solemnly COMMIT ourselves and our governments to the conservation and sustainable management of highly migratory tuna resources by:

- **FULLY IMPLEMENTING** without delay the conservation and management measures developed and endorsed by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC);
- **SEEKING THE URGENT ADOPTION OF ADDITIONAL MEASURES** by the WCPFC to address over-fishing of bigeye and yellowfin, including a reduction in longline catches and addressing purse seine fishing, and specific steps to reduce the catch of juvenile bigeye and yellowfin;
- **RECOGNISING THE ASPIRATIONS OF SMALL ISLANDS DEVELOPING STATES** to develop their domestic fisheries and **CALLING ON DEVELOPED MEMBER COUNTRIES** of the Commission to implement measures to support such endeavours;
- **DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING**, with the assistance of the Forum Fisheries Agency, a comprehensive regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) strategy;
- **INVESTIGATING AND TAKING APPROPRIATE STEPS** as a matter of priority to strengthen, simplify and give full transparency to our national fisheries governance and licensing arrangements;
- **CONTINUING SUPPORT** as appropriate for the current tuna tagging initiative of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, including the aspiration that it expand to cover the rest of the Pacific; and,

- SUPPORTING AND ENDORSING efforts by the Forum Fisheries Agency, supported by the Forum Secretariat, to take forward as a matter of urgency work to examine the potential for new multilateral Pacific regional arrangements patterned on the Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement model for exchange of fisheries law enforcement data, cross-vesting of enforcement powers, and use of fisheries data for other law enforcement activities; and

CONSISTENT with our previous deliberations, REAFFIRM the Declaration on Deep Sea Bottom Trawling adopted at the 2006 Nadi Forum and WELCOME the subsequent UNGA Resolution 61/105 which called for strong measures to regulate and manage deep sea bottom trawling;

COMMIT to the protection of high seas biodiversity and the conservation and management of non-highly migratory fish stocks in the Pacific Ocean;

ENCOURAGE effective participation in the negotiations to deliver a best-practice South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation in view of the longer-term strategic significance to Members and the possible interaction of the high seas pelagic stocks with tuna resources governed by the WCPFC;

AGREE TO RAISE THESE DEEP CONCERNS as a matter of urgency with Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFNs) and regional coastal states participating in the Post-Forum Dialogue, and urge their close cooperation with our efforts; and,

REQUEST the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Forum Secretariat and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission to jointly monitor progress in implementing these commitments, and reporting on this – especially progress in regional tuna management – under the Pacific Plan to Forum Fisheries Ministers and our next Leaders' Meeting for further consideration.

Oct 2007