

Statement to the 2nd WCPFC meeting

5 to 17 December 2005, Pohnpei

Honourable Chairman, Distinguished representatives of member governments of the WCPFC, the Executive Director of the WCPFC, Delegates of respective Committees, fellow observers, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Greenpeace thanks you for permitting us to address this forum and takes this opportunity also, on behalf of everyone, to extend our gratitude to the people and the Government of the Federated States of Micronesia for the hospitality provided to all of us here.

It is no secret that as global fish stocks collapse the Pacific Ocean is being preyed upon increasingly by Distant Water Fishing Nations. Our ocean is thus under immense pressure. Yet we still have an opportunity to ensure that the mistakes of other regions are not repeated here. The Pacific Ocean's resources do not belong to the fishing industry or to governments alone. They belong to all the people of the Pacific and it is their interest that must be placed above all else. As such, and according to the terms of the Convention, it is incumbent on the Commission to apply the precautionary principle to fisheries management so that where there is scientific uncertainty regarding the effects of an activity on the natural environment, we should constrain such activity until proof, of either no effect or a negative impact, is obtained.

Greenpeace has a three-tiered set of solutions to propose in application of the precautionary approach that will ensure the sustainability and prudent management of highly migratory fish stocks.

1. Overfishing, Overcapacity and Capacity Migration:

Overfishing is the greatest threat to our oceans and its ecosystems. Greenpeace is very concerned about the status of two key tuna species in our region, namely, bigeye and yellowfin. The stocks of these highly vulnerable and valuable fish are already showing signs of overfishing. The status of stocks are under greater threat with the construction of fishing vessels with increased capacity and the migration of foreign fishing vessels from collapsed or collapsing fisheries around the world.

Recommendations have been developed by the Commission's Scientific Committee in response to the status of these two key tuna species. Any effort reduction is a good thing and is welcomed, but if we are talking about it in terms of the estimated maximum sustainable yield (M_{SY}) for tuna populations as recommended by the Scientific committee, then we could be heading for trouble. There are several reasons for this view. Firstly, M_{SY} doesn't sufficiently incorporate physical and biological variations in stocks. It brings the fish stock too low with the risk of collapse. Secondly, M_{SY} is a management concept that assumes that fish populations have value only as catch and ignores their wider role in the ecosystem. Since the conservation and management measures of the Convention emphasise ecosystem-based approaches higher safety margins are needed. Furthermore, the impacts of IUU fishing must be taken into account in catch and effort data so that they can be factored into existing management measures.

We are, therefore, as part of our first tier of solutions, calling for:

- much greater effort reduction; more than the recommended 20% based on M_{SY} by the Scientific Committee, to accommodate uncertainties in the fisheries science and in compliance with ecosystem-based approaches to fisheries management;
- compliance with a United Nations call for a 20-30% reduction in the sizes of fishing fleets;
- consequently, an immediate halt on the construction of new purse seine and longline vessels intended to fish in the WCPO, and controls on the relocation/deployment of such vessels from other areas; and
- immediate prohibition of transshipments at sea, with transshipments to occur in designated ports, as provided for in the Convention.

We expect a collaborative effort in ensuring that these critical solutions are observed at the Commission level and that interest-based politics will not overtake the very pressing need to conserve these species.

2. Strengthening Monitoring, Compliance and Surveillance (MCS) systems and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (IUU)

However, effort reductions alone do not make fish stocks sustainable. Another key threat to the sustainability of fish stocks in our region is varied and weak monitoring, compliance and surveillance systems compounded by the demon of pirate or IUU fishing. Despite the right aspirations and the political will of Pacific peoples and governments to strengthen MCS systems, Pacific Islands have the stark realities of poor infrastructure, lack of capacity, limited and over-stretched resources and competing development priorities to deal with and balance. The fact that IUU operations are vague, secretive and thrive on loopholes that make them hard to detect makes monitoring, compliance and surveillance even more difficult. Therefore, this Commission must collaborate with other RFMO's, the MCS network, NGO's and other organisations to strengthen and harmonise MCS systems across the region and work towards eradicating IUU totally. The second tier of solutions by way of recommendations on MCS and IUU are in an information paper which we have provided to members and observers of the TCC. We invite you to consider these seriously .

3. Marine Reserves

Strengthening MCS coupled with effort reductions are positive steps to take provided we do take them. However, they are grounded in the conventional fisheries management paradigm and do not resolve the dilemma that these approaches have failed to work elsewhere. This is where our third tier of solutions come in and the solution is the establishment of no-take marine reserves.

Marine reserves are not something new. Where there are marine reserves – which are a fraction of 1% of the oceans, scientists have shown that fish stocks recover and become more productive. Marine reserves have been shown to result in long-lasting and often rapid increases in marine populations, their diversity and productivity. A network of such parks can significantly benefit fisheries in a number of ways. They allow exploited stocks and damaged habitats to recover within the reserves themselves and there is clear evidence that they improve population sizes in adjacent fishing grounds.

As a first step, we propose that you consider three high seas areas as potential marine reserves:

- ◆ in the enclosed high seas area bounded by Palau, FSM, PNG and Indonesia;
- ◆ in the enclosed high seas area bounded by FSM, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Nauru and Marshall Islands
- ◆ and the smaller enclosed high seas area bounded by Samoa, Cook islands, and French Polynesia.

These areas are strategically placed and implementing reserves in these areas will not compromise the income you derive from fisheries conducted within your EEZs.

But this is about more than just fish. Reserves benefit highly migratory fish species and the entire marine ecosystem and can and should be designed so that they protect endangered and rare species or habitats, critical feeding grounds, nursery areas and migration routes. While some marine reserves are needed to serve urgent protection and conservation needs, arguably the most important benefit of such reserves comes over the longer term, in helping to ensure that our oceans remain healthy and productive for future generations.

We applaud the efforts of Palau, Kiribati and more recently Fiji for making leaps in this area by designating strategic areas of their waters as either protected areas or reserves. We trust that other Pacific Islands will take their cue from this progressive leadership.

Esteemed members of the Commission, the solutions to the sustainability of fish stocks in the Pacific do not lie in the singular or dual adoption and implementation of the solutions we have proposed, ie. in effort reductions or strengthening MCS and eradicating IUU or in establishing marine reserves. The best solution lies in adopting and implementing all three. It is this wholistic approach or what we know also as ecosystem-based fisheries management that will ensure the sustainability of fish stocks in our region. The future of

the Pacific Ocean is in your able hands. Let us not go down the path like other RFMOs with proven records of failures but instead be the first to provide exemplary leadership in conserving one of the greatest resources of our people – the Pacific Ocean.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to working closely with you for the greater good of our region.

Vinaka Vakalevu

(delivered by)

Lai Waqanisau
Oceans Campaigner.

Greenpeace delegation to the 2nd meeting of the WCPFC:

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2. Lai Waqanisau - Oceans Campaigner