

**Draft Statement for Secretary General Puna**  
**For the**  
**Interactive Dialogue 4: Making fisheries sustainable and providing access for**  
**small scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets**

**[Salutations]**

It is indeed an honor for me to be part of this important discussion as fisheries is a standing priority for the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders embodied by their commitment to ensure the long-term sustainability and economic viability of the Blue Pacific's fisheries, and, recognizing its centrality to the wellbeing of our communities and economies.

Our fisheries are vital to the prosperity of Pacific peoples. It supports our economies by generating revenue and employment opportunities. It also contributes greatly to food security in our region. This was evident when many of our people turned to the ocean for their sustenance when COVID-19 reached our shores causing loss of jobs and urban to rural drift.

However, the sustainability of our fisheries resources, is being compromised by illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing, harmful fisheries subsidies, impacts of climate change and marine pollution.

***So what is the Blue Pacific doing to address overfishing and ensure the continued viability of fish stocks?***

*Regional Fisheries Agencies*

In the Pacific region, we have various agencies that work towards ensuring the sustainable management and development of our fisheries resources.

We have the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency that supports the management of our offshore fisheries resources. It works very closely with a sub-regional organization called the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA). The PNA consists of 8 countries and a territory, all small island developing states (SIDS), yet controls around 50% of the global supply of the most commonly canned tuna, skipjack tuna. These agencies work in collaboration with the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, a regional fisheries management organization, to sustainably manage the tuna resource in our region and the high seas.

In addition, we have the Pacific Community (SPC) who provides technical and scientific support to the work of FFA and WCPFC in the management of tuna, and also supports Pacific countries and territories in managing their coastal fisheries resources and aquaculture.

I bring this to you to illustrate not only the importance of fisheries to our region, but to highlight the importance of multi-country and multi-stakeholder partnerships in managing fisheries resources.

### *Stock status and Zone based fisheries management*

To date, the Western and Central Pacific Ocean remains the only ocean with healthy tuna stocks. This is due largely to the cooperative management by the PNA under the auspices of FFA and the WCPFC. All four commercial tuna species are considered to be healthy, managed at biologically sustainable levels, and none are considered to be overfished. PNA members heavily rely on tuna as it generates up to approximately 30 percent to 90 percent of their government revenues from tuna fishing license fees.

Tuna fisheries in other ocean areas across the globe have issues of overfishing and we encourage them to learn from the Pacific region. Our Blue Pacific Ocean remains sustainable because of the robust zone-based fisheries management regimes including high levels of cooperation and coordination to combat and deter IUU fishing in the Pacific. This is evidence that ‘zone-based fisheries management’ approach is a successful approach to fisheries management. Our region fully supports this approach and calls on distant water fishing nations to recognize and support Pacific SIDS undertake effective management of their tuna fisheries within their Exclusive Economic Zones.

### *IUU Fishing and Fisheries Subsidies*

It is therefore of great importance to our region that we continue to work together to sustainably manage our fisheries resources. A recent study reported that the total annual value of tuna harvested or transhipped in the Pacific that involves IUU fishing is approximated at USD333 million. This represents about 6.5% of the total tuna catch in the WCPFC Convention Area in 2019.

### *Fisheries Subsidies*

Pacific voices were heard and visible in shaping the outcome of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference that concluded a few weeks ago in Geneva. Leading into the MC12, fisheries subsidies was the top priority given its significance for the region. A priority that is mandated through SGD14.6. After intense negotiations and compromises during MC12, a “partial agreement” on fisheries subsidies was reached. While not the perfect agreement, the partial agreement is the only legally binding agreement, focused only on two pillars – Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Overfished stocks, plus notification and transparency.

The Pacific and the ACP fought hard for certain flexibilities for developing countries of the WTO members. The flexibilities are important as they provide the policy space we need to develop our fishery, be it coastal or offshore.

The Pacific now calls on the WTO and large subsidizers to show commitment to continue negotiations to include overcapacity and overfishing and to reach a comprehensive agreement as mandated in SDG 14.6 as soon as possible. Experts estimate that 54 per cent of high seas fishing grounds would be unprofitable if subsidies were eliminated. Academic estimates of total annual global fisheries subsidies in 2018 amount to about \$35 billion, including about \$22 billion in capacity-enhancing subsidies.

Unless overcapacity and overfishing are addressed, large subsidizers will continue to subsidize their fleets, creating unfair competition to the detriment of smaller developing coastal states and importantly, continue their unsustainable race to fish.

#### *Port State Measures*

The region is committed to meet international requirements in dealing with the use and entry of ports through the UN FAO Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA). Currently, Fiji, Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu have ratified the PSMA while some are undertaking national processes toward ratification.

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is taking the lead in managing the high seas. Driven by its Members, the WCPFC has a suite of conservation and management measures (CMM) designed to conserve and sustainably manage highly migratory fish stocks such as tuna and tuna-like species. These include CMM 2017-02 that establishes the minimum standards for Port State Measures.

The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and its membership are also in the forefront of developing, strengthening and implementing strategies, systems and management framework to ensure sustainability of the offshore fisheries resources in the region. These include putting in place regional monitoring, control and surveillance strategy (RMCSS), including the Regional PSM Framework that identify the PSM “as a key control and enforcement mechanism for fishing vessels and their activities” and explains that PSM are “one of the useful MCS tool in overall MCS toolbox available to members in the fight against IUU fishing.

While not all Pacific Island Countries have ratified the PSMA, all of them have implemented compatible port state measures domestically. These include the demarcation of designated ports, inter-agency cooperation, 72-hour port call notices, pre-boarding inspections, boarding and inspections, unloading authorization, amongst others.

#### **Strengthening the implementation of small-scale fisheries co-management**

In 2016, Forum Leaders recognized the importance of coastal fisheries and tasked the Pacific Community (SPC) to coordinate with national fisheries agencies, Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific agencies and regional and national community groups, to strengthen support and resourcing for coastal fisheries management. This strengthened the participation by key stakeholders including non-state actors in the decision making processes.

Many of the fisheries administrations in the Pacific are small and the responsibility of managing large area of ocean whether it be inshore or offshore, is a huge undertaking. To effectively manage the fisheries resources, co-management support from communities is required. Support towards this approach was reflected in the endorsement of the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling-up Community-based Fisheries Management by our Pacific Fisheries Ministers in 2021. In endorsing this, Ministers emphasized the importance of coastal fisheries resources to their people and communities, essential during the pandemic, and key to a sustainable recovery from the pandemic.

### *Conclusion*

Despite the many potential opportunities our vast ocean provides, our fisheries resources remains a key priority to us. As a collective, our region will continue to work to protect this resource for the people of the Pacific from the devastating impacts of climate change and disasters. For those tuna-dependent economies, the impact of climate variations on the redistribution of tuna will have significant revenue implications.

With all the challenges we continue to face whether it be from the impacts of climate change or from high inflation, our region remains optimistic and is working towards a 2050 vision to be reflected in a 2050 Strategy where ocean and its resources will continue to play a pivotal role in achieving our Leaders 2050 vision.