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## 7<sup>TH</sup> MEETING OF THE COMMISSION

*The Hague, The Netherlands, 23 to 27 January 2019*

### COMM7-Report ANNEX 10b Opening Statement by Mr Osvaldo Urrutia *SPRFMO Commission Chairperson*

Distinguished Director General of Nature, Fisheries and Rural Area of the Dutch Government, Mr Johan Osinga; distinguished Delegates of Commission's Members, CNCPs and Observers; ladies and gentlemen:

I am honoured to open the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) at The Hague, such an iconic city for international relations, a byword for peaceful understanding among the members of the international community and certainly the capital of international law. I wish to express my sincere and deep appreciation to the Dutch Government and its fishing industry, and the European Union, for hosting this Commission Meeting, and for the outstanding support and facilities provided. We are grateful for your hospitality.

2018 was a special year for the work of SPRFMO. Dr Sebastian Rodriguez took over as our new Executive Secretary. I want to welcome him once again to our family and to thank him for this year of work. Sebastian is a natural leader, he has the highest standards of professionalism and at a personal level it has been a pleasure to share this fruitful time with him. I trust we will continue working together.

As you know, in May the Commission had to deal with the objection to the jack mackerel CMM presented by Ecuador, according to Art 17 and Annex II of the SPRFMO Convention. Beyond the particular outcome and the findings of the panel, the procedure confirmed that we have a solid legal system to address these kinds of disagreements among the Commission members, and we should be proud of it.

A third development during 2018 was the establishment and report of the Performance Review Panel. I would like to express my appreciation to Penelope, Alexa, Lyn and Stuart for their outstanding, extremely professional and constructive report. Their conclusions show that SPRFMO is a solid organisation that have performed well during its 7 years of existence. The report highlights that we indeed have several challenges ahead. I hope this report is the first step towards a productive discussion at this meeting and in the forthcoming future, allowing us, as Commission, to improve our performance towards achieving the objectives of the Convention.

Regarding the many tasks ahead for this meeting: as you have realised, this year we have an extremely busy agenda in front of us. I have no recollection of a past meeting when we have had so many relevant issues to discuss and important decisions to make, not least in sensitive matters such as the allocation of SPRFMO resources.

We will have to discuss the recommendations coming from the CTC, which held its sessions from Saturday to Monday, under the exceptional leadership of Andrew Wright from NZ. The discussions led to positive outcomes and I am personally very satisfied to see how our compliance performance improves every year. There were incidents to address, and we will need, as Commission, to take responsible decisions on the IUU List. I don't need to remind this distinguished audience about the importance the outside world, including other RFMOs and civil society, places on combating IUU fishing.

We will also need to engage in the work of the FAC, which will need to address several proposals and deal with the SPRFMO budget. This is a complex topic. As you know, our Organisation has had a tight budget, and this can affect the efficiency of our performance. I invite all members to look at this matter closely and as informed as possible. I would also like to take the opportunity to express my appreciation to China and the EU for their



voluntary contributions to the budget and activities of SPRFMO, not least the generous EU contribution to the future SPRFMO observer programme.

I will not refer to each one of the proposals we have ahead of us, but I would like to remind you of two relevant topics where we need to make our utmost efforts to address constructively:

1.- We have two relevant issues concerning bottom fishing. One is the technical aspects, the substantive measures to manage sustainably and protect bottom fisheries stocks and ecosystems. This is work in process. A different but related one is the allocation of orange roughy. We have two Commission members, Australia and New Zealand, who have come to the Commission with their arguments and positions on a sensitive matter for their national interests. I urge all the members to engage constructively in this discussion, to fully understand the arguments presented by these members and to help to achieve a sensible solution.

2.- The second one is the proposal for the Observer Programme. We are all very aware of how important this issue is. This is also work in progress and I am confident we will be able to agree on a robust measure for our organisation.

Before closing, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you all personally, and especially the Secretariat and the Executive Secretary himself, the Chairs of the SPRFMO subsidiary bodies: Dr Jim Ianelli from the US, Ms Kerrie Robertson from Australia and Mr Andy Wright from NZ, for your support and advice during this year as Chairperson of the Commission.

With these words, I am pleased to declare the 7<sup>th</sup> meeting of the SPRFMO Commission open.

Thank you very much.