

**6th Meeting of the Commission
Lima, Peru, 30 January to 3 February 2018**

COMM6-Report ANNEX12b: Opening Speech, VI Commission Meeting

(Osvaldo Urrutia, SPRFMO Chairperson)

[Distinguida Ministra de Produccion del Peru, Sra Lieneke Scholl; distinguido Vice Ministro de Pesca del Peru, Sr Hector Soldi; distinguidos congresistas peruanos hoy presentes, distinguished Delegates of Commission's Members, Cooperating NCPs and observers; ladies and gentlemen:]

I am honoured to open the 6th Meeting of the Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) here in Lima. I wish to express appreciation to the Government of Peru for hosting this Commission Meeting and for the outstanding support and facilities provided. We are grateful for the wonderful Peruvian hospitality we have been offered, and for the warm people we have met over the Compliance and Technical Committee (CTC) sessions last week.

For this opening speech, I would like to refer to some aspects of our past and present work that are important to bear in mind while we meet up these days under the SPRFMO framework.

Let me start by recalling that, roughly 5 or 6 years ago, the collapse of the jack mackerel fishery to an estimated 5% of the unfished biomass made this fishery one of the most depleted stocks in the world. The lessons we learnt should never be forgotten by the participants to SPRFMO. Please allow me to quote Mr Bill Mansfield, the first Chair of the SPRFMO Commission, who stated in 2013: “a straddling stock cannot be managed sustainably if, in the years in which it is concentrated in the high seas, it is over fished by distant water fleets and, in the years in which it is concentrated in the exclusive economic zones it is over fished by vessels authorized by the coastal states.”

The only possible answer to this tragedy of the commons was, as it is today, meaningful international cooperation. The agreement to collect and exchange relevant information, to accept scientific advice on the state of the jack mackerel fishery and to restrain catches accordingly, lay down the very foundations of this organisation. As you know, the situation of the jack mackerel stock is very different now. Thanks to our committed efforts, the conditions of this stock in the Southeast Pacific show a continued recovery since 2010. Fishing mortality is estimated today to be well below F_{MSY} levels, and Biomass near interim B_{MSY} . Recruitment signs continue to be positive.

This temporary story of success highlights the spirit of cooperation, commitment and responsibility that I believe should continue guiding our present and future actions regarding all the stocks we manage under the SPRFMO Convention, even when they exhibit different condition or status.

After our 5 first years of formal existence, SPRFMO has become a responsible and respected organisation in the international arena. But if we want to maintain and enhance this positive reputation, we need to continue our work. There is still much to do and we have important tasks in the forthcoming years. Our organisation is being watched by the international community, and I believe that our well-deserved reputation will be influenced by how we develop and achieve these tasks ahead.

It is in this context that I can proudly give account of the intersessional activities of the SPRFMO Commission, which explain the priorities our organisation is focussing today after the very positive outcomes of the previous Commission Meeting held in Adelaide, Australia, on January 2017. This work undertaken intersessionally highlights our main challenges for this meeting, and possible for our next years, and I would like to refer to them.

The 5th Meeting of the Scientific Committee was graciously organised and coordinated by China, in Shanghai, from 20 to 28 November, including a workshop on squid and another one on deep-water stocks. It was a big success and I take the opportunity to thank China for hosting that meeting, and also to Mr Jim Ianelli, for his commitment as SC Chair.

The SC adopted a precautionary approach and advised 2018 catches for the entire Jack mackerel range in the southeast Pacific at or below 576.000 tonnes. This is based on a lower fishing mortality than that recommended for 2017. Regarding the squid fishery, the SC and the workshop tackled biology, assessment methods, stock structure issues and research plans. In relation to deep water fishing, including orange roughy, the Scientific Committee looked at new and innovative methods to prevent significant adverse impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems and methods for data-poor stock assessments. As Mr Gordon Neil, my predecessor as Commission Chair, said last year, it is critical to our Organisation's success that SPRFMO values its scientific advice, and then acts accordingly. I am confident we are on the right path on this.

Under the umbrella of the CTC, our work has continued to advance proposals to agree on an SPRFMO Observer Programme, to streamline our VMS System, and to continue our attempts to upgrade our High Seas Boarding and Inspection Procedure, amongst others. I would like to express my gratitude to the US delegation and in particular to Michael Tosatto for his work on the Observer Programme and the HSBI, and to Luis Molledo from the EU for his leadership in coordinating the VMS discussion, and to all those Members who joined the intersessional work.

Under the Financial and Administrative Committee, we have worked intersessionally on some key aspects of the internal work of our Commission, and particularly in achieving a sustainable budget formula. I would like to thank the current FAC Chair, Ms Kerrie Robertson from Australia, for her leadership in discussing this issue and I urge members to continue discussing and making efforts to reach agreement on this relevant matter, over this meeting.

Some members also worked to develop and table important proposals. The regulation of some of the fisheries we manage has been given high consideration.

Bottom fisheries receive global attention and the sustainability of target species and deep water ecosystems is a key aspect of our work. I am grateful of the efforts made by Commission members and particularly to Australia and NZ, and I am confident that the discussions over this meeting will lead to the adoption of an overall and long-term measure for next year.

Something similar can be said with regards to the squid fishery. True, this stock was not a priority years ago when SPRFMO started as organisation. But the situation now is different, and over the last years SPRFMO has given more importance to this fishery. I would like to highlight that is imperative to avoid the trap of having inconsistent approaches to the regulation of the fisheries stocks we manage under the SPRFMO Convention. I personally envisage that our efforts over the forthcoming years should focus on achieving sustainable, effective and consistent regulations for all our fisheries, including not only jack mackerel but also deep water stocks and squid.

Indeed, there are also other important proposals we will need to discuss and agree upon during these days. I would like to draw your attention that our performance review provides us with that opportunity to review how we are going and make a plan about our next steps. I urge all Members to engage in the proposal tabled by the European Union and Australia.

At this meeting we will have the chance to appoint a new Executive Secretary and to bid a warm and much-deserved farewell to our current Executive Secretary, Mrs Johanne Fisher, and to thank her and her team for their ongoing enthusiasm and commitment to SPRFMO, as well as their personal support to me in my role as Chair. It is true that the Secretariat and a Chair are one of the key partnerships in any RFMO, and in this regard, I can assert my appreciation for our Executive Secretary and the Secretariat staff.

Before closing, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you all personally for your support and advice during this year as Chairperson of the Commission.

With these words, I am pleased to declare the 6th meeting of the SPRFMO Commission open.

Thank you very much.