

Chair's speech, opening of 3rd meeting of SPRFMO Commission, Auckland 2.1.2015

Distinguished delegates and observers, ladies and gentlemen, on your behalf, I would like to thank Deputy Secretary Gerard van Bohemen for his words of welcome on behalf of the Government of New Zealand. Through him I would also, on your behalf, wish to express appreciation to the Government of New Zealand for agreeing to host this third meeting of the Commission and for the facilities and support being provided. May I also acknowledge the warm welcome to you all to *Tamaki Makaurau* or Auckland on behalf of Maori as the tangata whenua or first people of the land of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Tena koe Martin.

The journey to this third meeting of the Commission has been an interesting one. Like Gerard and me, a few of you will personally remember it began in Wellington, New Zealand, in February 2006 following an invitation from Australia, Chile and New Zealand to all interested states and fishing entities to join them to discuss the establishment of a South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization and thereby to fill a major gap in the architecture of high seas fisheries management and protection of the marine environment in the South Pacific. It took us three years to negotiate and adopt the Convention here in Auckland in November 2009. And it was almost another three years before the Convention entered into force on 24 August 2012 enabling the first meeting of the Commission to be held, again here in

Auckland early in 2013. Although seven years may seem a long time from the commencement of negotiations to the establishment of a Commission with the ability to take binding conservation and management measures it bears comparison quite well with the time taken to develop other similar international agreements.

There were some serious setbacks over those seven years but we responded effectively to them and demonstrated the cooperation necessary to build a strong and effective regime for the future. The most serious setback was the collapse of the jack mackerel fishery to an estimated 5% of the unfished biomass making it one of the most depleted fish stocks in the world. In large part the cause of this collapse was a rush to fish during the negotiation of the Convention and also the fact that we had to learn the hard way that a straddling stock like jack mackerel 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 economic zones of coastal states it is over fished by vessels authorized by the relevant coastal states.

The cooperative response to this collapse was impressive. There were three elements. First, the voluntary agreement from the beginning to contribute fishing information that was very detailed even compared with that required by existing regional fisheries management organisations. Second, the willingness to accept the advice of our scientists, based on that information, on the state of

the jack mackerel fishery. Third, the agreement, initially on a voluntary basis, and later as a binding commitment to restrain overall catches to a level at or below that which the scientists advised there was a good chance it would rebuild.

This cooperative restraint seems to be producing results even if not as fast as we would like. Last year's report from the Scientific Committee said there were indications of an increase in spawning biomass consistent with the reductions in fishing mortality. Their advice this year is similarly positive provided fishing mortality is maintained at or below 2014 levels. They specifically recommend that the catch for 2015 be of the order of 460,000 tonnes or lower. Accordingly we will again have a challenging and sensitive negotiation on jack mackerel to ensure we comply with this advice. But I am confident we can do that.

We also have important work to do on the matters that the Compliance and Technical Committee has been working on inter-sessionally and also during its meeting here on Friday and Saturday. As you all know these matters include the examination of the draft list of vessels that appear to have engaged in illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) in the Convention Area. IUU fishing is the scourge of the cooperative efforts of states through organisations like this to regulate and control the catches of the vessels of their legitimate fishing companies. The owners of companies whose vessels engage in IUU fishing must be given the strongest possible message that such actions will not be tolerated

by this organization and that the vessels concerned can expect to be severely sanctioned.

The other elements of the Compliance and Technical Committee's work - development of a Vessel Monitoring Scheme, a Boarding and Inspection Scheme, procedures for Transshipment and the development of a Compliance and Monitoring Scheme are the remaining building blocks we need to have in place for the fully functioning and effective organization that we all want and that I am convinced is in everyone's interest.

For coastal states a strong and effective organisation will obviously play a key role in the effective management of high seas catches of any straddling stock that is important to them. But more generally the detailed information available through the Organisation about the vessels authorised to fish in the Convention area will also provide both an assurance that legitimate distant water fleets are respecting coastal state rights and an opportunity for cooperative action against IUU vessels whose actions threaten both high seas and coastal state fisheries.

For distant water fishing countries and entities a fully effective organisation will provide confidence that straddling stocks are being managed sustainably. But it will also provide assurance that action will be taken against IUU vessels and that distant water fleets that comply with the rules will not operate at a disadvantage against such vessels.

More generally an effective SPRFMO will serve the wider interest of the international community in maintaining the integrity of the ecosystems of the South Pacific Ocean.

We have come a long way. We have established a new organisation to manage this very large area of ocean. The Convention establishing the Organisation is at the leading edge of regional fisheries management organisation treaties and in particular has effective decision making and dispute settlement provisions. And we are well on the way to completing the full suite of measures needed to ensure its effective operation. The establishment of this Organisation now means that all states with an interest in fishing in the area covered by the Convention are obliged under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the United Nations Fish Stock Agreement and customary international law to join the Organisation or cooperate fully with it. Accordingly I think we can take some satisfaction that we have created the structure and systems necessary if we are to ensure that future generations can have access to fishery resources on a sustainable basis in this vast ocean.

So we have challenging work ahead of us this week but it is against a background of cooperation and considerable accomplishment over the past nine years and none of the hurdles are as difficult as the ones we have found a way over in the past.

May I conclude by again thanking, on your behalf, Gerard van Bohemen and the New Zealand Government for the welcome to

Auckland and for the facilities provided.

Please join me in expressing our thanks.