

Vice Minister Fernando Yopez, Vice Minister Guillermo Moran, delegates and observers, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure to be here in this modern major seaport and fisheries centre of Manta for this, the second meeting of the Commission of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation. Throughout the negotiations to conclude the Convention establishing this new organisation and during the period of the Preparatory Conference for this Commission we have generally met alternately on each side of the great South Pacific Ocean with which the Convention is concerned. On your behalf I want to say that we are very grateful to the Government of Ecuador for enabling us to continue this practice by agreeing to host this second meeting of the Commission. I also want to say that I am sure we all recognise that fisheries are enormously important for the city of Manta and for the country of Ecuador as a whole.

Our new Organisation has come into being at a time when fish stocks and the marine ecosystems that support them continue to be under heavy pressure world wide and yet there are few signs that the world fishing fleet is reducing in size or even stabilising. If future generations are to continue to have access to fishery resources we all have an obligation to cooperate to bring this situation under control – coastal states, distant water fishing states, ship building states, states of registry and regional fisheries management organisations such as ours. We all need to play our part.

Cooperation is especially important with regard to stocks like jack mackerel that straddle coastal state economic zones and the high seas. Obviously a 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 economic zones it is over fished by vessels authorised by the relevant coastal states. Unfortunately that is what seemed to happen with jack mackerel in the early years in which we were negotiating our Convention. The spawning biomass declined to an estimated 5% of the unfished biomass making it one of the most depleted fish stocks in the world. The good news is that faced with this serious situation participants accepted the advice of our scientists and, at first voluntarily, and then on a binding basis restrained overall catches to the level at or below that which the scientists advised there was a good chance the stock would begin to rebuild. The even better news is that the latest report from the Scientific Committee says there are some indications of an increase in spawning biomass consistent with the

reductions in fishing mortality. They are clear, however, that we should aim to maintain catches for the entire jack mackerel range in the southeast Pacific at or below the level they recommended last year of 440,000 tonnes. One of the most important tasks for this meeting, therefore, is to agree on the allocation of catches consistent with this scientific advice.

But we have other important work. For example in respect of other fisheries in the Convention area we must aim to adopt a conservation and management measure dealing with bottom fishing.

We also have important work to do on a range of issues and measures being considered or developed by the Compliance and Technical Committee that will strengthen the operation and effectiveness of the Convention. This work includes the examination of draft lists of vessels that appear to be engaged in illegal, unreported or unregulated fishing (IUU fishing) in the Convention Area, the development of a Vessel Monitoring Scheme, Port State Measures, a Boarding and Inspection Scheme, procedures for Transshipment and a Compliance and Monitoring Scheme. It is in everyone's interest I believe that we make as much progress as possible, as quickly as possible, on all these matters.

For coastal states it is obvious that a strong and effective organisation will play a key role in the effective management of high seas catches of any straddling stock that is important to them. But as fishing pressures from the northern hemisphere increase an effective organisation it 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 organisation will serve the wider interest of the international community in maintaining the integrity of the ecosystems of the enormous South Pacific Ocean.

We are in a new era. The Convention is in force and we are on track to count within the Members of the Commission all those with a major

interest in the fisheries for which the new Organisation has responsibility. The first year of the Commission's operation has been an effective one. Members and Cooperating Non-Contracting Parties have complied with their commitments regarding catch limits and generally have fulfilled their commitments with respect to the supply of data in accordance with the rules adopted. In addition our dispute resolution mechanisms were put to the test and found to be effective.

We, of course, have a sensitive negotiation ahead of us this week on catch limits. These negotiations are never easy. But we have done a similar exercise before more than once and we will do it again in the future. I have every confidence that if we all maintain the cooperative spirit we have shown in the past, take full account of the scientific advice we have been given and keep a clear eye on the benefits of rebuilding a depleted stock we will find agreement. We must do so. I also look forward with confidence to major progress on our other work to which I have referred. And I wish to say that with the excellent facilities, arrangements and support provided to us by the Government of Ecuador we have every opportunity to succeed in our work.

May I, on your behalf, thank Vice Minister Ypez and Vice Minister Moran for their warm welcome to Manta, for formally opening our meeting and for giving us their important thoughts on our work. May I also again express our gratitude to them for the excellent facilities and support that the Government of Ecuador has so generously provided.

Please join me in expressing our thanks to them.