

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

1st SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

*(Noumea, New Caledonia, 9–13 August
1999)*

Information Paper 12

Original: English

Country Statement by the United States



FIRST HEADS OF FISHERIES MEETING OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

**NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIA
9-13 August 1999**

COUNTRY STATEMENT BY THE UNITED STATES

Mr. Chairman and distinguished representatives;

I would like to express, on behalf of the United States delegation, our pleasure in being here in Noumea to participate with you in the first Pacific Community Heads of Fisheries Meeting. We look forward to productive discussions and dialogue.

The United States enjoys positive and constructive fisheries relations with the Pacific Island States that will only be strengthened by opportunities like this to exchange ideas and information on fisheries issues of importance to the region.

An important part of our strong overall foreign relations with the Pacific Island nations is the Multilateral Treaty on Fisheries Between the Governments of Certain Pacific Island States and the Government of the United States of America. This positive fisheries relationship, as well as a common desire to conserve fisheries resources in the South Pacific, has carried over into the ongoing multilateral negotiations to establish a Convention for the conservation and management of highly migratory fish species in the Central and Western Pacific, where we are cooperating closely with the Pacific Island States.

Both the Treaty and the ongoing negotiations for the Central and Western Pacific provide a solid foundation upon which we can cooperatively address the challenges of sustainable development and conservation of fisheries in the South Pacific. The United States is committed to promoting sustainable fisheries, not only in the South Pacific, but throughout the world. Meeting this goal will require continued cooperation to conserve and manage stocks, in particular highly migratory species.

The past several years have been a period of considerable activity in terms of the negotiation of global international fisheries agreements. I am referring specifically to the UN Agreement for the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks, the FAO Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas, the FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, and the FAO International Plans of Action for the Management of Fishing Capacity, Seabird Bycatch, and the Conservation and Management of Sharks. As you know, the United States has ratified both the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the Compliance Agreement. We are actively urging other governments who have not yet done so to do the same. I am pleased to report that the United States is currently developing its national plans of action for implementing the three FAO International Plans of Action (IPOAs).

In particular, in April of this year the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) implemented a Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic highly migratory species (including sharks), reduced shark quotas in the Atlantic by as much as 70%, and initiated a study to investigate the utilization of sharks in U.S. affiliated areas of the western and central Pacific. The national plan of action for reducing the incidental catch of seabirds in longline fisheries is planned to be completed by March 2000, building on bycatch reduction measures for seabird species already taken under other U.S. legislation. In addition, both Pacific Management Councils are considering new seabird protection measures in their longline fleets and the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council has distributed a multilingual pamphlet entitled "Catching Fish Not Birds—A Guide to Improving Your Long Line Fishing Efficiency" throughout the Hawaiian longline fishery. Finally, we are developing our national capacity management plan, working on the development of the analytical tools necessary to measure capacity, including participating in an FAO-sponsored technical working group meeting in Mexico later this year, and have raised the issue of subsidies that contribute to overcapacity in several World Trade Organization meetings.

In the coming years, we will have the opportunity to work together to achieve sustainable fisheries in many fora. The United States sees four major opportunities for both maintaining the present course of sustainable fisheries in the South Pacific region as well as moving forward to address some of the remaining challenges.

These include:

- Renewing the Annexes to the Treaty on Fisheries between the Governments of Certain Pacific Islands States and the Government of the United States of America;
- Concluding the negotiations to establish a Convention for the conservation and management of highly migratory species in the Central and Western Pacific;
- Addressing the quantity and impact of marine debris in the Pacific; and
- Bringing into force the Agreement on Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks and the FAO Compliance Agreement.

First, let me say that the United States continues to be very satisfied with the operation of the South Pacific Treaty and we intend to continue to do all we can to perfect the operation of the Treaty. Overall, we believe that the Treaty is being implemented effectively and efficiently. Because of its importance, the United States does not believe it is too early to begin thinking about renewing the annexes to this Treaty. We believe that discussion on this issue would be an important addition to the agenda for the next Annual Consultation under the Treaty, scheduled for March 2000 in Niue.

Second, the United States has enjoyed productive and cooperative negotiations with the Pacific Islands States at the last four MHLC meetings and are encouraged by our progress. As you know, the fifth MHLC session will be held in Hawaii in September, and the United States is looking forward to continuing discussions with you on this important issue.

Third, the United States Government is very concerned with the quantity of plastic debris, particularly derelict fishing nets, packing bands, and indigestible plastic material discarded in the oceans. Discarded or lost fishing gear, nets, or other types of plastics are a navigation hazard and can interfere with working fishing nets. Such material can continue to "ghost" fish and entangle marine mammals, seabirds, and sea turtles. Also, discarded or lost plastic material such as light-

sticks, lighters, and plastic bags, many of which are fatally ingested by marine organisms. At the most recent meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, the impact of marine debris on albatrosses and Monk seals, both protected species, was a subject of great concern. Researchers have found that there is significant mortality of albatross chicks through plastic ingestion, at Northwestern Hawaiian Island nesting sites. The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service estimates that there are at least 70,000 discarded net pieces in the waters surrounding Pearl and Hermes Atoll and French Frigate Shoals—two of the five major Monk seal breeding colonies in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. In addition, recently 6 tons of debris was removed from the French Frigate Shoals in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands in just 6 days in an effort to determine rates of deposition. Although well documented for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, the impacts of derelict marine debris on navigational safety, marine creatures and near shore environments is a concern shared by many Pacific Island nations.

The International Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) controls marine pollution from ships. The United States, along with 92 other States, have adopted its general principles, along with many of its annexes. Of particular importance to this issue is Annex V which prohibits the dumping of plastics, synthetic ropes and fishing gear, at sea. Due to the significant impact plastic marine debris has on the marine ecosystem, we encourage all Pacific Island nations, who have not yet done so, to become a party to MARPOL and accept Annex V as soon as possible.

The National Marine Fisheries Service and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will host an international workshop in Hawaii 26-30 June 2000 to address this issue and the United States invites you all to participate and hopes that you will be able to attend.

Fourth, the United States believes that one of the most important steps States can make toward achieving sustainable fisheries is to ratify or accede to the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. Many South Pacific Island nations and other small island states have signed the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. In fact, of the 13 small island states that have ratified it, 8 are Pacific Island nations--making Pacific Island nations the most important group in support of this treaty. We congratulate the Pacific Island nations on their leadership in ratifying the Agreement and their recognition of the critical importance of the fisheries resources to their nations that this treaty is designed to protect.

This September the United Nations General Assembly will be holding a Special Session on Small Island Developing States and the Fifth Anniversary of the Barbados Program of Action. The United States encourages Pacific Island nations to highlight their leadership role regarding ratification of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement at this UN Special Session. Islands States, unlike many of the much larger fishing nations, have committed to achieving sustainable fisheries by becoming party to this Agreement.

Finally, it is our view that the FAO Compliance Agreement and the UN Fish Stocks Agreement form a vital set of legally binding rules to promote the achievement of sustainable marine fisheries. We understand and recognize some of the concerns that the Pacific Island nations have with certain provisions of the Compliance Agreement. However, these two treaties are complementary and both should be brought into force as soon as possible. The Compliance Agreement provides the legal basis for controlling vessels fishing on the high seas by expanding upon the obligations outlined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea which mandate that States whose vessels fish on the high seas cooperate in the conservation and management of living

marine resources. This Agreement, once it enters into force, will be a significant tool for conserving high seas fisheries. Therefore, we encourage all of the Pacific Island nations, who have not yet done so to ratify or accede to the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the FAO Compliance Agreement as soon as possible.

The U.S. delegation looks forward to working with you all at this meeting and in the future.

Thank you.