



PRESS RELEASE

Alarming increase in illegal fishing in Central Pacific

Wellington, New Zealand. A dramatic increase in the number of sightings of unauthorized fishing vessels in the western and central Pacific Ocean in the last three months is alarming fisheries officials in the Pacific Islands region. Speaking during a regional meeting of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency in Wellington, New Zealand, the Executive Director of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, Andrew Wright, has advised that there is strong evidence of a significant increase in illegal fishing ranging throughout the central Pacific through French Polynesia, Cook Islands and Kiribati. The majority of reports received so far concern large purse seiners flagged to Latin American countries. These vessels normally operate in the eastern Pacific but as fishing conditions for tuna in that region are reported to be depressed this year vessels are moving west. Tuna fisheries in the central and western Pacific are managed through the recently established Commission which is headquartered in Micronesia. Mr Wright said that the members of the Commission have agreed that only vessels flying the flag of the members of the Commission may be authorized to fish in the western and central Pacific. He added that Latin American countries are not members of the Commission and so any of their vessels fishing in the WCPFC Convention Area will be conducting illegal activities. As such activity undermines the conservation and management measures of the Commission, and adversely impacts on fragile island economies dependent on fishing, the members of the WCPFC treat the threat posed by illegal fishing activity very seriously. *Ends.*