
**PREPARATORY CONFERENCE FOR THE COMMISSION FOR
THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHLY
MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS IN THE WESTERN AND
CENTRAL PACIFIC**

Fourth session
Nadi, Fiji Islands
5 – 9 May 2003

WCPFC/PrepCon/24
5 May 2003

**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PREPARATORY
CONFERENCE AT ITS FOURTH SESSION**

1. After that very impressive opening ceremony, it is time for us to get down to business and focus on the work ahead of us this week. I would like therefore to take this opportunity to make a statement which will address the work of this session of the Conference. When I have concluded, there will be the opportunity for delegations who wish to do so to make opening statements.
2. You will have received the information note and other documents circulated in preparation for this session. That information note indicates the key decisions made during the third session held in Manila and summarizes the progress of work in the three main working groups of the Conference. I think it is important to bear in mind, at the outset, that the work of the working groups is both complex and inter-related. Many of the issues which are under consideration will take time to resolve and, to some extent, are dependent on the outcome of discussions taking place in other working groups or which are yet to take place. The fact that particular proposals and ideas do not appear in the documents for this session does not mean that those proposals and ideas are not going to be given the consideration that they undoubtedly deserve.
3. As indicated in the information note, this session will be very much a working session. The emphasis will be to make progress on detailed technical issues in Working Group I and Working Group III, and this is reflected in the indicative programme of work which is before you. Having said that, however, I feel I should take this opportunity to clarify matters in relation to Working Group II.
4. As noted in the information note, it was felt during the lead-up to this session that Working Group II should not meet formally during the present session. This was because, at PrepCon III, the Working Group had identified a number of technical matters which needed to be considered by the Scientific Coordinating Group (SCG) first before Working Group II would be able to reach a decision on them. The Working Group had also identified a number of substantive matters on which it had requested more information, including further background material on the various options for the delivery of scientific services to the Commission. Since that further information is not likely to be available until the end of May, and since SCG will not meet until July, it was felt that the most efficient use of the available time would be to focus during PrepCon IV on the very important and complex matters under consideration in Working Groups I and III and to return to scientific matters in more detail at PrepCon V, when the report and outcomes of the second meeting of the SCG would be available for consideration.

5. It was not intended in any way to detract from the importance of the discussions in Working Group II, which are clearly of critical importance to the future work of the Commission.

6. Moreover, having had the opportunity to consult informally with delegations, I am of the view that there would be merit in adjusting the present schedule to enable Working Group II to meet for a short period on Thursday afternoon. While it is still very much the case that the technical studies and reports requested by Working Group II will not be ready for consideration at that time, I believe it would be useful for the Group to have a general exchange of views on the progress of its work and, more importantly perhaps, to develop a common understanding of the expectations from the SCG and on the future work programme of the Group.

7. Let me now say a few words about the work of the other Working Groups.

8. Working Group III will hold its first substantive meetings during this session. I know that the subject-matter of those meetings – procedures for boarding and inspection – is a matter of the utmost importance to many delegations. The need to develop practical and effective procedures for boarding and inspection was one of the issues identified as being crucial to the agenda of Working Group III at Madang. It is therefore important that we use this opportunity to explore the possibility of making progress on this and other issues.

9. Working Group I will meet later in the week and will, I hope, begin to make progress on the formula for the scheme of contributions to the budget of the Commission. I believe that the discussions that took place in Manila, which are reflected in the report of the Chairman of the Working Group, on the size of the budget were very constructive and form a sound basis for further discussion at a later stage. There are a number of pending issues with respect to the various components of the budget and it is important that we do not lose sight of these issues and that we return to them in due course. However, in keeping with the work programme that we had adopted at previous sessions, I believe it is important at this session to start to look in more detail at the formula for the scheme of contributions. This in turn will help individual delegations to then look at the overall budget in perspective.

10. On Wednesday it is proposed that we meet in informal plenary to continue our discussion of the draft rules of procedure for the Commission. As a result of the substantial progress that has been made with respect to the rules of procedure at previous sessions, I believe there are relatively few issues that we need to consider in detail. There are, of course, a number of new issues which have been brought up and which we agreed at Manila that we should consider further at this session. I would propose to commence discussion of these issues at our session on Wednesday. One issue is the proposed annex relating to the Northern Committee. This involves important and sensitive questions. On the one hand, some delegations attach major importance to what has been proposed. On the other, some delegations have expressed concern about the consistency of what is proposed with the Convention.

11. One of the matters that we did not have time to consider at PrepCon III was the issue of cooperation with IATTC. You will recall that we had agreed that the most efficient way of dealing with this matter would be to invite a small group of delegations to examine the issue in more detail. A working paper had also been prepared on this issue (WCPFC/PrepCon/WP.12). I would like to suggest that we return to this matter during the present session and that we set aside time for a small group to convene to consider the working paper. Perhaps this might best be done informally, outside the scheduled meetings, and I would invite interested delegations to consult

together accordingly. As a practical matter, perhaps this might best be done using the good offices of the Director of IATTC and the Head of the Interim Secretariat.

12. For the plenary meeting today, I would like to propose that after we have heard general statements, we deal with the report on the status of the Convention and the report of the Interim Secretariat on the status of the Preparatory Conference Organizational Fund and related matters. This afternoon, Working Group III will begin its work. For the rest of the week, we will proceed as shown in the indicative programme of work, except that, as I have suggested, part of Thursday afternoon would be given over to an informal meeting of Working Group II. The objective of that meeting, as I had indicated, would be to review the progress being made on the work of the Group and to discuss the agenda for the SCG.

13. The Preparatory Conference has reached a very technical stage. We are now focusing very much on areas of detail and I am sure that, for many of us, it is very difficult to keep an eye on overall progress. Because of the number of issues under consideration, it is not possible to address all issues at each session of the Conference and inevitably there will be some matters that are left pending for future discussion. I urge all delegations to bear in mind that the Preparatory Conference is a continuing process and that the primary objective throughout should be to find the areas of agreement and gradually narrow down the areas of disagreement on the various topics that we have to address. Having said that, however, I do believe that at PrepCon V, it may be timely to take stock of progress to date and try to review and prioritize the work of the Conference. I will propose at PrepCon V that time be made available for this purpose.

14. I say this particularly in light of the fact that we had agreed at PrepCon I in New Zealand that our objective should be to complete the work of the Preparatory Conference within an overall time-frame of three years; that is, by early 2004. This is especially important in view of the fact, by virtue of article 36, the Convention could in theory enter into force at around the same time.

15. In that regard, I would like to take this opportunity to urge all participating delegations to take the necessary steps to ratify this very important Convention as soon as possible. While there may be differences on matters of detail and implementation, the fact is that this is a Convention that is a product of many years of hard work on all sides. It reflects a careful balance of interests between fishing States and coastal States, as well as between developed and developing and large and small States. Most importantly, it is based firmly on the principles contained in the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. It is therefore in the interests of all to bring the process to fulfilment by the establishment of the Commission.

16. I now invite any statements of a general nature.

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