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

Third session
Manila, Philippines
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**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PREPARATORY
CONFERENCE, AMBASSADOR MICHAEL POWLES**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends,

Now that the third session of the Preparatory Conference is underway, I would like 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.

In Madang, at our last session, in addition to continuing with organizational issues, we were able to begin with consideration of the substantive issues before the Conference. We made tangible progress on a number of important matters including the size and structure of the future Commission secretariat, and the science needs of the Commission. There is however much more that remains to be done.

Distinguished delegates,

You will have received the information note and other documents circulated in preparation for this session. That information note recalled the work done during the second session held in Madang. It included:

- (a) a decision on participation in the Preparatory Conference (WCPFC/PrepCon/12);
- (b) a decision to establish a third working group on issues relating to monitoring, control and surveillance;
- (c) agreement on measures to give effect to the provisions of article 22 of the Convention related to cooperation with other regional fishery management bodies;
- (d) a second reading of the draft rules of procedure for the Commission;
- (e) a decision to establish a scientific coordinating group (SCG) as a sub-group of WG.II, reporting to both WG.II and the Conference as a whole;
- (g) adoption of guidelines for the operation of the Preparatory Conference Organizational Fund and the interim secretariat; and,
- (f) adoption of a set of principles and criteria to be taken into account in determining the location of the Commission's headquarters as well as a decision on the process to be followed. A little later in this statement, I will return to this issue.

While some of these decisions stand alone, others represent works in progress and some, as with the decision relating to the Preparatory Conference Organizational Fund and the Secretariat, will require continuing resolutions.

Working Group III will meet for the first time in this session. I believe that the discussions in this working group will be crucial to the success of the preparatory process.

As to the work of this session, there are a number of matters which Plenary needs to address. These include:

- (a) Adoption of the programme of work for this session;
- (b) A report on the status of the Convention;
- (c) The report of the SCG and the question of whether and, if so, when, the SCG should meet again;
- (d) How to deal with the question of cooperation with IATTC;
- (e) A request for observer status by the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific; and
- (f) The location of the headquarters of the Commission.

As regards the issue of cooperation with IATTC, you will recall that, at the last session, we 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. Since then, a working paper has been prepared on this issue (WCPFC/PrepCon/WP.12). We will obviously need to set aside time during this session 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.

With respect to the request for observer status by the Permanent Commission for the South Pacific, I refer delegations to the information paper prepared by the secretariat (WCPFC/PrepCon/INF.1). We do not need to take a decision on this matter today, but I would like to ask delegations to consult amongst themselves on the request, taking into account, of course, the decision that was reached at Madang on the issue of participation.

Distinguished delegates,

I strongly believe that to further delay a decision on the issue of the location of the Commission's headquarters will be harmful in at least two respects. First, it undermines the progress that we are making on other substantive and organizational matters. Second, it risks bringing the momentum that has been generated within the preparatory process to a grinding halt. In addition, it risks damaging the credibility of the overall process if we are unable to reach decisions. I propose therefore to seek a decision from the Conference on the issue at our Plenary meeting on Thursday. You will recall that, at Madang, we took a comprehensive decision on the criteria for selection and on the process and you have that document before you in the form of an attachment to the Chair's report of the Madang meeting. Obviously, delegations will make their decision in accordance with those criteria.

As delegations have been notified, three bids to host the Commission were received within the prescribed time-frame. They were from the Federated States of Micronesia, Tonga and Papua New Guinea. After the deadline expired, additional bids were received from the Philippines, Fiji and Samoa. If delegations should require any additional information regarding any of the bids, I assume they will approach their colleagues from the country concerned.

Because of the seriousness of the issue, it is only fair that I should indicate at this stage that my present intention is to rule that only the bids received within the time-frame as decided by this Conference in Madang will be considered. In other words, for the late bids to be considered, there would have to be a consensus in favour of doing so.

At our meeting on Thursday, it seems to me, after careful consideration, that the appropriate course to take would be as follows:

Unless there is a consensus in favour of considering the late bids, the Chair would rule that only bids received within the timeframe be considered as agreed by this Conference in Madang.

Then we would proceed to take a decision on the three valid bids; in the course of doing so, there will obviously be opportunity for discussion.

I have spelt this out at some length in the interest of clarity and in the hope that we will not waste time on procedural issues relating to it. With that thought in mind, I would like to turn to this week's work programme. When I have concluded, very shortly, I will give the floor to delegations which wish to make opening statements.

You will have before you the indicative programme of work in which you will see that most of the sessions will be taken up by the working groups. For the plenary meeting today, I would like to propose that after we have heard general statements, we deal with the report of the scientific coordinating group and the report on the status of the Convention. Following the adjournment of Plenary today, Working Group III will hold its first meeting. For the rest of the week, we will proceed as shown in the indicative programme of work. Given the amount of work for this session, it may be necessary to adjust the indicative programme from time to time, and in particular it may be necessary to consider meeting in the evenings or carrying out some of the tasks of the working groups simultaneously. I am fully aware of the disadvantages of both of these options and I flag them just as possibilities.

May we now adopt the programme of work on that basis?

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