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

Second session
Madang, Papua New Guinea
25 February – 1 March, 2002

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**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PREPARATORY
CONFERENCE, AMBASSADOR MICHAEL POWLES**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, colleagues and friends,

I welcome you to the second session of the Preparatory Conference for the Establishment of the Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Central and Western Pacific.

Distinguished delegates,

As we are all aware, since we last met in Christchurch in April 2001, the UN Fish Stocks Agreement has received the necessary number of ratifications and entered into force in December 2001. This is a significant development, with important implications for our work, especially given that the majority of participants in this Conference are also signatories to the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. Indeed, from the outset of the negotiations in MHLIC, it was understood that the UN Fish Stocks Agreement formed the basis for the future Western Central Pacific Fisheries Convention. Its entry into force, therefore, should provide additional encouragement to all those who have not already done so, to move expeditiously towards ratification of the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Convention.

Distinguished delegates,

You would all have received the information note and other documents circulated in preparation for this second session of the Conference. That information note recalled the progress that was made during the first session, held in Christchurch, New Zealand in April 2001. Among these achievements were:

- (a) The adoption of an agenda (WCPFC/PrepCon/2) which would also serve as the basis of the work of the Conference in future sessions, subject to such amendments as may be necessary;
- (b) The establishment of two open-ended working groups to consider issues related to organizational and budget matters and the provision of scientific advice to the Commission respectively, agreement on the terms of reference of the two working groups and adoption of a plan of work for each working group;
- (c) Agreement to establish a Preparatory Conference organizational fund to finance future sessions of the Conference and an interim secretariat;
- (d) A first reading of the draft rules of procedure for the Commission;

(e) Tabling of a paper on the participation of territories in the future Commission with a view to further discussion of this issue at future sessions of the Preparatory Conference.

We had also agreed to the convening of an informal consultation, immediately prior to this session, to discuss mechanisms to promote participation in the Convention. As you know, those informal consultations took place on Thursday and Friday last week and, in accordance with the procedures that we had agreed upon, I shall be reporting formally to the Preparatory Conference on the outcomes of those consultations following this statement. Although it is unfortunate that one delegation did not take the opportunity to participate, I was extremely pleased to see the constructive engagement of all other participants in the informal consultations. I feel that we made excellent progress in identifying the real issues of concern to some delegations and I believe that the informal consultations were successful in clarifying a number of these issues.

As a result of the informal consultations, the Conference will consider later this morning a number of important recommendations and decisions. I believe the adoption of these recommendations and decisions will go a long way towards achieving the objective of the informal consultations and will indeed promote participation in the Convention.

Distinguished delegates,

The first session represented the beginning of a new process following the adoption of the Convention in September 2000. Much of the work of the first session, therefore, was organizational in nature. This session, our objective should be to start to make substantive progress in accordance with the work plan that we adopted at the first session. To this end, most of the time available this week has been devoted to the work of the two open-ended working groups established to consider issues related to organizational and budget matters and the provision of scientific advice to the Commission respectively. In accordance with the requests made by those working groups, the interim secretariat has prepared a number of studies and reports. I hope that you have all had the opportunity to study these reports, which will form the basis for discussions in the working groups during this session. Those discussions will, of course, be part of an ongoing process and should not commit any delegation to a final position. It is my hope, however, that the working groups will at least be able to make some progress this week in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement and thus help to further clarify the issues to be discussed at future sessions.

During the first session, we also made good progress in examining the draft rules of procedure for the Commission. As requested, the interim secretariat has issued a revised draft of the rules of procedure, taking into account the proposals made and the outcomes of discussions at the first session. As at the first session, I propose to take up consideration of the draft rules of procedure in informal session and this might be the first matter we take up once the formal business of this plenary session has been concluded.

Distinguished delegates,

The agenda for this Conference is largely determined by the mandate given to us by resolution I of the MHLC. There are, of course, a large number of other items on our agenda apart from those we will deal with this week, and we need to bear in mind that the work of this Preparatory Conference will continue until entry into force of the Convention. It is clearly not

possible to address all the items on the agenda in this session and we must therefore try to make progress in a logical, step-by-step fashion, in accordance with the 3-year time frame we had agreed at Christchurch and without losing sight of the ultimate objective which is to lay the necessary groundwork for the entry into force of the Convention and a smooth transition to the Convention regime. In part, the rate of progress is determined by the resources that are made available to the Conference and in this regard, the interim secretariat will be providing a report to this session of the Conference on the status of the organizational fund that was established following our meeting in Christchurch and on the work that has been carried out by the interim secretariat.

With respect to the interim secretariat, I am pleased to report that, in accordance with the instructions of this Conference as contained in its resolution on arrangements for future sessions of the Preparatory Conference and for a Preparatory Conference Secretariat, I was able to make the necessary arrangements to appoint an interim secretariat on at least a temporary basis. While, for various reasons, this did not happen quite as expeditiously as I would have liked, I am pleased that the interim secretariat has been able to carry out a substantial amount of work in a relatively short time and that this has been achieved efficiently and on a cost-effective basis. I do feel that the workload of the interim secretariat has been somewhat greater than originally anticipated and there are a number of issues we shall need to consider in relation to the future of the interim secretariat when we come to this item on the agenda later in the week.

In addition to the matters I have referred to, there are a number of other items on the agenda on which we shall receive progress reports, although it may not be necessary for us to reach decisions on them at this time. These include the issue of the location of the headquarters for the Commission and the issue of participation by territories, which we had agreed at Christchurch might be taken up at a later session of the Conference. With respect to the latter issue, I believe that constructive discussions have been taking place and that we might be in a position to receive a progress report later in the week. Again, I emphasize that there is no actual requirement that we reach a decision on either of these issues during this session.

Distinguished delegates,

I now propose that I report to you on the outcomes of the informal consultations, following which we should adopt our programme of work for the remainder of the week. There will then be an opportunity for those who wish to do so to make general statements.

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