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

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Nadi, Fiji Islands
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STATEMENT BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

1. The issue of capacity and its linkages to sustainable resource management are of critical importance to the United States. For this reason, we worked with delegations around the table in both the MHLC and the Preparatory Conference to highlight this issue through two resolutions. Both resolutions urged all States and other entities to exercise reasonable restraint in respect of any expansion of fishing effort and capacity in the Convention Area. Both of these resolutions were adopted by consensus and the United States takes them very seriously. However, in our view, reasonable restraint is not being exercised. In fact, since both of these resolutions were adopted, we have seen a dramatic increase of capacity in the region with more on the way.
2. Earlier this week we heard from Chinese Taipei that new investment in the purse seine fishery for skipjack in this region is justified and that to do otherwise would have food security implications for the world. Frankly speaking, my delegation found this statement, as well as the analysis on regulating the use of FADs, very troubling. Despite what we heard from the delegation from Chinese Taipei, the IATTC is still struggling to find an effective way to manage the fishery on FADs and, in our view, has much work to do in this regard.
3. While it is true that the purse seine catch in the Western Pacific Ocean is approximately 75% skipjack, the steady increase in capacity in the region has eroded the skipjack price and resulted in an unprecedented spread between the skipjack price and the yellowfin price. Obviously this puts more pressure on vessel operators to catch yellowfin, one of the tuna species which, according to the interim scientific advice provided to the PrepCon by the Scientific Coordinating Group in November 2002, “is likely to be nearing full exploitation.”
4. This organization prides itself on being the first regional fisheries management organization fully to embody the principles of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement. One of these principles is the application of the precautionary approach to questions of resource management. As noted above, the SCG has provided interim advice that both bigeye and yellowfin tuna are likely to be at or nearing full exploitation. At the same time, we are aware of an alarming number of tuna purse seine vessels under construction for deployment in the Western Pacific. This continuing increase in capacity can only result in greater fishing pressure on these stocks. Failure to take immediate action to address this situation would be to abrogate our responsibilities under the principles on which this organization is being founded.
5. We appreciate the statement of the FFA on the level of purse seine fishing in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. We believe that the statement of the Preparatory Conference Chairman should reflect agreement to move forward with the work outlined in paragraph 6 of the FFA statement. This additional scientific work will assist us in understanding the status of the fish stocks in the region and the impacts on those stocks of current levels of fishing effort. In

addition, we appreciate the cooperation from the FFA regarding the ongoing work we have been engaged in to measure fishing capacity in the purse seine fishery.

6. However, we believe the current proposal does not go far enough and we are disappointed that paragraph 6 of the FFA proposal does not even mention the issue of fishing capacity or the relationship between fishing effort and resulting pressure on the fish stocks in the region. We can no longer continue to ignore this issue within this Preparatory Conference process. Moreover, in our view, we cannot wait for conclusive scientific evidence of the impact of this increased fishing pressure on the stocks in question. Article 6, paragraph 2 of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention provides, “Members of the Commission shall be more cautious when information is uncertain, unreliable, or inadequate. The absence of adequate scientific information shall not be used as a reason for postponing or failing to take conservation and management measures.” This provision flows directly from Article 6, paragraph 2 of the UNIA.

7. Furthermore, economic factors cannot be discounted as a critical component of this problem. Vessels operating on the thinnest of margins are often those that are least willing and able to implement conservation and management measures, such as catch quotas, when doing so could mean economic collapse. As a result, fishing pressure on key stocks is often increased at a time when those stocks are least able to sustain such pressure.

8. This is why the United States does not believe the current approach satisfies our obligations under the UNIA or Article 6, paragraph 2 of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention. We must address these issues in parallel with efforts to conduct the necessary scientific and economic assessments. In this regard, we, for one, believe that the Korean proposal for a moratorium has considerable merit, as long as we take into account the legitimate rights of developing Pacific Island states and territories to develop their domestic fishing industries. Between now and the next meeting, we will be looking seriously at the specific and concrete actions we feel must be taken.

9. Paragraph 10 of the Resolution establishing the Preparatory Conference provides for us to take necessary conservation measures pending the entry into force of the Convention to ensure the long-term sustainability of stocks in the Convention Area. In our view, if in the Preparatory Conference process we cannot reach agreement to address these issues through concrete actions in the short term, it raises questions whether we will, in the longer run in the Commission, be able to grapple with the hard issues needed to carry out our mission. Moreover, if we cannot agree to action soon, we wonder whether by the time the Commission is fully operational it may be too late for at least some of the stocks.

10. Mr. Chairman, the United States plans to continue to work to address these issues in this Conference and the future Commission, and we are prepared to work with all participants in this regard.

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