



PARTIES TO THE NAURU AGREEMENT

PNA Office Building, Uliga

P.O. Box 3992

Majuro, Marshall Islands (MH) 96960

Phone: +(692) 625-7626/7627

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Media Release – Outcomes of the 20th Session of the WCPFC

The Chief Executive Officer of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) Office, Dr. Sangaalofa Clark, welcomed the outcomes of the 20th meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission that was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands from 4-8 December 2023.

Dr. Clark was particularly pleased at the renewal of the Tropical Tuna Conservation and Management Measure. This measure applies to the management of fisheries taking around 2.5 million tonnes of tropical tuna species annually. This is about half the global catches of the main tuna species, so it is the major global tuna management instrument.

Dr. Clark welcomed the implementation of the successful first run of the skipjack management procedure in the Measure, and the easing of measures for fisheries taking bigeye tuna, including the reduction of the FAD closures in the purse seine fishery. The easing in the bigeye management measures was the outcome of a long-term programme of conservation measures for bigeye which had seen the stock continue to reach the management objective, and projections that indicated the stock was likely to continue to improve. The reduction in the FAD closures would particularly benefit PNA Members and Tokelau with 90% of the purse seine fishery in their waters. But it would also benefit other Pacific Island countries and territories including American Samoa which was heavily dependent on the purse seine fishery.

Dr. Clark noted that the FAD closure reduction would likely result in a moderate increase in the catch of WCPO skipjack from the waters of PNA and Tokelau, ensuring that supplies of sustainably caught tuna to global markets remained plentiful.

PNA was also pleased with the changes made to realign the Commission's Compliance Monitoring Scheme. This would make the Scheme more effective at addressing the weakness of monitoring and compliance in the high seas longline fishery which was now the Commission's biggest shortfall.

Dr. Clark noted other advances that were important to PNA Members, including establishment of a process for reviewing the Commission's measures to ensure that they were appropriately adapted to the impacts of climate change, adoption of an interim TRP for south Pacific albacore, adoption of an enhanced Harvest Strategy for the north Pacific Albacore Tuna Fishery and commitments to further work on FAD management.

Overall, the meeting had made great progress in catching up with a backlog of work from the COVID period.

Dr. Clark thanked the Government and people of Cook Islands for the successful hosting of the meeting. She also expressed appreciation for the very effective guidance of the meeting by the incoming Commission Chair, Dr. Josie Tamate, the great progress being made in the work of the WCPFC Secretariat under Ms. Rhea Moss-Christian, and the friendly and effective support for the meeting by the local Cook Islands team.