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SPC/Fisheries 15/Background Paper 6
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SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

FIFTEENTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 1 - 5 August 1983)

AGENDA ITEM 8 OF THE REPORT
OF THE 1983 PLANNING AND EVALUATION COMMITTEE -
CONSERVATION OF THE TUNA RESOURCES OF THE WESTERN
AND CENTRAL TROPICAL PACIFIC

69. The Secretariat advised that Working Paper 7 was not a Secretariat position paper, but was provided purely as a basis for discussion.

70. The Representative of France advised that his country wished to see the programme continue but in a different and more broad-based form as suggested in the working paper. He then announced that the French Government had decided to proceed with the establishment of satellite-based oceanographic research equipment in Noumea which would be made available to all Pacific Island countries and which could in particular be used for fishing purposes.

71. The Secretariat advised that the yellowfin tuna resource was presently under serious threat of depletion, due to an increase of fishing activity in the area.

72. The Representative of New Caledonia supported the extension of the programme in a broad-based form using the existing Tuna Programme at the SPC as a base structure. The new organisation should include all countries of the region and it could be formulated in detail at the next SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries to be held in August. Vanuatu endorsed these comments.

73. The Representative of United Kingdom supported modification of the present Tuna Programme within the SPC, as opposed to the development of another new organisation in the Pacific.

74. The Secretariat confirmed that the SPC continually consulted with the Forum Fisheries Agency, but added that it would be very difficult to pursue conclusively the suggested broad-based organisation before the current Tuna Programme ended in September 1984. The Secretariat noted that as matters now stood any depletion of tuna resources in the Pacific region would be the result of fishing by foreign vessels in the region, and not by the Island people themselves.

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75. The Representative of Federated States of Micronesia advised that concrete resource management recommendations were required from the SPC and that the Technical Meeting should be instructed to produce a proposal. The Representative of the Forum Fisheries Agency stated that the FFA strongly supported the continuation of such research as is currently undertaken by the SPC Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme. The FFA Representative advised that the 1983 Forum Fisheries Committee had instructed the FFA to report on alternatives available leading towards better management to meet the requirements of its members and said that the FFA would be happy to assist SPC in the evaluation of proposals for the conservation and management of tuna resources of the Pacific. The Representative of New Zealand commented that there was a need for a comprehensive approach to the management of the tuna resource and that the range of options needed to be examined in detail. The Secretariat commented that future assessments of fisheries resources would always be subject to change as the resources were continually affected by various fishing methods employed in the region.

76. The Representative of Western Samoa stated that the advent of purse-seining in the Pacific region is responsible for the depletion of the yellowfin tuna resource, and there has been a percentage reduction in longline and pole-and-line catches. The Representative of France suggested that a new formula should be sought to establish a broad-based organisation from the existing Tuna Programme. A Representative of ORSTOM advised of the problem of gaining reliable statistics from non-SPC countries in the Pacific area, to enable proper management and fishing of the resource.

77. The Secretariat advised that countries would have to decide at the SPC Technical Meeting what the future of the Tuna Programme should be and what kind of arrangement should follow it. The Secretariat suggested that the SPC and FFA prepare a joint paper to be placed before the coming SPC Technical Meeting to assist countries in deciding their course of action. The Secretariat explained the procedures relating to attendance at the SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries and the Expert Committee in response to a question from Solomon Islands.

78. The Representative of Federated States of Micronesia suggested that the Committee should recommend to the Conference that the Tuna Programme continue and that any proposal for management of the tuna resources be organised jointly by the FFA and SPC. The Representative of French Polynesia advocated that all countries of the Pacific should be involved in any discussions on management of fisheries for the entire Pacific, especially if regulations were to be considered. The Representative of American Samoa advised that based on the value of the Tuna Programme to his country he would like to see the programme continue until the issue of a broad-based organisation was discussed further. The Representative of Solomon Islands again requested an explanation from the Secretariat as to why its FFA nomination to the Expert Committee had not been accepted.

79. The Chairman proposed the following resolution which was accepted by the Committee:

The Committee recognised the importance to the region of the activities of the SPC Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme and requested the 1983 SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries to consider alternatives for the continuation or otherwise of such activities in their present or a modified form with a view towards making detailed and specific recommendations for consideration by the Twenty-third South Pacific Conference. To assist the Technical Meeting on Fisheries in its deliberations the Committee directed the Secretariat to submit alternatives to the Technical Meeting in consultation with the FFA.