

Tonga

(INTRODUCTION)

A very good morning to you all

Chair I would like to congratulate you for being the Chair for the FFC 102, thanking Australia for agreeing to host this FFC meeting.

I would like to also thank the Director General, James Morvick and staff of FFA for their hard work and also to the Outgoing Chair Vanuatu for the leading role in all FFC meetings in the past year. Hope we are going to have a very productive meeting. To you members.....wish you all the best.

Malo e lelei!

- Tonga fisheries has been undergoing some big changes.
- In 2015 our Minister, Semisi Fakahau, announced that fisheries would become a stand-alone Ministry. We would no longer be part of a large Ministry with Agriculture, Food, and Forests.
- Our Minister will be known to many of you. He is a fisheries professional and worked in the fisheries Ministry for many years.
- His goal is create a renewed focus on our fisheries, to increase exports, to try to help combat the problem we have in Tonga of non-communicable diseases like diabetes, by promoting more fish in our diet, and to increase the benefits from fisheries management to all Tongans.
- I can tell you that last year we have already started to see rewards from this new focus.
 - Our exports were up 73% to 1,743 tonnes; with a 54% increase in the value of fish exported, to over \$10 million.
 - We are increasing the availability of fish on our local markets by requiring all by-catch from our foreign licensed vessels to be landed for sale in Tonga.
 - We have reviewed our snapper management plan based on the outcomes of the recent stock assessment models developed by SPC and Tonga, and our fleet of snapper vessels are supported with concessional loans from our National Bank.
- Of course it's not all good news. For example, our sea cucumber fishery is closed for up to five years due to overfishing.
- The Ministry of Fisheries has a new function based organisation structure involving four divisions. These are:
 - Fisheries Management and Development Division
 - Fisheries Science Division
 - Fisheries Compliance Division, and
 - Corporate Services Division
- We have only recently finished recruiting the Deputy Chief Executive positions for each division head.

- Along with the new Ministry has come the requirement to spend a lot of time developing a new Corporate Plan, and new internal policies and procedures.
- Like many other countries we manage our fisheries at a range of different levels.

(COMMUNITY FISHERIES)

- We manage our community fisheries through the implementation of Special Management Areas.
- SMAs are a form of area based management where the community helps to determine the rules, and only people from within the community are allowed to harvest fish.
- By the end of this financial year we are aiming to have over 30 SMA's implemented, and there is the potential for around 100 to be established over the long term.

(COMMERCIAL FISHERIES)

- Our commercial fisheries are the larger scale fisheries which include deepwater snapper, and tuna. All our commercial fisheries are required to have a management plan.
- The only fishery where we permit foreign vessels to be licensed is the tuna fishery and there are currently 7 foreign licensed vessels.
- Coastal fisheries, those fisheries that are not covered by either an SMA or a commercial fishery are a significant challenge for Tonga. We expect to start registering coastal fishermen and their vessels soon.
- We are also exploring the potential for a deepwater Bluenose line fishery on our sea mounts, with support from New Zealand (that's "Blueeye" to some of you).

(AQUACULTURE)

- We are enthusiastic and optimistic about aquaculture but at this stage we are still in the development phase for potential industries including seaweed, pearls, clams, sea cucumber, and milk fish.
- The sequence of cyclones experienced in Tonga last year damaged years of work in this area, with Cyclone Winston in particular, wiping out both seaweed and milkfish trials.

(MAJOR CHALLENGES)

- The major emerging challenge for the Ministry of Fisheries has been the Government's approval of the Tonga Fisheries Sector Plan, developed with the assistance of the World Bank.
- There are over 100 action items that represent the biggest range of fisheries reforms in Tonga for over 20 years.
- We are implementing the plan and are seeking funding and technical assistance from our development partners.

- I should particularly thank the FFA Director General for his prompt attention to our request for support during the implementation planning phase, and in particular Mike Batty for his in-country support and the review of stakeholder engagement.
- We are also extremely grateful to New Zealand for their ability to support us with a wide range of projects.
- We are now in the early stages of discussion for significant funding under the World Bank Pacific Regional Oceanscape Program (PROP).

(CONCLUSION)

- Thank you for the opportunity to provide this country statement for Tonga.
- On a personal note I look forward to developing closer ties with the FFA, and with my colleagues from other countries over the coming years.