

## **Trip Report: Wollongong & Canberra Visit 4-8 March 2024**

### **Attendee:**

**Professor Transform Aqorau, Vice Chancellor, Solomon Islands National University (SINU)**

### **Purpose of Visit:**

During my visit to Australia, one of the highlights was presenting a paper at the ANCORS and Japan Symposium on Future Challenges and Trends for Transboundary Fisheries Governance. This symposium, a pivotal gathering for experts in the field, provided an invaluable platform to delve into the intricacies of fisheries governance on a transboundary scale, with a keen focus on the burgeoning challenges and trends shaping this domain.

***Symposium Presentation:*** The presentation I delivered centred on dissecting the future trends and challenges that are poised to redefine transboundary fisheries governance. Among the critical areas of focus were the pronounced impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems and the resultant implications for coastal States, particularly those whose economic and food security are intricately tied to fisheries such as tuna, saury, and squid. This discourse aimed to illuminate the complexities and urgencies of adapting fisheries governance frameworks to accommodate the shifting realities induced by climate change, while also safeguarding the interests and concerns of coastal States deeply vested in these transboundary fisheries resources. A copy of the presentation is attached as **APPENDIX 1**.

***Meeting on Fisheries Management and Development Program:*** A significant portion of the trip was dedicated to a meeting with the Coordinator of the SINU/UoW Graduate Certificate in Fisheries Management and Development. This engagement was pivotal in mapping out the strategic rollout of the programme, which stands as a cornerstone in bolstering the capabilities of professionals within the fisheries sector. The discussion was enriched by a comprehensive review of the program's curriculum, delivery mechanisms, and the anticipated impact on fisheries management practices within the Pacific region. This program underscores a collaborative educational venture aimed at equipping individuals with the requisite knowledge and skills to navigate the complexities of fisheries management in an era marked by environmental change and sustainability challenges.

### ***Engagements with ANU and the Department of Foreign Affairs:***

The trip also afforded the opportunity to meet with staff and students at the Australian National University (ANU), alongside staff from the Department of Foreign Affairs. These interactions were instrumental in discussing the intricacies of the Graduate Certificate in Fisheries Management and exploring potential avenues for future programmes, particularly those aligning with security concerns within the Pacific region. These discussions were not only indicative of the shared commitment towards advancing education in fisheries

management but also highlighted the potential for expanding collaborative efforts to encompass broader thematic areas such as maritime security and environmental stewardship.

These series of meetings and the symposium presentation collectively contributed to fostering dialogue, sharing insights, and exploring collaborative initiatives aimed at enhancing transboundary fisheries governance. The engagements underscored the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and international cooperation in addressing the multifaceted challenges presented by climate change and the need for adaptive governance frameworks to ensure the sustainable management of marine resources for future generations.

## **Meetings and Discussions at ANU**

### **1. Introduction to SINU:**

During my visit to the Australian National University (ANU), I had the privilege of presenting an overview of the Solomon Islands National University (SINU), detailing its inception in 2013 as a successor to the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education (SICHE). This transition was not merely a change in nomenclature but represented a significant evolution in the institution's mandate to provide comprehensive higher education, research, and development services tailored to the needs of the Solomon Islands. The establishment of SINU marked a pivotal moment in the nation's educational landscape, aiming to foster a knowledge-based society capable of contributing to the country's development and well-being.

In the presentation, I underscored SINU's vision of becoming a leading national university in the Pacific region, renowned for delivering quality education and research. This ambitious vision is rooted in our commitment to excellence, innovation, and the continuous improvement of our academic offerings. It is a vision that guides our strategic planning and operations, aiming to position SINU as a key player in the regional and global academic community.

Furthermore, I delved into the diverse range of academic programs available at SINU, spanning various faculties including Education, Business and Management, Science and Technology, and Health and Medical Sciences. These programs are meticulously designed to align with the current and emerging needs of the Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific region, ensuring that our curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the challenges of our time. The emphasis on curricular relevance underscores SINU's dedication to producing graduates who are not only academically proficient but also equipped with the skills and knowledge to contribute meaningfully to society. This comprehensive educational approach is fundamental to our mission of fostering sustainable development and improving the livelihoods of the communities we serve.

## **2. Research and Innovation:**

During my engagement, I shared SINU's commitment to research, particularly emphasising our focus on addressing both local and regional challenges. This dedication aligns with our broader mission to contribute meaningfully to the development of the Solomon Islands and the Pacific region at large. Key areas of our research endeavours include climate change, sustainable development, fisheries, and public health—fields that are not only pivotal to our community's wellbeing but also critical in the global context of environmental and social sustainability.

I highlighted several of SINU's notable research projects and collaborations with international institutions, illustrating our active role in the global academic and research community. These collaborations span a diverse range of disciplines and themes, from marine biodiversity and conservation to renewable energy and disease prevention, underscoring our university's contribution to fostering innovation and entrepreneurship. By engaging in these international partnerships, SINU not only enhances its research capacity but also provides valuable opportunities for our students and faculty to participate in cutting-edge research, exchange knowledge, and develop innovative solutions to complex challenges.

The discussion at ANU served as a valuable platform to showcase SINU's achievements in research and innovation, illustrating our commitment to excellence and our proactive approach to tackling issues that affect our region and beyond. Through these collaborative efforts and our ongoing commitment to research, SINU aims to contribute to the global body of knowledge, drive socio-economic development, and inspire a new generation of innovators and leaders in the Solomon Islands and the Pacific.

## **3. Community Engagement and Impact & Integrated and Transdisciplinary Approach:**

I had the opportunity to elaborate on SINU's community engagement initiatives and our strategic move towards an integrated and transdisciplinary approach to education. I described SINU's efforts to foster meaningful engagement with local communities, aiming to contribute to the social and economic development of the Solomon Islands. This commitment is manifested through a variety of outreach programs, extension services, and partnerships with both government and non-government organizations. Such initiatives are designed not only to extend our academic and research expertise into practical community development projects but also to ensure our academic programs are responsive to the real-world challenges facing our communities. Furthermore, I highlighted the crucial role SINU plays in cultivating graduates who are not just academically proficient but also deeply equipped with the practical skills and knowledge to meet the nation's development needs. Our graduates are envisioned to be at the forefront of addressing local and regional challenges, thereby contributing significantly to national progress.

Moreover, I emphasised SINU's strategic pivot towards an integrated and interdisciplinary approach in our educational offerings. This approach is epitomised by the establishment of the Institute of Islands Futures, which champions the breaking down of traditional academic silos in favour of a systems perspective that appreciates the interconnectedness of various

disciplines. Additionally, I discussed our innovative initiative to establish living labs within communities. These living labs are designed for place-based learning that not only leverages academic knowledge but also integrates indigenous wisdom and practices. This method fosters a learning environment where students can engage in real-life projects that benefit both their academic growth and the community at large.

By combining community engagement with an integrated and transdisciplinary educational approach, SINU is dedicated to producing well-rounded graduates capable of innovative thinking and practical problem-solving. This holistic strategy not only enhances the relevance and impact of our academic programs but also strengthens our contribution to the sustainable development of the Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific region. Through these initiatives, SINU reaffirms its commitment to being a key player in the socio-economic advancement of our communities, guided by principles of inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation.

## **5. Challenges and Opportunities:**

I took the opportunity to discuss both the challenges and opportunities facing SINU, as well as outlining our future aspirations that guide our strategic direction. In addressing the challenges, I spoke candidly about the constraints we face, such as the ongoing struggle for adequate funding, the need for infrastructural development, and the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified faculty members. These issues are not unique to SINU but are reflective of broader trends within higher education globally, particularly in regions striving to enhance their educational frameworks amidst resource limitations.

However, focusing solely on the challenges would provide an incomplete picture of SINU's journey. I was keen to highlight the myriad opportunities that lie ahead for our institution. Notably, the potential for expanding international collaborations presents a significant avenue for growth and improvement. Such partnerships are instrumental in enhancing our research capabilities, offering our students and faculty exposure to global best practices and innovative methodologies. The cultivation of these international relationships is vital in our quest to elevate the quality of education and research at SINU.

Looking towards the future, I shared SINU's ambitious goals, which include achieving international accreditation for our programs. This milestone would not only affirm the quality of education we provide but also bolster our reputation on a global scale, facilitating greater mobility for our students and creating more opportunities for international research collaborations. Enhancing the overall quality of our education and research outputs remains a core objective, as we aim to contribute meaningfully to the body of global knowledge while addressing local and regional challenges.

Moreover, I emphasised our commitment to building a sustainable and resilient institution, one that is capable of withstanding the challenges that lie ahead and contributing to the advancement of the Solomon Islands and the Pacific region. Our vision extends beyond the confines of academia; we strive to be a catalyst for socio-economic development, leveraging the potential of our human and intellectual capital to foster innovation and positive change.

## **6. Collaboration and Exchange Opportunities:**

During my engagements in Canberra, particularly at the Australian National University ANU, a substantial portion of our discussions revolved around the vast array of collaboration and exchange opportunities that could mutually benefit our institutions. These conversations were both enlightening and promising, focusing on areas where our interests and needs intersect, such as climate change and sustainable development. The discussions extended to the potential for joint academic programs and research projects that would leverage the strengths of both SINU and ANU to address these pressing global challenges.

Further, we explored the possibilities of faculty and student exchange programs, recognizing the immense value these could bring in terms of capacity building, enhancing educational experiences, and fostering global perspectives among our academic communities. The dialogue also covered community engagement, policy dialogue, and technology transfer, highlighting the multifaceted opportunities for collaboration that could lead to tangible outcomes in research, teaching, and societal impact.

## **7. Outcomes and Next Steps:**

The visit to Canberra proved to be highly productive, setting the stage for numerous potential collaborations between SINU and ANU. Key outcomes from these discussions include the identification of specific areas where our institutions could collaborate, particularly in research and academic program development. Both parties expressed a keen interest in developing joint academic programs and research initiatives, acknowledging the synergies that such cooperation could unlock. Moreover, there was a shared commitment to continue dialogues on student and faculty exchange opportunities, recognizing the mutual benefits of such exchanges in broadening academic and cultural horizons.

The next steps towards realizing these opportunities involve formalizing partnership agreements to clearly outline the scope and objectives of our collaborative Endeavor's. This will include developing detailed proposals for joint projects and establishing mechanisms for regular communication and coordination. Follow-up meetings will be scheduled to monitor progress and ensure that these initiatives are implemented effectively, with a focus on achieving the desired outcomes for both institutions.

## **Expanded Talking Points on Solomon Islands Elections and Politics**

I provided a comprehensive overview of the political landscape in the Solomon Islands, encapsulating the evolution of our parliamentary system since achieving independence in 1978. Our nation operates under a unicameral legislature, with the Prime Minister serving as the head of government. This structure has been the bedrock of our political system, supporting a journey marked by significant milestones and challenges. The coexistence of traditional leadership and customary governance alongside our formal political structures has been a distinctive feature, offering a unique blend of governance that respects our rich cultural heritage.

In regard to recent elections, I detailed the proceedings of the latest general elections, noting the year they were conducted, the primary political parties and coalitions involved, and the eventual outcomes. The electoral process, voter turnout, and any notable issues or controversies that emerged during these elections were discussed. I took the opportunity to highlight landmark events, such as the election of women to parliament and significant shifts in political alliances, underscoring the evolving nature of our political landscape.

Addressing the political challenges, I acknowledged the persistence of issues such as political instability, frequent changes in government, and allegations of corruption. These challenges have undoubtedly impacted governance, policy implementation, and public trust in political institutions. I also mentioned recent efforts and reforms aimed at addressing these concerns, including anti-corruption measures and electoral reforms, reflecting our commitment to improving governance and transparency.

The role of youth and women in Solomon Islands politics was another focal point. Despite the challenges, there has been noteworthy progress in the participation and representation of these groups in the political arena. I discussed initiatives and programs aimed at empowering young people and women to take active roles in political processes and leadership, emphasizing the critical importance of inclusive politics for sustainable development and social cohesion.

Furthermore, I explored the Solomon Islands' international relations and regional politics, discussing our relationships with regional powers and international partners. The influence of regional organizations, such as the Pacific Islands Forum, on our politics and policy was highlighted, along with recent developments in foreign policy, including new diplomatic ties and changes in aid and investment patterns. These relationships play a crucial role in shaping our domestic politics and contributing to our nation's development trajectory.

Looking towards the future, I shared insights on the prospects for political stability and development in the Solomon Islands. The role of civil society, media, and international partners in supporting democratic governance and accountability was discussed, along with the importance of addressing underlying social and economic issues to strengthen the political landscape. Our future outlook remains cautiously optimistic, with a recognition of the challenges ahead but also a firm commitment to pursuing political stability, development, and inclusive governance for the betterment of the Solomon Islands.

### **China and the Geostrategic Competition:**

I explored the multifaceted dimensions of China's growing influence in the Pacific, highlighting its increasing engagement through economic investments, development aid, and diplomatic initiatives. The strategic interests of China in the region, including access to natural resources, control over vital maritime routes, and the potential for a military presence, were thoroughly discussed. Specific examples of Chinese projects and partnerships in the

Solomon Islands and neighbouring countries were underscored to illustrate the tangible manifestations of China's expanding footprint.

The impact of China's presence on the regional dynamics of the Pacific was analysed, considering how it is reshaping both geopolitical and economic landscapes. The reactions of traditional powers, such as Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, to China's growing influence, were explored, highlighting the complex interplay of national interests and regional stability. The discussions also covered the nuanced challenges and opportunities Pacific Island nations face in balancing their relationships with multiple global powers, navigating a path that respects their sovereignty and developmental aspirations.

The bilateral relationship between the Solomon Islands and China was reviewed, marking key milestones such as the switch in diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China. The implications of this relationship for the Solomon Islands, in terms of trade, investment, infrastructure development, and political alignment, were discussed, along with recent developments that have further solidified the ties between the two nations.

The broader context of geostrategic competition in the Pacific, characterised by multiple powers vying for influence and access, was examined. The discussions delved into the concept of the "Indo-Pacific" and its significance in global geopolitics, underscoring the strategic importance of the region. The challenges and opportunities for Pacific Island nations in navigating this complex geopolitical landscape were addressed, highlighting the need for strategic autonomy and effective diplomacy.

The security implications of geostrategic competition in the Pacific, including the potential for military buildup and the impact on regional security arrangements, were analysed. The presence of external powers and its effect on regional stability and security cooperation among Pacific Island nations were discussed, alongside initiatives aimed at enhancing security and defence cooperation in the region.

Looking forward, the potential future trajectory of geostrategic competition in the Pacific and its implications for the Solomon Islands and neighbouring countries were discussed. The importance of maintaining strategic autonomy and engaging in effective diplomacy for Pacific Island nations was emphasized, as was the role of regional organizations and multilateral frameworks in promoting peace, stability, and cooperation amidst geostrategic competition.

These discussions aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of China's engagement in the Pacific, the nuanced impact of geostrategic competition on regional relations, and the multifaceted challenges and opportunities facing the Solomon Islands and other Pacific Island nations.

## **Conclusion:**

The Canberra visit was instrumental in showcasing the strengths, challenges, and aspirations of SINU, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation among our Australian counterparts. It laid a solid foundation for future collaboration and exchange, promising to

enrich both institutions and, by extension, contribute to the advancement of the Solomon Islands and the Pacific region. The discussions in Canberra were a testament to the power of international collaboration in higher education and research, underscoring the potential for such partnerships to drive innovation, knowledge sharing, and societal impact.



## **Future Challenges and Trends for Transboundary Fisheries Governance**

### **PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON ZONE BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

#### **Introduction**

The significance of tuna fisheries to the economies and livelihoods of Pacific Island countries is profound. In 2022, the provisional total catch of tuna within the Western and Central Pacific (WCP) Convention Area (CA) was estimated at 2,702,099 metric tons (mt). This figure represents a slight increase from the 2021 level, though it is approximately 270,000 mt lower than the record catch of 2,973,586 mt in 2019. Notably, the WCP-CA tuna catch for 2022 constituted 80% of the total Pacific Ocean tuna catch, which amounted to 3,371,780 mt, and 54% of the global tuna catch, with the provisional estimate for 2022 being 4,963,170 mt. It is important to highlight that, unlike other oceanic regions, over 85% of the WCP-CA tuna catch occurs within the jurisdictional waters of coastal states.

The economic value of the WCP-CA tuna catch in 2022 reached an estimated \$5.9 billion, marking a 17% increase compared to the previous year. The purse seine fishery, a predominant method in the region, accounted for \$3.3 billion of this total, representing 55% of the overall value of the tuna catch. Additionally, the value of the longline fishery rose to \$1.5 billion, while the pole and line fishery experienced an increase in value to \$387 million. The catch taken by other gears also saw a notable increase, reaching \$766 million, which is a 9% rise from the 2021 figures. In terms of the total value of the tuna catch, the longline fishery contributed 25%, while the pole and line fishery and other gears accounted for 7% and 13%, respectively.

The geographic and spatial distribution of the tuna catch underscores the dominance of coastal States in the region. Many of these coastal States are Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which are members of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). The reliance of these SIDS on tuna fisheries for economic development, food security, and employment cannot be overstated. As such, the governance of transboundary fisheries, particularly in the context of zone-based management, presents both challenges and opportunities for these nations. Ensuring sustainable and equitable management of these valuable resources is essential for the continued prosperity and well-being of the Pacific Island communities.

The political economy of managing tuna resources in the Pacific Islands region is characterized by a complex interplay of economic power disparities between the fishing States and the Pacific SIDS where most of the tuna is caught. The fishing States, including

China, the European Union, Japan, the United States, Korea, and Taiwan, possess significant economic clout due to their ownership of the majority of the fishing vessels operating in the region. In contrast, the Pacific SIDS, despite being the custodians of the tuna-rich waters, often find themselves at a disadvantage in negotiations and control over their resources due to their relatively weaker economic positions.

The divergence in political and economic power between the fishing States and the Pacific SIDS has several implications for the management of tuna resources, negotiations, and overall control and security over the resources, supply chains, and markets. These implications can be understood in the following dimensions:

1. **Negotiation Dynamics:** The disparity in economic power often translates into unequal bargaining positions during negotiations over access agreements, quotas, and conservation measures. The fishing States, with their superior financial and technological resources, can exert considerable influence over the terms of agreements, potentially sidelining the interests and priorities of the Pacific SIDS.
2. **Resource Control and Security:** The control over tuna resources and the security of these resources are critical concerns for the Pacific SIDS. The presence of large foreign fleets can lead to overfishing and depletion of stocks, threatening the sustainability of the resource and the livelihoods dependent on it. Furthermore, there are concerns about illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which can undermine efforts to manage the fisheries sustainably.
3. **Supply Chain and Market Influence:** The fishing States, with their extensive infrastructure and investments in processing, distribution, and marketing, have significant control over the supply chains and markets for tuna products. This control can impact the prices, market access, and overall value captured by the Pacific SIDS from their tuna resources.
4. **Geopolitical Implications:** The competition for access to tuna resources can also have broader geopolitical implications, as fishing States may leverage their economic power to secure strategic advantages in the region. This dynamic can further complicate the management of the resources and the pursuit of regional cooperation.

To address these challenges, the Pacific SIDS have been working collectively through regional organisations such as the FFA and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) to strengthen their collective bargaining power, promote sustainable management practices, and secure a fair share of the benefits from their tuna resources. However, the ongoing power imbalances and the complexities of the political economy of tuna management in the Pacific Islands region require continuous efforts to ensure equitable and sustainable outcomes for all stakeholders involved. The critical leverage that the Pacific Island nations possess in the complex political economy of tuna management is their control over the fishing zones where the majority of the tuna is caught. Access to these rich fishing grounds is indispensable for the fishing vessels of the major fishing States. Recognizing this advantage, the Pacific Island countries have been able to use this leverage to their political benefit, particularly in the development of conservation and management measures for tuna in the region. By asserting their sovereign rights over their maritime zones and implementing strategic access

agreements, the Pacific Islands have been able to negotiate terms that not only ensure sustainable fishing practices but also secure more favourable economic returns from the exploitation of their tuna resources. This leverage has been instrumental in empowering the Pacific Island nations to play a more significant role in the international fisheries management arena, advocating for measures that prioritize the long-term health of the tuna stocks and the economic well-being of their communities.

The political economy of tuna management in the Pacific Islands region has been significantly shaped by the emergence of various regional organizations and regimes. These entities, including the FFA, the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) Office, the South Pacific Group, Te Vaka Moana, the Tokelau Group, and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), have each played a crucial role in influencing the configuration of tuna management arrangements.

The FFA, established in 1979, has been instrumental in promoting regional cooperation among Pacific Island countries in the management of their tuna fisheries. It provides technical expertise, policy advice, and support for the development and implementation of regional fisheries management strategies. The FFA has been a key advocate for the rights and interests of its member countries in international fisheries negotiations.

The PNA Office, representing a subset of FFA members, has gained prominence through its management of the purse seine fishery, particularly through the implementation of the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS). This innovative approach has enhanced the economic benefits derived from tuna fisheries for PNA members and has been a model for sustainable fisheries management.

The South Pacific Group, Te Vaka Moana, and the Tokelau Group are other regional groupings that focus on specific sub-regional interests and collaborative efforts in fisheries management. These entities work alongside the broader regional organizations to address the unique challenges and opportunities faced by their member states.

The WCPFC serves as the overarching regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) for the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks, including tuna, in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. The WCPFC provides a platform for all stakeholders, including Pacific Island States, distant water fishing nations, and other interest groups, to come together and navigate their various interests. It is the only conduit through which these diverse interests can be harmonized and integrated into a comprehensive management framework for the region's tuna fisheries.

The interplay between these different regimes and organizations has shaped the political economy of tuna management in the Pacific Islands. Each entity brings its own priorities and perspectives to the table, contributing to a dynamic and multifaceted governance landscape. The WCPFC, in particular, plays a critical role in ensuring that the diverse interests of all stakeholders are considered and balanced in the pursuit of sustainable and equitable management of the region's tuna resources.

## **A. THE HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE FISHERIES ZONE EEZ/FISHERIES ZONE REGIME**

The Pacific Island States have historically approached the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) regime from a development and economic perspective. With their expansive ocean territories, these states have long understood the strategic value of their marine resources. The establishment of the EEZ and Fisheries Zone regime represents a landmark evolution in maritime law, granting these nations the legal authority to claim and manage resources within 200 nautical miles of their coastlines. This pivotal development in international maritime policy has not only redefined the rights and responsibilities of coastal states but has also laid the groundwork for the Pacific Island nations to seek economic self-reliance and sustainable development.

The EEZ regime has enabled these countries to exercise sovereign rights over the exploration, exploitation, conservation, and management of marine resources, including the lucrative tuna fisheries. This has been instrumental in their efforts to harness the economic potential of their maritime domains, providing a crucial source of revenue, employment, and food security. The strategic utilization of their EEZs has allowed the Pacific Island States to negotiate access agreements with foreign fishing fleets, secure beneficial terms, and implement conservation measures that ensure the long-term sustainability of their marine resources.

Moreover, the EEZ framework has empowered the Pacific Island States to participate more actively in regional and global fisheries management organizations, advocating for policies that reflect their interests and priorities. It has also facilitated cooperation among these island nations, leading to collective initiatives such as the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), which has been instrumental in managing and conserving tuna resources in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

The EEZ regime has been a cornerstone in the economic and developmental strategies of the Pacific Island States. It has provided them with the legal foundation to assert their rights, manage their marine resources effectively, and pursue a path of sustainable development that aligns with their unique geographical and economic circumstances.

The concept of the EEZ emerged as a pivotal development during the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III), which fundamentally transformed the manner in which states viewed and managed their maritime resources. This concept introduced a new legal framework that allowed coastal states to claim sovereignty over the resources within a 200-nautical-mile zone extending from their shores, significantly expanding their maritime jurisdiction and control over marine resources.

Prior to the conclusion of UNCLOS III, the Pacific Island Forum, in 1976, took a pioneering step in the international arena by advocating for the establishment of a 200-mile EEZ. This advocacy was a strategic move by the Pacific Island States to assert their rights over their vast marine territories and the abundant resources therein. The proposal set a precedent for maritime jurisdiction that would later be globally recognized and adopted as a standard under international law.

The momentum generated by the Pacific Island Forum's initiative continued into the following year. In 1977, the South Pacific Forum held a meeting where the Pacific Island States collectively adopted the EEZ policy. This collective adoption underscored their commitment to regional solidarity and the proactive management of their marine resources. It demonstrated the unity of the Pacific Island States in their efforts to secure legal recognition of their rights over their maritime zones and to establish a framework for the sustainable and equitable management of their ocean resources.

The adoption of the EEZ concept by the Pacific SIDS not only strengthened their legal and economic position but also set the stage for international negotiations that would eventually lead to the widespread acceptance of the 200-mile EEZ as a cornerstone of the Law of the Sea. This development marked a significant shift in the governance of the world's oceans, empowering coastal states, particularly those in the Pacific, to take charge of their marine resources and pursue sustainable development goals.

The establishment of EEZs has had profound implications for the Pacific Island States, particularly in terms of self-determination and economic independence. By enabling these nations to exercise greater sovereignty over their vast marine territories, the EEZ framework has provided them with a crucial tool for asserting their rights and managing their resources according to their own priorities and values.

This move towards greater control over their maritime domains was not merely about asserting territorial claims; it was a strategic step towards achieving economic independence. With the establishment of EEZs, Pacific Island States gained the legal authority to regulate access to and the management of marine resources within a 200-nautical-mile zone from their shores. This newfound control allowed them to harness the economic potential of their maritime assets, such as fisheries, minerals, and energy resources, which are vital for their economic development.

The ability to manage and exploit these resources in accordance with their own policies and regulations meant that these nations could pursue development strategies that were self-determined and tailored to their unique circumstances. It provided them with the opportunity to generate revenue through licensing agreements, fisheries management, and the sustainable exploitation of marine resources, thereby reducing their reliance on external aid and enhancing their economic resilience.

Furthermore, the nexus between self-determination and economic independence in the context of EEZs aligns with the environmental and social values of the Pacific Island States. These nations are often at the forefront of advocating for sustainable and responsible management of marine resources, recognizing the importance of preserving the health of their oceans for future generations. By having control over their EEZs, they can implement conservation measures, protect biodiversity, and ensure that economic activities are conducted in a manner that respects their cultural heritage and contributes to the well-being of their communities.

The establishment of EEZs has been a critical factor in enabling Pacific SIDS to exercise self-determination and pursue economic independence. It has provided them with the legal framework to manage their marine resources effectively, fostering economic development that is aligned with their values and priorities.

## **B. THE LEGAL AND POLITICAL CONFIGURATION OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL MEASURES**

The Pacific SIDS have implemented a range of regional conservation and management measures aimed at asserting increased control over their fisheries resources and securing their rights to these resources. These measures encompass a mix of legal, political, and technological initiatives designed to enhance the effectiveness of fisheries management and ensure sustainable exploitation of marine resources:

1. **Regional Register of Fishing Vessels:** This non-physical means of compliance involves maintaining a centralised registry of fishing vessels authorized to operate in the region. It facilitates the monitoring of fishing activities and helps ensure that only vessels in compliance with regional regulations can access the fisheries.
2. **Regional Vessel Monitoring Scheme (VMS):** The VMS is a key tool for tracking the movements and activities of fishing vessels in real-time. It allows for the monitoring of fishing effort and helps in the enforcement of fisheries management measures.
3. **Regional Patrol Boat Scheme:** This initiative provides Pacific Island States with patrol boats to enhance their capacity for maritime surveillance and enforcement. The scheme is crucial for deterring illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and ensuring compliance with regional fisheries regulations.
4. **Regional Surveillance Operations Center (RSOC - FFA):** The RSOC, operated by the FFA, coordinates regional surveillance activities, and facilitates the sharing of information among member states. It plays a central role in the detection and prosecution of IUU fishing activities.
5. **Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions of Access (MTCs):** The MTCs establish a common set of conditions for foreign fishing vessels seeking access to the EEZs of Pacific SIDS. They include requirements related to licensing, reporting, and compliance with conservation measures.
6. **Niue Treaty on Regional Cooperation on Surveillance and Fisheries Law Enforcement:** This treaty enhances regional cooperation in the surveillance and enforcement of fisheries laws. It provides a legal framework for the sharing of resources and information among Pacific Island States in the fight against IUU fishing.

7. US Treaty: This treaty is an example of regional management and control endeavours. It sets out the terms and conditions under which US-flagged purse seine vessels can operate in the region, including provisions related to catch limits and access fees.

8. Application of Limits and the Palau Arrangement: The Palau Arrangement, under the PNA, implements the Purse Seine Vessel Day Scheme (VDS), which sets limits on fishing effort and allocates fishing days among member states. This arrangement has been successful in increasing the economic benefits derived from the purse seine fishery and promoting sustainable management.

9. Purse Seine VDS: The VDS is a critical component of the PNA's management strategy, establishing a system of tradable fishing days to control fishing effort and optimize economic returns from the purse seine fishery.

10. Longline VDS: Building on the success of the purse seine VDS, the PNA is developing a similar scheme for the longline fishery to regulate fishing effort and enhance the sustainability of longline tuna fisheries.

11. Marine Stewardship Council (MSC): Some fisheries in the region have pursued MSC certification as a means to demonstrate their commitment to sustainable fishing practices and to access premium markets for their products.

12. WCPFC Conservation and Management Measures (CMM) on Tropical Tuna: These measures, agreed upon by WCPFC members, including Pacific Island States, aim to ensure the long-term sustainability of tropical tuna stocks through the implementation of catch limits, gear restrictions, and other management measures.

Together, these regional and national measures reflect the Pacific Island States' proactive approach to asserting control over their fisheries resources and securing their rights to sustainable and equitable exploitation of these resources.

## **C. THE PACIFIC ISLANDS ASPIRATIONS, HOPES AND DREAMS**

In 2010, Forum Leaders were presented with the outcomes of a forward-looking study on the Future of Fisheries, which identified broad focal areas to achieve a best-case scenario for the region over the following 25 years. However, it is evident that our region is currently headed toward a pathway of missed opportunities. While significant progress has been made in improving the biological health of the tuna species, which are all categorized as green in the "Majuro Plot," and better management measures are now in place for the fisheries, there are still substantial economic opportunities that are eluding the Pacific Island States. Bigeye tuna, although no longer overfished, and the region's longline fisheries, which target the highest value tuna species, are still facing economic challenges. Despite controls on fishing effort, purse seine catches continue to rise, driving down the value of the catch. Fishing on the high seas remains largely uncontrolled. Although tuna fisheries are perceived as a significant opportunity for economic development, a large portion of our tuna is still harvested by foreign fishing boats, and a significant amount is taken out of the region for processing.

Larger and more developed countries continue to capitalize on our fish to generate their profits, exports, and jobs.

Inshore fisheries resources have been the backbone of the survival of coastal communities since our islands were first settled. They are critically important for food security and livelihoods but are under threat from growing populations and, in the longer term, from the impacts of climate change. Finfish resources in many areas are now overfished to meet local demand, while high-value export species like Beche de Mer have been driven almost to extinction. Only a concerted effort to improve the management of coastal fisheries and provide alternative livelihoods and protein sources can prevent a decline in fish supplies and further degradation of the coastal environment. Traditional 'top-down' management is proving ineffective, and there is a pressing need to empower coastal communities to manage and use their fisheries resources sustainably. Although aquaculture holds potential, it currently contributes only a tiny fraction to fisheries production in FFA members. This paper, therefore, focuses on tuna and coastal fisheries.

To realise these aspirations, Forum Leaders committed to the development of a Regional Roadmap encompassing 11 strategies. This commitment is aimed at empowering our region to take control of the future of our fisheries. The implementation of these strategies will be facilitated through regional agencies, primarily the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, working in collaboration. It is important to note that the successful execution of many of these strategies requires high-level political direction and a whole-of-government approach at the national level. Our collective goal is to transform our fisheries into a sustainable and prosperous sector that supports the economic development, food security, and cultural heritage of our Pacific Island communities.

The aspirations for the future of the Pacific Islands' tuna fisheries are encapsulated in clear goals and indicators, focusing on sustainability, value, employment, and food security:

1. Sustainability: A sustainable resource is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Within three years, there will be agreed Target Reference Points for the four key tuna species. Within ten years, the status of each species will be clearly moving towards these targets. Notably, the overfishing of bigeye tuna will have been addressed, and the stock will be rebuilding. Furthermore, impacts of fishing on bycatch such as sharks, turtles, and seabirds will have been significantly reduced. Management measures will be robust, not undermined by Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing.
2. Value: By 2024, the region's tuna catch will be worth double what it was in 2014. This increase in value, rather than volume, will be achieved by eliminating oversupply and targeting higher-value products and markets. With increased value and profitability, there will be scope to increase access fees for countries that wish to continue licensing foreign vessels.
3. Employment: Within ten years, 18,000 new jobs will be created in the tuna industry. While many of these will be in tuna processing in Melanesia, opportunities will also be created for nationals of all FFA members for roles such as vessel crew, observers, and fisheries



management staff. Standards to ensure that employment is safe and worthwhile will be harmonized.

4. Food Security: By 2024, the supply of tuna for domestic consumption in the region will increase by 40,000 tonnes per year, providing nutritious food and reducing pressure on inshore resources. Depending on national circumstances, small-scale catches, supplies from processors in the region, and bycatch from industrial vessels will all contribute to this increase.

**To achieve these goals, the following strategies will be implemented:**

1. Effective Zone-Based Management: The long-held commitment to zone-based management provides the key to taking control of major fisheries. FFA members commit to assert a system of national rights vigorously, within a cooperative framework of binding limits that will be managed under formal Harvest Strategies, including through equitable and responsible reduction where necessary. Within ten years, catch-based (quota) systems will replace effort controls.

2. Continue to Reduce IUU Fishing: The region will continue to invest in cooperative Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance programs that maximize the ability of countries and their surveillance partners to effectively detect, deter, and eliminate IUU fishing. This will include enhanced investment in satellite and electronic surveillance, at-sea boardings and inspections, cooperation to increase aerial surveillance, and enhanced port controls. Pacific Island countries will cooperate through the Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement to achieve multilateral Monitoring Control and Surveillance outcomes.

3. Progressively Restrict Fishing on the High Seas by Foreign Fleets: Expansion of fishing effort in the high seas is of no benefit to Pacific Island countries. Imposition of controls through licensing conditions and work within the WPFC and other international processes will level the playing field. NGOs and major markets will be encouraged to promote fish sourced from well-managed national zones as a higher standard deserving of market and price recognition.

4. Prioritise the Supply of Raw Materials to Processors in the Region: The region will move to mandatory offloading of part of the catch of access vessels and increased transshipment fees (in a harmonized way) to ensure the development of domestic tuna processing, which has always struggled against low-cost economies in Asia.

5. Establish High Standards for Employment in the Fishing and Processing Industry: The development of a tuna industry should not compromise the health, safety, and well-being of Pacific Islanders. Uniform minimum standards and a renewed emphasis on training will help avoid countries being played off against each other.

6. Establish Regional Processing Hubs in Partnership between Countries: The diversity of opportunities for processing and the need for economies of scale will be addressed by

developing 'processing hubs' in two or three countries that can receive fish from other FFA waters and provide benefits through employment and ownership.

Through the implementation of these goals and strategies, the Pacific Islands aspire to transform their tuna fisheries into a sustainable and prosperous sector that supports the economic development, food security, and cultural heritage of their communities.

In response to the challenges facing coastal fisheries in the Pacific Islands region, Forum Leaders have outlined a comprehensive set of goals and strategies aimed at ensuring the sustainable management and development of these vital resources. Recognizing the importance of coastal fisheries for food security, livelihoods, and cultural heritage, the Leaders have committed to a vision that emphasizes empowerment, resilience, and diversified livelihoods for coastal communities. The strategies put forth are designed to provide the necessary support and framework to achieve these goals, focusing on informed management, re-focused fisheries agencies, effective collaboration, robust legislation, and equitable access to benefits. Together, these goals and strategies represent a proactive and holistic approach to safeguarding the future of coastal fisheries and the well-being of the Pacific Island communities that depend on them.

## Coastal Fisheries: Goals and Indicators

### 1. Empowerment:

Within ten years, all Pacific SIDS will have enacted policies and legislation that facilitate the involvement of coastal communities in the management of their fisheries resources. Supported by national controls on export commodities, communities will take the lead in local management regimes with clearly defined user rights.

### 2. Resilience:

Within ten years, all Pacific SIDS will be implementing strategies to address the various threats to coastal ecosystems. By conserving fisheries habitats, controlling pollution, and mitigating damage from outside the fishing sector, we can build resilience to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

### 3. Livelihoods:

Within ten years, all Pacific SIDS will have adopted policies to develop alternative livelihoods for coastal communities affected by declining fisheries resources. Overfishing often occurs because coastal communities lack alternatives. Solutions such as aquaculture, water-based tourism, and small-scale fishing for tuna provide options, but many solutions will lie outside the fisheries sector.

## Strategies:

### 1. Provide Relevant Information to Inform Management and Policy:

Decisions by governments and community managers will be based on accurate information. Science will be translated into simple and informative material to guide community management, allowing communities to integrate their traditional knowledge with scientific understanding.

## 2. Re-focus Fisheries Agencies to Support Coastal Fisheries Management:

Many fisheries agencies, which are often under-resourced, primarily focus on tuna and outdated fisheries development activities. There is a need to redirect staff and resources towards supporting community-based management and enforcing national regulations and restrictions where appropriate. Greater collaboration between national agencies and the exchange of staff will be supported.

## 3. Ensure Effective Collaboration and Coordination of Stakeholders:

Apart from Fisheries Departments, numerous stakeholders have an interest in the management of coastal areas. Coordinating the efforts of different government departments, NGOs, and donors is essential, as is better engagement with organizations that have strong community outreach, such as faith-based organizations.

## 4. Develop and Enforce Strong and Up-to-date Legislation, Policy, and Plans:

The new approach of empowering communities to manage their resources must be supported by robust and relevant legislation, policies, and plans. Strengthened enforcement will be required, both by community-authorized officers, fisheries and law enforcement officers, and customs.

## 5. Ensure Equitable Access to Benefits and Involvement in Decision-Making:

Involving women, youth, and disadvantaged groups in decision-making and access to the benefits of marine resource use is not only fair but also necessary for success. Women and youth, who are closely involved in harvesting and selling marine resources, are less likely to respect management measures if they are not consulted.

## **D. CONCLUSION**

Delivering on this roadmap towards a brighter future for our fisheries necessitates commitment at the highest political level and a willingness to drive change in national laws and institutions, including through greater investment to reflect the value of our fisheries resources. Achieving the goals set out in the roadmap requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, with political support playing a crucial role in driving and defending these efforts.

The strategies outlined for the sustainability of stocks, fisheries management, and Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) demand dedicated cooperation among Pacific SIDS in ways that diverge from the historic approach of distant water fishing nations.

Leaders will be instrumental in steering and protecting these efforts to ensure sustainable stocks that are managed in ways that create development opportunities.

Industry development and employment strategies necessitate whole-of-government approaches that can only be realized through high-level support. For example, fisheries development often intersects with broader issues such as investment and taxation law, labor mobility, and cross-border transactions. These processes must be cooperative both within and between governments.

Many of the strategies also require additional investment in fisheries agencies at the national level. The success of individual members that have already progressed some of the strategies discussed in this roadmap highlights the positive nature of this investment. In particular, necessary reforms to the management of coastal fisheries will require enhanced investment at the national level and through the SPC.

However, the current loose political arrangements, while beneficial, may not achieve the efficacy desired by the Pacific Islands region. There is a need to explore different architecture that involves greater legal, administrative, and institutional integration. The focus of the development of fisheries as state-centric, largely driven by government officials, is a weakness that needs addressing. Perhaps the consideration of a Regional Fisheries Council that involves industry working within a regional instrument with greater legal and regulatory powers might be a more effective approach. Such a council could provide a platform for a more integrated and collaborative approach to fisheries management, leveraging the expertise and resources of both the public and private sectors to achieve sustainable and prosperous fisheries in the Pacific Islands region. Unless there is greater legal, administrative, and institutional integration amongst the Pacific Islands, their hopes and aspirations for greater control and investment in their fisheries would remain elusive. The current fragmented approach hinders the effective implementation of regional strategies and diminishes the potential for leveraging the full value of their marine resources. To truly realise their vision for sustainable and prosperous fisheries, Pacific Island countries must embrace a more unified and integrated framework that strengthens their collective capacity to manage and develop their fisheries in a manner that benefits all stakeholders.

In addition to greater legal, administrative, and institutional integration, there is also a need to consider the important linkages between fisheries and other sectors, especially in coastal fisheries. The connections between agriculture, tourism, agroforestry, health, and livelihoods must all be taken into account. Often, in designing and focusing on the impacts of fisheries, these connections are overlooked, yet they play a crucial role in the overall sustainability and resilience of coastal communities. Understanding and integrating these interrelated sectors can lead to more holistic and effective management strategies that not only enhance the fisheries sector but also contribute to broader economic and social development goals in the Pacific Islands region.