

Priority Issues for the Tuna Industry in Micronesia

The third tuna industry sub-regional meeting was held in Majuro, Marshall Islands from 7 - 9th November 2006 for participants from Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau and Tuvalu. During the three days meeting, a number of critical issues relating to tuna industry were raised. On the final day of the meeting a list of priorities requiring urgent attention by the DevFish project and regional agencies was made as follows:

- There is a need for up to date national stock assessments to complement the region-wide picture.
- There is a need for clearer understanding of the stock assessment models used and the impacts of limitations of data.
- Lack of effective implementation of management measures in Indonesia and Philippines should not be disregarded simply because they are 'too hard'. The governments should be encouraged to ensure effective conservation management measures are in place. The impact of weaknesses in data collection in these countries on current stock assessment models needs to be quantified.
- A wide range of value added products could be produced in countries in the sub-region; the Japanese market for tuna products consumed at home was identified as one which would merit a study.
- Industry participants expressed concern at the high level of fees charged by FFA for VMS and vessel registration and requested that these be reviewed; it is also important that FFA respond quickly to applications as fishing companies in the sub-region are penalized for late licence applications.
- Regional agencies need to become more proactive in dealing with criticism on fisheries issues in the region - media reports are dominated by the views of NGOs.

Other issues raised during the meeting include:

Government Policies

- There is a need for appropriate policies, especially with regard to foreign investment in the fishery.
- New policies must be supported by a firm commitment to implement change.
- Policy initiatives are required to address issues such as fuel costs, air freight and tax reform; some of these could be handled on a sub-regional basis.
- There is a need to focus on specific issues that affect industry.
- There may be a need to restructure Government fisheries administrations to be more responsive to development needs.
- Survival of local and locally based fishing operations is an issue. Countries in the region are competing against low cost operations, in Indonesia and Philippines for example.
- There is a need for strategies to make Pacific Island fisheries more viable, and to make local bases more attractive to foreign vessels.
- The economic benefits of local basing justify tax remissions and special treatment, at least in the short term.

Management of the Resource

- Management measures to reduce catches of Yellowfin and Bigeye in the WCPFC have become urgent.
- There is a need to ensure that such management measures recognize the development aspirations of small island developing states.
- There is a need to quantify the economic benefits of different tuna industry operations so that these can be maximized.
- Both biological and economic factors should be taken into account when establishing management measures.

Consultation with Industry

- Fisheries Associations have a very important role as a representative mechanism for stakeholders.
- There is a need for Governments to address issues of information sharing and transparency.
- The effectiveness of consultation between Government and Industry depends on the approach. Dialogue needs to be well structured and there is a role for professional facilitators.
- It is important to balance the representation of stakeholders, particularly where there are likely to be winners and losers.
- The competitive nature of fishing operations can make it difficult to reach agreement on joint solutions.
- Bureaucrats need to be cautious when planning development initiatives. Industry will determine what works best in a competitive environment.

Market Access

- Meeting requirements for the EU market will require a major investment of time and money.
- Even if the EU is not a target, there is still a need to improve standards and inspection regimes in the region for other markets.
- Training of inspectors, probably on a regional basis, is a key requirement.
- Development of products in partnership with a buyer would seem the best strategy.

Regional Issues

- The meeting noted the key role for FFA in helping member countries to meet obligations under the WCPFC, and stressed the need for industry participation in meetings and discussions of national positions.
- It was noted that, although WCPFC decisions allow for the development of Pacific Island fisheries, issues of allocation of the resource were yet to be resolved. Countries need to be prepared to defend the interests of local and locally based fisheries.
- The need for clearly identified national representative to participate in the regional Pacific Island Tuna Industry Association was stressed.
- Industry stressed the need for greater consultation on the proposed Fisheries Partnership Agreement with the EU.