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**FOURTH MEETING OF
THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC MINISTERS OF AGRICULTURE**

Port Vila, Vanuatu, 23-24 July 2001

**Presentation by
FAO Sub-Regional Office for
the Pacific Islands (SAPA)**



FOURTH MEETING OF THE SOUTH WEST PACIFIC MINISTERS OF
AGRICULTURE

23 – 24 July 2001, Port Vila, Vanuatu

COMMUNIQUÉ

Ministers from the South West Pacific region (Kiribati, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) and Representatives from Australia and Fiji met at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Port Vila, Vanuatu, from 23 - 24 July 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to examine and discuss a range of issues relating to food security in the Pacific region and give guidance on the further elaboration of a programme of work on issues identified at the Third Meeting in Tonga on 26-27 April 1999.

The meeting was opened by His Excellency, the Acting President of the Republic of Vanuatu, Honourable Donald Kalpokas. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Vanuatu, Right Honourable Edward N. Natapei was unanimously elected as Chairperson.

Ministers welcomed the information provided by the Director-General of FAO, Dr Jacques Diouf, on the preparation for the World Food Summit: *five years later* (WFS:*fyl*), to be held in Rome from 5 to 9 November 2001. They reaffirmed the commitments made at the WFS and highlighted the importance of Pacific leaders personally attending the WFS:*fyl*. Ministers supported the Director-General's call for mobilizing adequate resources which may include voluntary contributions to serve as a catalyst for enhancing food production and improving access to food.

Ministers welcomed the opportunity to provide comments on the draft text for the WFS:*fyl* resolution which was distributed and is being coordinated for the South West Pacific sub-region by Australia in its role as the South West Pacific representative to the FAO Council. Ministers agreed to forward comments to Australia by the end of October 2001.

Ministers reviewed activities related to the 1999 Communiqué and noted progress achieved in several areas by the FAO Sub-regional Office for the Pacific Islands. They recognized the importance of efforts made by FAO to increase regional cooperation for the benefit of member countries and to work with CROP agencies (Council of Regional Organizations of the Pacific) and other organizations to minimize duplication and optimize the sustainable use of countries' limited resources.

Ministers noted that the priorities and activities under discussion would be instrumental for and consistent with the implementation of the World Food Summit Plan of Action and acknowledged the role of women in pursuing these objectives. Ministers identified opportunities where increased cooperation was likely to produce mutual benefits. These included:

Agriculture Policy Five Years after WFS

Ministers reaffirmed the importance of a well-defined, coherent and achievable agriculture policy contributing to the long-term prosperity and growth of the Pacific Island economies.

Ministers, while recognizing the complexity of land tenure issues in the region, agreed to consider the development of policies that advance the establishment of well defined and secure property rights which recognize customary ownership and use. They further agreed that approaches to resolving land issues should be tailored to suit each country in recognition of the diversity and different histories of PICs (Pacific Island Countries). Ministers considered it essential that governments invest time and effort in working together with communities to develop sustainable land policy options that are appropriate to customary land ownership and use.

Ministers recognized that food security issues need a holistic approach across sectors such as agriculture, land, health, education, fisheries and forestry, and cooperation with the private sector, churches, NGOs, customary groups and other partners.

Ministers noted the efforts within the region to deal with the complex issues linked with trade liberalization and trade promotion and welcomed the enhanced understanding of the implications of the WTO agreements. Ministers:

- Endorsed the importance of adapting national policies to align with the evolving trade environment and the need to further develop national capacity building in this area.
- Noted that some members are considering their goal of WTO membership and called for further assistance to member countries to evaluate the costs and benefits of joining the WTO.

Responsible Fisheries and Food Security

Ministers recognized the importance of sound management and sustainable use of fisheries resources and the need for concerted attention to conservation of fisheries resources. Ministers:

- Stressed the need to strengthen international collaboration in the Preparatory Conference of the Convention of the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific (WCPT Convention).
- Agreed that members should continue to implement the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and for this purpose called on FAO for assistance.
- Welcomed the commencement of the 5-year regional project on fisheries statistics. They urged FAO to continue to coordinate its efforts with that of the Fisheries Programme of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and other agencies, which supports PICs in their efforts to strengthen national capacity of statistics on coastal and subsistence fishery and aquaculture.
- Agreed that members need technical assistance in the setting up of appropriate authorizing bodies and quality assurance, inspection and certification systems to facilitate trade on fishery products.

- Supported further development of aquaculture of economically important species.
- Noted the suggestion to carry out a study on the effects of globalisation on fisheries in the region.

Food and Nutrition Challenges

Ministers recognized the importance of ensuring access by all people at all times to adequate quantity of safe and nutritious foods and expressed their concerns for the growing rates of consumption of highly processed foods. While acknowledging that diseases of over nutrition such as diabetes are a growing problem in the Pacific, Ministers also acknowledged the importance of addressing the small pockets of protein/energy under-nutrition in the Pacific.

Ministers agreed that food control systems should be strengthened through the development of appropriate legislation and the reinforcement of food inspection systems to ensure that all foods (imported, exported and locally produced) meet internationally accepted standards.

Ministers recognized that the food industry in the Pacific could contribute to national food security by developing efficient food production systems, increasing food choice and improving nutritional status. They acknowledged the contribution of the food industry to people's livelihoods and the economy.

Ministers recognized the value of applying good hygienic and good manufacturing practices and introducing the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) approach to improve food safety and quality. Ministers emphasized the need to train personnel to assist countries in meeting international safety and quality requirements. More specifically, Ministers:

- Acknowledged the role of Codex Alimentarius and the National Codex Committees.
- Emphasized the need to strengthen coordination of various ministries, the private sector and consumers in ensuring food safety and quality.
- Stressed the importance of consistent availability of affordable local food.

Small-Farmers' Contributions to National Food Security

Ministers recognized the important contribution of the small farmer sub-sector to national economies, employment in rural areas and national food security in PICs. More specifically, Ministers:

- Recognized the importance of continued support to small farmers in the form of a Farmer-Centred Development approach, based on the modification of traditional farming systems.
- Appreciated the potential positive impact of such an approach on attracting youth to the agriculture sector, the role of women in agricultural development, prevention of urban drift by income and employment generation in rural areas.
- Recognized the need for fair distribution of resources amongst rural communities leading to poverty alleviation.

- Recognized that addressing needs of communities in rural areas can contribute to social cohesiveness and stability.
- Encouraged FAO to actively collaborate with other organisations and stakeholders in further refinement of a Farmer-Centred Development approach and to seek donor assistance for its implementation in the Pacific region.

Plant Protection and Food Security

Ministers endorsed the value of establishing and maintaining sound quarantine and bio-security systems in order to protect domestic food production and facilitate trade. Ministers agreed that FAO and other organizations should continue to strengthen their coordinated approach to plant protection in the Pacific.

Recognizing that PICs do not have the capacity to meet all their technical needs, Ministers endorsed the value of coordinated regional information services such as Pacific PestNet.

In the desire to minimize the negative effects of agricultural chemicals and their residues on human health and the environment, Ministers:

- Noted with concern the high rate of increase in herbicide use.
- Suggested that PICs should consider introducing systems to monitor pesticide and in particular herbicide use and its impact on food safety, water quality and soil quality.
- Endorsed the use of alternatives to chemicals such as Integrated Pest Management.
- Expressed interest in exploring options for developing organic industry as niche opportunity for PICs while recognizing the need to consider the establishment of appropriate institutional systems.
- Emphasized the need for ongoing research into viable plant protection measures in PICs.

Enhancing Food Security Through Forestry

Ministers highlighted the need for conservation and sustainable development of forests and hence the need for strong political commitment to the development of legislation, policies and national forestry management plans. They emphasized the need for FAO to work closely with other organizations as part of the UNFF (United Nations Forum on Forests) process in assisting countries to implement the Intergovernmental Panel on Forest and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IPF / IFF) proposals for action.

Ministers recognized the potential of coconut wood as a valuable resource and encouraged FAO to continue investigating opportunities for use of coconut timber.

More specifically, Ministers agreed that PICs should:

- Include food security needs in forest management plans and objectives, particularly for those communities that rely largely on forest and tree products to supplement their diet.
- Encourage agro-forestry systems in order to help protect the environment and provide income.
- Support small-scale forest based enterprises by encouraging adequate financing facilities, the sustainable supply of input materials and the development and use of appropriate technology.
- Set new policy frameworks to promote tree planting, forest regeneration and sustainable management of forest resources.

Ministers decided that the name of this meeting be revised to better reflect the geographic distribution of Member countries.

Ministers agreed that the Fourth Meeting has been constructive and useful. Ministers agreed that the next meeting would be convened and held in Fiji during 2003.

1. Honourable Edward N. Natapei (Vanuatu)
2. HRH Prince ‘Ulukalala Lavaka Ata (Tonga)
3. Honourable Young Vivian (Niue)
4. Honourable Emile Schutz (Kiribati)
5. Honourable John Silk (Marshall Islands)
6. Honourable Tuisugaletaua Sofara Aveau (Samoa)
7. Honourable Moon Pin Kwan (Solomon Islands)
8. Honourable Matt Robson (New Zealand)
9. His Excellency Perry Head (Australia)
10. Mr. Samisoni Ulitu (Fiji)

Signed in Port Vila, Vanuatu on 24 July 2001