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TWENTY-SIXTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES (Noumea, New Caledonia, 5 - 9 August 1996)

COUNTRY STATEMENT

FIJI

New developments in the fisheries sector have necessitated a shift on the emphasis on the Fisheries sector objectives and subsequent implementation strategies. As the sector is increasingly commercialised fishermen are more and more able to support their infrastructure and capital development, whilst certain resources will come under greater pressure.

The laws governing the use of any marine resources are enshrined in Chapters 158, 158A and 149 of the Laws of Fiji. Chapter 158, the Fisheries Act, regulates and sets out guidelines for fisheries resource exploitation, and recognises indigenous Fijians customary right to fish in their traditional fishing grounds and even, to control exploitation pressures. This control extends over the immediate inshore waters being enclosed by a fringing or barrier reef system. They are able to impose restrictions on all other fisherfolks, particularly to commercial fishermen.

The Fisheries Division largely assumes an advisory role to the customary fishing rights owners and is also responsible for instituting legislative and enforcement measures. Licences to fish in customary fishing rights areas are only issued by this agency, when a fisherman has obtained a permit from the head of the designated ownership unit. Moreover, the exploitation of the resources within the EEZ, the territorial, and the Archipelagic waters are the responsibilities of the Fisheries Division.

Almost all inshore (within IDA) commercial sedentary species (holothurids, tridachids, trochids, etc) are being over-harvested for the past decade, due to the pressure from South East Asian markets, and the emphasis is to harvest at a sustainable rate. In the past, the fisheries sectors direction was focused towards increasing production, but is now on management and conservation of fisheries resources, due to increased level of exploitation.

Total volume of local artisanal fish production gauged through market sales within the country for 1995 was estimated at 4688 mt, with an estimated value of \$16.32 m. Subsistence production is estimated at 17,000 tonnes, which is worth over \$42 m at a nominal price of \$2.50 per kg fish. For the past 10 years there has been a continued increase in exploitation of inshore or coral reef fisheries which resulted in a virtual catch decline in sedentary or semi-sessile species such as bêche-de-mer, giant clams, MOP's and even trochus. Artisanal fin fish production largely remained constant for the past two years. Effective management and sustainable development will now be the emphasis for inshore fisheries sector.

Future resource development plans will consider these objectives as priorities, and provide direction for actions. Some avenues for easing pressure on inshore fisheries are the introduction of Fish Aggregation Device (FAD's) into immediate offshore waters, and the development of freshwater aquaculture. The fishermen and investors have been also encouraged to move to offshore fisheries such as deepwaters snappers, with assistance in bank loans for gear, boat construction, infrastructures, and training in these ventures. More attention is given to managing and regulating over-exploited inshore fisheries, including harvesting of live corals for exports.

The government is trying to promote aquaculture and expectations for major break through is anticipated in not too distant future due to improvement of seedling stocks through research in genetic selection. The techniques for mass production of seedlings stock have been established, both for tilapia and giant clams.

The government is looking forward to developing the offshore fishery. The industrial fishery is well established in Fiji. Primarily consists of PAFCO canning tuna. The domestic longliners targeting sashimi grade tuna are also important export earners. Tuna and tuna like species are extremely valuable commercially (for export), especially albacore, bigeye, yellowfin, blue fin and skipjack, however, a large portion of by-catch from this industry is consumed locally.
