



**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR FISHERIES
1st REGIONAL FISHERIES MINISTER'S MEETING
26 August 2020
SUVA, FIJI**

Salutation

**The Honourable Chair,
Honourable Prime Minister Puna,
Honourable Ministers,
Representatives from our CROP agencies**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

NI SA BULA VINAKA

Honourable Chair,

May I first join others in congratulating you on your role as chairman. Today we come together to mark a new chapter of strengthening regional cooperation, solidarity and friendship through this inaugural session, and especially in these unprecedented times.

While each of our countries has our own unique challenges, we as a region like the rest of world have all been greatly affected by the impacts of COVID-19.

Now more than ever does regional cooperation, solidarity and friendship play an important role.

Our economies that have plummeted, health and security systems tested, threats to the fall of social structures as a result of mass job losses and the associated struggles faced on a daily basis.

We need to solidify our efforts as a region to be ahead of what is yet to come. The impacts brought about by COVID-19 should not be seen in isolation.

Prior to COVID-19, we as regional countries have collaborated to address the uncertainty of climate change, increase in fishing efforts, sustainability of our tuna resources, coral reefs and other ecological ecosystems and the continuous threats of IUU fishing.

Honourable Chair, reflecting on our reliance on our fisheries resources, our foresight and shared responsibility is needed to enable us to work smart and be innovative.

Our ability to holistically find solutions to these problems will determine the survival of our people, our economy, the region and enable us to minimise the threat to our Blue Pacific continent!

As such Honourable Chair, we are determined to progress discussions the fusion of EU model with the hubs and spokes model in supply chain. As custodians, this would ensure that members maximize socio-economic gains from the last healthy tuna fishery and other fisheries resources as it would:

- Encourage trade amongst the membership
- Add to the economic gains received through access agreements
- ensure full utilization of processing plants and provide employment opportunities across the region
- encourage domestication of fleets
- Fully utilize fish caught or cultured within the Blue Pacific Continent otherwise transshipped, landed at foreign ports, or exported as unprocessed commodities; and
- Maintain premium fish prices at the global level

We also reiterate the call for CROP agencies to work together in a more coordinated and concerted manner that is more efficient and effective to suit and address members' needs and aspirations.

Fiji remains committed to work with the CROP agencies and membership in making sure, we all achieve our obligations including the shared decision from our Leaders.

Honourable Chair, underpinning Fiji's global commitments, we are determined to support the regional efforts in sustainably managing the region's fisheries resources.

Honourable Chair, some key issues, which we hope to advance, includes;

- maritime boundary negotiations
- removal of harmful fisheries subsidies
- climate change threats
- response to COVID-19
- progressing on coastal fisheries, aquaculture and the road map for the longline fisheries,
- progress work on new, safe and innovative monitoring tools such as electronic monitoring

Honourable Chair in concluding, I would like to urge my fellow Ministers that the COVID pandemic would call us to make hard decisions. Decisions that determines the survival of our economy and its people. In due respect of the decision we make, we should all be reminded of our roles.

We owe it to our people to make the best decisions for their sustenance.

This is not just for the current generation but for our children and the future generations.

Honourable Chair, Fiji reaffirms its commitment to work constructively with all members to ensure that we conclude this year's session in a spirit of regional cooperation and solidarity.

Honourable Chair, I would like to assure you of the Fiji's delegation's unwavering support as you steer this meeting.

Vinaka vakalevu and I thank you!