

**Thirty-fifth Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific
1-4 September 2020**

**Statement
International Collective in Support of Fishworkers (ICSF)**

**Agenda Item 18:
Building Resilience of Small-scale Fisheries to Ensure Food Security and Nutrition in the Pacific**

1. In the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, 11 million people live in 14 independent countries and eight territories, spread over 28 million sq km of ocean space. The total land area in this region is less than two per cent of the combined ocean area. Less than four per cent of the total land area is arable. As a result, the fisheries sector is vital for local food security and nutrition.
2. Subsistence, coastal, artisanal, semi-industrial and industrial fisheries coexist in the region, harvesting species ranging from sedentary molluscs to shared, highly migratory tuna stocks. The fishing areas range from lagoons, reefs and shoals in archipelagic, internal and territorial waters, to the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and the high seas.
3. While distant-water and national offshore fishing fleets dominate in terms of employment, revenue, income and foreign exchange, contributing 90 per cent of the fish catch in the region, the coastal commercial small-scale fisheries, including subsistence coastal and nearshore fisheries, contribute significantly to food security and nutrition of the local populations. Women particularly play an active role in subsistence fisheries. Over 80 per cent of the coastal and nearshore catch is used for subsistence in countries in the region with relatively large populations. In some remote atolls of the region, the per capita consumption of fish is as high as 250 kg—all of it sourced from subsistence fisheries.
4. Subsistence fisheries are an important source of nutrition, culture and welfare in the region, and are not marginalized here as they are in many other parts of the world. In fact, there are secure customary tenure rights to lagoons, reefs and shoals in many of these islands. However, the coastal fisheries resources are depleting. Sea cucumber, trochus, pearl oysters, corals and live reef fish species are increasingly being harvested and exported to rich Asian markets, interfering with traditional food sources. Urbanization and siltation from mining and logging are degrading fisheries habitats of subsistence fishers. These customary tenure rights regimes certainly need to be transformed to become more sustainable and equitable.
5. Several regional policies exist for fisheries management and sustainable coastal fisheries in the Pacific islands, which include the 2015 Noumea Strategy, the 2015 Future of Fisheries Roadmap and the Melanesian Spearhead Group Roadmap for Inshore Fisheries 2015-2024. Despite these instruments, the attention is still focused more on distant-water and national offshore fishing fleets, and less on managing coastal and nearshore fisheries. We request APRC to advise Parties of the Nauru Agreement (PNA) to dedicate a share of access fees generated from

sustainable purse-seine and longline fishing to benefit subsistence fisheries management and development and achieve the commitment of the Noumea Strategy to “Re-focused fisheries agencies that are transparent, accountable and adequately resourced, supporting coastal fisheries management and sustainable development”, as further supported by the Pacific Island Leaders’ in the Future of Fisheries Roadmap.

6. There is need to stem the decline of coastal fisheries resources and related ecosystems on the one hand and to improve the lot of subsistence fishers, on the other. The 2014 Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines) can assist in reaching these goals. The SSF Guidelines are broadly compatible with regional strategies and processes, such as the 2015 Noumea strategy of the Pacific Community, and we urge APRC to request FAO to work with regional and national agencies and other stakeholders to implement regional policies and supplement areas of the SSF Guidelines that are not adequately covered.

7. To benefit from a human rights-based approach, as promoted by the SSF Guidelines, all the States in the region may be encouraged by APRC to ratify the United Nations treaties that protect all human rights. Increased transparency and accountability in decision-making and availability of information will improve the sustainability and returns from fisheries management and APRC may encourage the States in the region to implement the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC).

8. To fully benefit from the provisions of the SSF Guidelines, especially to realize the non-fishery objectives such as improved access to drinking water, sanitation, housing, health, education, social protection, gender equity, justice to resolve disputes, and strengthening of human rights institutions, APRC may advise the States in the region to include the human-rights landscape of fishing communities in the Universal Periodic Review they submit to the UN Human Rights Council.

9. While customary rights are enshrined in the constitutions of some States of the Pacific region, the holders of customary rights (whether de facto or de jure) are not adequately represented in any of the regional or national policy initiatives. We recommend APRC to urge the States in the region to work with customary rights holders, to uphold sustainable, equitable and gender-just tenure rights, to actively engage with this process, supported by civil society organizations (CSOs) such as the Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs) network and other relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing coastal communities in the region. We urge APRC to call upon the FAO Sub-Regional Office in Samoa to promote the effective participation of CSOs/NGOs that legitimately represent the interests of the rights holders in the regional fisheries-governance processes, consistent with the guiding principles of the SSF Guidelines, and be accountable for what is done with their inputs.

10. Protecting subsistence fisheries and the human rights of fishing communities can definitely turn the tide and make coastal fisheries sustainable and safeguard the contributions of coastal fisheries to food security and nutrition and enhance the socio-ecological resilience of fishing communities in the Pacific.