

SECURING THE BLUE PACIFIC

Effective regional security underpins the vision outlined in the theme for this year's Pacific Islands Forum: Building a Strong Pacific: Our People, Our Islands, Our Will. The security of our people and their environment is crucial for sustainable growth and development, and the way we organise ourselves to protect and nurture our Blue Continent must be something we decide for ourselves.

"Securing the wellbeing and potential of The Blue Pacific is at the centre of the Forum Agenda", said Forum Chair and Prime Minister of Samoa, the Hon. Tuilaepa Malielegaoi at the Korea-Pacific Forum Foreign Ministers Meeting in Seoul last December.

"Protecting The Blue Pacific will require a collective security architecture that recognizes, promotes and provides security in the broadest sense of the term. There is commitment to working together to ensure the security of our shared ocean geography, resources and ecosystems therein, from unsustainable exploitation and illegal activities, including illegal fishing and transnational crime.

This is a time of profound change; and this change is taking place at an unprecedented pace. Geo-strategic competition between major world powers has once again made our region a place of renewed interest and strategic importance. Climate change increas-

ingly affects our people in a variety of ways including increased severe weather events, scarcity of food and water, and displaced communities. Information and communication technologies (ICT) are burgeoning and with them issues relating to cyber security and cyber enabled crime.

Within this context, at the Forum Leaders meeting in Apia last year, Leaders directed the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat to engage in consultations to refresh our existing security arrangements to meet the regions current and future security challenges.

Forum Leaders saw the need to expand and strengthen collective action for regional security inclusive of human security, humanitarian assistance, prioritizing environmental security and building resilience to impacts of natural disasters and climate change.

As a result the Forum Secretariat has been working on a



A Strong #BluePacific –
Our People, Our Islands, Our Will.

declaration which is currently dubbed

strategic responses to security issues and determine what the region's priorities and interests will be into the future.

In opening a recent Forum Members security meeting, Fiji's Minister of Defence and National Security, Ratu Inoke Kubuabola said "At the heart of all this is ensuring that this new declaration will enable us to work better collectively to forge a secure and stable environment that will enable all our Pacific peoples to live free and worthwhile lives".

"Biketawa Plus should be about prevention as much as it is about response. How can we better monitor, assess and provide advice on addressing potential drivers and sources of conflict in our

region? How do we build a better understanding of peace and security across our communities and countries? How can these regional approaches be linked to national security policies, plans or strategies?"

The Forum's reinvigorated security architecture must represent the security aspirations of all Forum members. The Forum Secretariat has undertaken a rigorous process of consultations to ensure inclusiveness and ownership.

While the Biketawa Plus work is focussed on contemporary and future security challenges, members of the Pacific Islands Forum have a long history of working together on security arrangements and initiatives.

The Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) provides a strong example. Informed by the values of our own Pacific Way, Forum countries worked side by side to help a neighbour in need to restore law and order, restore the machinery of government, bring perpetrators to justice, and rebuild the economy as the basis for sustained and genuine development.

Our region is blessed with many riches: our people, our cultures, our resources. Ensuring their potential and wellbeing will require strong collective action on regional security.

WHY TUNA FISHERIES ARE VITAL TO OUR BLUE CONTINENT

The fish that thrive in our waters have a large part to play in building a strong Pacific. Shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean

and maintaining regional solidarity as one "Blue Pacific" will ensure this resource continues to make a significant contribution to the sustainable development of our people.

For decades, we have been successful in managing our fisheries and have surpassed other regions of the world in terms of sustainable practice. Regional cooperation on management of our tuna resources by Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) members, supported by fisheries science from the Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC), has ensured that our collective efforts in managing the four main tuna species – skipjack, bigeye, albacore, yellowfin – are paying off, with all currently being harvested within sustainable levels. Effective sub-regional fisheries management arrangements, such as those adopted by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), have been integral to the out-



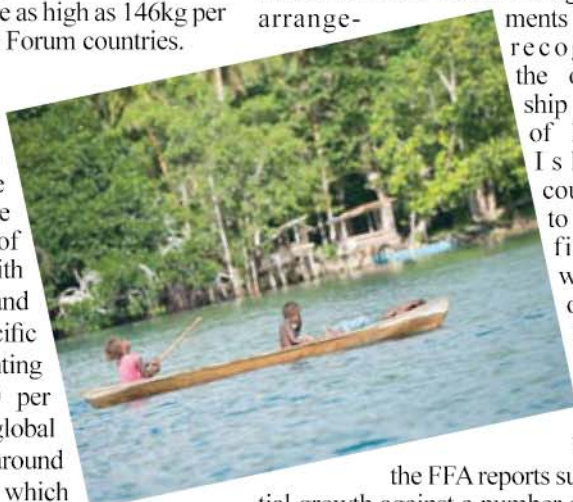
comes billion.

achieved.

Fish from offshore and coastal waters can often be found on our dinner tables and is essential for the food security of Pacific islanders. Estimates suggest that annual consumption can be as high as 146kg per person in some Forum countries.

Our fish also contribute significantly to the diets of people in other parts of the world, with the Western and Central Pacific Ocean accounting for almost 60 per cent of the global tuna catch, around two-thirds of which is taken in the waters of

Forum member countries. In 2016 alone, tuna caught in FFA members' waters totalled some 1.5 million metric tonnes worth USD 2.5



While the FFA reports substantial growth against a number of economic indicators (link), all Pacific stakeholders acknowledge that there is more that could be achieved. Two-thirds of the catch taken in our waters is harvested by foreign fishing boats

INCREASED RETURNS FROM TUNA FISHERIES

The region has made huge strides in the last decade to reap a greater proportion of the economic benefit from the tuna caught in its waters. The PNA Vessel Day Scheme, in particular, has resulted in a fivefold increase in economic returns to PNA member countries for access to the purse seine fishery in their waters – a remarkable success story that highlights the benefits of zone based management arrangements that recognise the ownership rights of Pacific Island countries to the fishery within our EEZs.

and nearly 90% is taken out of the region for processing. In 2015, Pacific Islands Forum leaders responded to these figures by endorsing the Future of Fisheries Roadmap that was put forward by the region's Fisheries Ministers. In doing so, Leaders called for an expedited process to increase the sustainable economic returns from the region's tuna fisheries in just five years.

A taskforce comprising the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office (PNAO) and the Pacific Community (SPC) has been focused since then on four key areas of work – longline fishery reform, employment and improved working conditions, trade and export, and value chain participation. A significant amount of work has also been done to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the region.

REALISING THE TRUE POTENTIAL OF OUR FISHERIES

Over the last decade, Pacific countries have seen results from initia-

tives to increase the sustainable economic returns from our tuna fisheries. The last 3 years have seen growth in



terms of value and control of the tuna caught in the region. We are on track to reach the targeted 9000 new jobs in the industry by 2020. Our export value has risen from USD \$643 million

in 2015 to \$775 million in 2016 with the target set for USD \$800 million by 2020.

There is no doubt that significant potential still remains within our tuna fisheries. It is important to recognise that the sustainability of our tuna stocks depends upon the success of work we are also engaged in around ocean management and conservation, climate change, regional security and securing our maritime boundaries.

To maintain momentum and realise the true potential of our fisheries will require a whole of region approach. This may be difficult at times but we must continue to work collectively, support one another and keep our focus on the greater good. Regional solidarity, for the improved health and livelihoods for Pacific people must continue to be our priority.