

## EVOLUTION OF FIJI'S MSC CERTIFICATION

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen

We have two sessions this afternoon the first one is the " Evolution of Fiji's MSC-certification". The second is the" MSC process and current status of certification in Fiji".

It all sounds rather boring to me and I'll try not to make it so.

I am talking this afternoon with an industry perspective in mind. Effectively this is the practicality of managing a commercial fishery under the auspices and requirements of a third party certification scheme.

When we talk about"industry "we are specifically referring to the " Fiji Fishing Industry Association MSC -group. (FFIA) ". Who are these people ?– they do not claim to be the total Fiji fishing industry but specifically represent some 72 longline vessels and six processing facilities. Collectively this group provides employment directly for almost 2000 workers at sea and ashore. There are approximately 1000 employees at sea and it is said that for everyone at sea there are five others being supported and providing services such as processing, engineering, carton manufacture, transport, health etc. These are the additional workers that are **indirectly** employed as a consequence of the existence of a "domestic" fishing fleet.

The Fiji surface longline fishery first gained MSC certification in December 2012. Fiji was the first country in the world to obtain MSC-certification for a Surface Long Line Fishery.

It was Fiji Fish Limited - under the tutelage of Grahame Southwick - which was the first company to commence long lining in 1988. By the use of American style fishing gear it was comparatively easy to convert existing fishing vessels into the long lining mode. This was the start of the industry as we know it today and is the subject of the current workshop.

The longline fishery became established as an Industry in the early 1990's when commercial operators finally moved away from Pole and Line fishing. The Pole and Line fishery actually peaked in 1989 when 6000 tons of Skipjack were landed in Levuka. Unfortunately ,as a consequence of the low prices paid by the cannery, the catching sector became increasingly uneconomical . Sadly with the demise of this fishery PAFCO lost a valuable source of material - but that is another matter!

The Fiji Longline Fishery is unique amongst all Pacific Island Fisheries in that it is **totally a domestic one** and this is important factor in the workshop we are attending today.

This domestication policy of successive Fiji governments has basically placed a ban on foreign license access to our EEZ. Furthermore the Government owned IKA Corporation provided a domestic catching fleet from the early 1970s.

It is these two factors that have provided the "Genesis" of today's MSC certified long line fishery.

Fiji lies on the periphery of the Pacific's richest tuna grounds. When compared with our neighbours to the West and North Fiji will never have the same potential for development in **high volume** catches of Big Eye, Yellowfin. or even Albacore. However Fiji has a distinctive advantage in access and transportation to markets such as Japan, USA and the EU. Couple this with a shore infrastructure unequalled in the Pacific the comparatively lower CPUE's can be offset somewhat by

judicial selection of markets and further processing of the tuna as landed. The six processing plants referred to are specifically geared to the longline Industry and the production of "Sashimi" quality end product.

Longline fishing is NOT "Industrial fishing". It produces a quality product preferred by sophisticated markets such as the EU who increasingly need to be assured that the fish they are eating is sustainably caught. More recently there has been the added interest and concern in labour conditions and traceability .

**Enter MSC!** - and the prospect that a small fishery in the Pacific could be accredited to the highest known sustainability standard in the world could be an option for Fiji.

In 2007 MSC undertook a pre-assessment (with funds provided by the EU through the Sustainable Fisheries Fund) to ascertain if any of the Western and Central Pacific Tuna fisheries were potentially certifiable under the MSC certification standard. The WCPO Albacore Longline Fishery was deemed to be suitable to immediate full assessment – either in its entirety or at a National level (i.e.Fiji).

Fiji was ready ! with a domestic fishery, a precautionary Tuna TAC set at 15,000 tonnes and proposals to limit EEZ licences to 60.

The Forum Fisheries Agency and MSC Sydney office then took the lead. External costs for full assessment were established at FD150,000. Funding sources found including a one third contribution from the " US Resources Legacy Fund" (I hope they were properly thanked). Funds were finally in place early 2011. These funds included indirect contribution from the EU through the DevFish programme. There then followed an amazing co-ordinated project involving every possible agency including the Fiji Ministry, FFA, and SPC . These agencies proving their expertise and knowledge at no cost. If all time and cost were factored in the all up cost of the initial assessment was in excess of FD200,000.

It was not easy for the Fiji Industry to understand the process – let alone to interpret the myriad of unusual acronyms which remain strange – even today.

Finally in December 2012 – almost five years after the pre assessment – certification with an initial five year term was granted. Certification came with certain conditions that will be explained in the next session.

The Fiji Long Line Industry then entered the International market offering Albacore certified to the World's highest sustainability standard. It was at the 2013 internationally acclaimed Brussel Seafood Show that then the Fiji Ambassador to the Fiji's EU presented Fiji's first ever MSC albacore to a world audience. The EU market was new to us and has expanded largely since. We acknowledge the fiscal assistance given in obtaining the certification and the EU market that has followed.

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