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The Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.

Thirteenth meeting of the Noumea Convention

Thirteenth ordinary meeting of the contracting parties to the convention for the protection of the natural resources and environment of the South Pacific Region and related protocols (Noumea Convention)

Apia, Samoa
18 September 2015

Agenda item 7.2: Marine pollution originating from purse seine fishing vessel operations in the Western and Central Pacific region, 2004-2014

Purpose

1. To provide: 1) an update on the Secretariat's recent analysis and summary of more than ten years of data about pollution incidents by fishing vessels from the SPC/FFA Regional Observer Pollution Report Form GEN-6 and 2) to seek endorsement from the COP of report recommendations.

Background

2. Marine pollution is emerging as a significant global problem, and studies around the world caution that the problem is growing. Impacts from marine pollution include: marine litter include entanglement of marine wildlife by abandoned, lost or discarded fishing gear (ALDFG); ingestion of marine litter by wildlife with potential for associated toxic chemical transfers; introduction of invasive species through use of marine litter as rafting habitats; negative impacts to tourism and fishing dependent economies; hazards to navigation and safety at sea through fouling of propellers and collisions with debris; damage to important and fragile coastal ecosystems such as coral reefs and mangroves; and smothering of deep sea benthic habitats and high financial costs of cleanup to coastal communities.

3. While land-based sources of marine pollution receive the largest share of attention, there is increasing concern about ocean-based sources of marine pollution. The global environmental community continues to recognise marine plastic and microplastic pollution as priority issues of concern, where more work is needed to reduce pollution sources and mitigate negative impacts. In the Pacific region, marine pollution impacts to coastal communities can be especially acute given the reliance of Pacific island countries on marine ecosystems and associated services within their extensive EEZs and beyond. The SPREP Waste Management and Pollution Control Division is addressing this issue through incorporation of a marine litter focal area in its 2016-2025 Regional Strategy, and collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to serve as the regional hub for its Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML).

4. The Secretariat recently investigated marine pollution incidents reported by fisheries observers over the past ten years (Report is attached as Annex 1). While based on a limited selection of data from mostly purse seine vessels, the information examined in this report suggests that fishing vessels are responsible for significant amounts of marine pollution in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. Action is urgently needed to curb this behavior. This report is specifically relevant to many of the Convention's articles.

Summary of Findings

5. This report provides the first substantive, documented evidence about the nature and extent of ship-sourced marine pollution in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. The report examines more than 8,000 pollution incidents originating from purse seine vessels within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of 18 Pacific island countries and territories, and in international waters. The report finds that 69% of the reported pollution incidents related to Waste Dumped Overboard; 18% to Oil Spillages and Leakages; and 13% to Abandoned, Lost, or Dumped Fishing Gear. When the category "Waste Dumped" was examined further, Plastics were found to make up the largest portion of total pollution incidents (36%). Only 4% of the reported incidents occurred in International Waters, while the rest occurred in the EEZs of Papua New Guinea (52%), the Federated States of Micronesia (12%), Kiribati (10%), Solomon Islands (7%), Marshall Islands (6%), Nauru (4%), and 12 other Pacific island countries and territories.

6. While based on limited data, the report finds evidence that pollution from purse seine vessels operating in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean is a serious problem and highlights the need for three initiatives: 1) increased monitoring, reporting, and enforcement of pollution violations by all types of fishing vessels, especially longliners, which currently have a very low (5%) mandatory observer coverage, which itself is rarely achieved; 2) a regional outreach and compliance assistance programme on marine pollution prevention for fishing vessel crews, business operators and managers; and 3) improvements in Pacific port waste reception facilities to enable them to receive fishing vessel wastes on shore.

Summary of Recommendations and Areas for Future Research

7. Recommendations and areas for further data analysis and future research are summarized below, and reflect and expand upon these three initiatives. They are designed for a variety of stakeholders, including intergovernmental organizations such as SPREP and SPC, regional fisheries managers and RFMOs such as WCPFC and FFA, national maritime and port authorities, national environment ministries, government leaders, policy makers, academics, and the private sector, particularly fishing vessel crews and business operators.

8. The recommendations in the report are to:

- Increase observer coverage especially on longliners and to provide more information about amounts and types of pollution by other fisheries;
- Report the pollution incidents to Member countries where the incidents occurred, flag states whose vessels are responsible for the incidents, the Noumea Convention and the International Maritime Organization (IMO)'s Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS);
- Promote effective enforcement programmes that communicate the message that deliberate pollution incidents are not acceptable;
- Develop an Outreach and Compliance Assistance programme for regional marine

- pollution prevention;
- Invest in expanded capacity of port waste reception facilities; and
- Develop a regional funding mechanism for marine litter management.

Areas for further data analysis and future research

- Further examination of specific pollution categories;
- Examination of the Abandoned, Lost or Dumped Fishing Gear incidents involving Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs);
- Survey fishermen, crews, vessel operators, port authorities and observers about causes behind and drivers for pollution incidents;
- Identify appropriate laws, regulations and procedures by which countries and territories can monitor and enforce penalties against pollution incidents by fishing vessels;
- Overlay purse seine marine pollution incidents with marine ecosystem information; and
- Sample fish for plastic ingestion.

Recommendations

9. The Meeting is invited to:

- **note** the progress on the analysis and summary of the SPC/FFA Regional Observer Pollution Report data;
- **seek** endorsement from Members of the recommendations provided by this report; and
- **call** on members to actively implement the recommendations in the report, particularly in the areas of pollution response through monitoring, reporting and prosecution of vessels involved in pollution violations.
