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

Twenty Sixth SPREP Meeting of Officials

Apia, Samoa
22nd – 24th September 2015

Agenda Item 10.3.3: Marine litter observer data (GEN-6: Marine pollution originating from purse seine fishing vessel operations in the Western and Central Pacific region, 2004-2014)

Purpose

1. To provide an update on the issue of marine litter and, in particular, the Secretariat's recent analysis and summary of more than ten years of data on pollution incidents caused by fishing vessels from the SPC/FFA Regional Observer Pollution Report Form GEN-6 and to seek endorsement from Members for the Report recommendations.

Background

2. Marine pollution is emerging as a significant, and increasing, global problem. While land-based sources of marine pollution receive the largest share of attention, there is also increasing concern about ocean-based sources of marine pollution, particularly marine plastic and micro-plastic pollution, where more work is needed to decrease pollution amounts and sources and mitigate negative impacts. In the Pacific region, marine pollution impacts to coastal communities can be especially important given the reliance of Pacific island countries and territories on marine ecosystems and associated services within their extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and beyond.

3. The SPREP Waste Management and Pollution Control Division is addressing this issue through the incorporation of a marine litter focal area in its Pacific Regional Waste and Pollution Management Strategy 2016-2025 (Cleaner Pacific 2025), and through collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in order 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 (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.

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 EEZs of 18 Pacific island countries and territories, and in international waters.

6. 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%), Republic of the Marshall Islands (6%), Nauru (4%), and 12 other Pacific island countries and territories.

7. 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.

8. The report highlights the need for three urgent and priority initiatives:

- 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;
- a regional outreach and compliance assistance programme on marine pollution prevention for fishing vessel crews, business operators and managers; and
- improvements in Pacific port waste reception facilities to enable them to receive fishing vessel wastes on shore.

Summary of Report Recommendations

9. Recommendations and areas for further data analysis and future research are summarised 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.

10. The recommendations of the report are for:

- Increased observer coverage to provide more information about amounts and types of pollution by other fisheries;
- Reporting of the pollution incidents to Member countries and territories where the incidents occurred, flag states whose vessels are responsible for the incidents, the Noumea Convention and the International Maritime Organization's Global Integrated Shipping Information System (GISIS);
- Promotion of effective enforcement programmes that communicate the message that deliberate pollution incidents are not acceptable;
- Development of an Outreach and Compliance Assistance Programme for regional marine pollution prevention;
- Investment in expanded capacity of port waste reception facilities; and
- Development of a regional funding mechanism for marine litter management.

Recommendations

11. The Meeting is invited to:

- **note** the progress on the analysis and summary of the SPC/FFA Regional Observer Pollution Report data; and
 - **endorse** the recommendations provided by this report.
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30 June 2015