



Address by

Hon. Jelta Wong, MP, Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources

Papua New Guinea

'Advancing Blue Transformation, Development and Innovation through the Global Tuna Industry'

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am humbled and honored to address the esteemed participants of the 18th World Tuna Conference and Exhibition here in the vibrant city of Bangkok. I thank the organizers of this event and in particular the Government of Thailand for hosting the Fisheries ministers of the world here on the banks of the Chao Phraya River.

A special welcome to my three (3) colleague members of the Parliament from Papua New Guinea who join me here today.

I note the overall theme of this Conference on ***'Advancing Blue Transformation, Development and Innovation through the Global Tuna Industry'***. I acknowledge that much of the post-harvest, market and trade are influenced by the global tuna industry.

As coastal states, I am of the view that we in the Pacific Islands region – where in the case of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, where 25 percent of the world’s tunas are caught; have a steadfast and unwavering commitment to sustainable tuna management. Collectively, we have the capacity to work with the global tuna industry in advancing the blue transformation, development and innovation agenda.

This is the second time for me to attend this conference in my capacity as the Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources for the Independent State of Papua New Guinea. Over the last 17 months the focus of my ministry in the Marape-Rosso Government was to refine and consolidate good governance and establishing the necessary institutional reforms to enable the National Fisheries Authority to be responsive to both the emerging challenges and opportunities in the fisheries sector.

This included Papua New Guinea’s ratification of the Agreement on Port State Measures two months ago and the commencement of installing necessary infrastructure and administration requirements at our declared commercial ports to be compliant with this Agreement.

PNG has also entered into a Shiprider Agreement with the Government of United States of America earlier this year. The PSMA and the Shiprider Agreement adds to the other well-established regional arrangements to monitor and address IUU activities within our Exclusive Economic Zone and Archipelagic Waters. Our National Fisheries Authority continues to contribute to tuna fishery management and addressing IUU through a highly efficient Vessel Monitoring System, Integrated Fisheries Management System, and dedicated fisheries officers including one of the largest observer programs within the Pacific region.

We are now at a point in time where the PNG fisheries sector is at the cusp of a transformational policy-paradigm shift that will ensure our fisheries sector is developed into a strong, broad-based, diversified, and value adding industry that is globally competitive; domestically inclusive and functioning as a robust and sustainable source for government revenue, and importantly food security and the livelihood of the people.

The attainment of such a transformational outcome, requires legislation, policy and regulatory interventions at all levels throughout the fishing and processing industry.

Our National Fisheries Authority is actively rolling out sectoral reform initiatives where a broad-based fisheries sector will be achieved through expansion of existing production capacity of commercial scale capture fisheries; increase productive capacity of commercial fisheries will be achieved through commercial-scale aquaculture.

The tuna fishery is by far our largest commercial fishery with an average annual catch of 350,000MT, which accounts for 12 percent of tuna catches from the Western and Central Pacific Ocean for the years 2018 to 2022. In 2022 our tuna catches peaked at over 500,000Mt comprising of 19 percent of the WCPO tuna catches. The average usage of vessel days under the PNA vessel days scheme within our EEZ over the last 4 years is around 10,120 vessel days.

It is common knowledge that the successes of private enterprises are determined largely by their shareholders foresight and sound management decisions. As a government, we however had to undertake necessary reviews of our policy environment to ensure that issues affecting the tuna fishing and processing sector are adequately addressed to safeguard the operations of the tuna processing plants.

As a responsible government we supported the fisheries sector through the National Fisheries Authority by providing preferential daily vessel rates to PNG flagged and Locally Based Foreign Flagged vessels and a rebate of US\$250 per metric tonnes to tuna processing plants for fish processed in Papua New Guinea.

This year we are going a step further in levelling the playing field by ensuring that each processing plants and their associated fishing fleets enter a Memorandum of Agreement with the National Fisheries Authority on *the allocation, usage, administration and management of the vessel day scheme for PNG flagged and Locally Based Foreign Flagged Vessels that operate in Papua New Guinea.*

A unique provision that is incorporated in the MOA is known as the Start-Fish Vessel Day Scheme Package which provides for PNG based fishing fleets to secure their required number of vessel days and for payment of the vessel days to be spread over a 12-month period.

This Package is beneficial to both the PNG based fishing fleets and the National Fisheries Authority. It will enable the PNG based fishing fleets to improve their cash-flow management and use of their allocated vessel days. As for the National Fisheries Authority it ensures that 30 percent of the total vessel days are considered sold at the beginning of each year and revenue generated from the sale of vessel days under this Package to be spread over the course of the year.

I am pleased to announce that we have commenced the signing of this MOA with the PNG based tuna processors and their associated fishing companies for its trial implementation in the second half of this year.

One of the strategic decisions of the Government was for the National Fisheries Authority to establish a sectoral State-Owned-Enterprise to participate in the commercial fisheries space. Work on the necessary legislation to give effect to this are on foot.

We came here last year looking for direction and we have been blessed to have found a path that is in line to achieving goals as a region. I have always subscribed to the thought that a connected and corporative Pacific Region can determine economic benefits to every part of our region. Partnership and equality in the region is a must for our future generations to continue to be an active part of this world we call home. It's imperative for us to lead now.

Papua New Guinea however, is not the first country in the Pacific that have taken the bold step to operate SOEs in the tuna fishing and processing sector. In this regard, we are glad to have ongoing discussions with the Government of the Republic of Marshall Islands to explore areas of cooperation, especially through the Pacific Islands Tuna venture and their partnership with Wal-Mart.

Pacific Islands Countries recognized the potential that the tuna fishery provides not only as source of revenue through collection of resource rents but also the pivotal role the tuna fishery can play in formulating partnerships amongst countries within the region and with strategic private sector partners to explore the potential to retain and enhance the value of our shared tuna resources within the Pacific Islands region.

In December 2023, the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders endorsed the *East New Britain Initiative*, as a regional platform for the Pacific Island Countries to work together to find collective and inclusive investment pathways in the regional tuna value chain in the context of increasing climate change challenges.

We do look forward to engaging with the global tuna industry through the *East New Britain Initiative* to **Advancing Blue Transformation, Development and Innovation** in the tuna industry.

If you are not aware of the East New Britain Initiative Concept, I urge you to take the opportunity to become accustomed to it now. It is a game changer, and

will affect the status quo of your interactions with Papua New Guinea and our Pacific Family.

With these remarks, I look forward to the detail presentations that will be made by the eminent fisheries and industry experts and to a successful 18th World Tuna Conference and Exhibition.

Thank you and God bless