

An open letter to the Parties to the Nauru Agreement

We, the undersigned organizations, urge the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) to support the implementation of a management procedure for western and central Pacific skipjack tuna as soon as possible in order to secure the long-term sustainability of this valuable and important fishery.

Skipjack tuna is one of the most important species in the western and central Pacific Ocean. These waters support the largest skipjack tuna fishery in the world, producing around 1.8 million metric tons of skipjack annually, worth \$2.54 billion in landed value. In the Pacific, the skipjack fishery supports many livelihoods, and the significant revenue it generates for governments funds public services. Canned skipjack is eaten worldwide as an affordable source of protein.

As Parties to the Nauru Agreement, the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Tuvalu, plus the territory of Tokelau, you represent a coalition of small island States whose waters contain some of the world's most productive skipjack fishing grounds. You have led the way in promoting sustainable fisheries policies, implementing practices that are then adopted across the region. PNA members form what is arguably the most powerful bloc of countries in the wider Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), which negotiates fishing rules for an area that covers roughly 20 percent of the Earth's surface and which supplies the majority of the world's tuna. The region's skipjack population has without doubt benefited from PNA leadership. It is currently in a healthy state – neither experiencing overfishing nor overfished.

However, the long-term sustainability of this skipjack stock requires the PNA to demonstrate its leadership in fisheries management once again. A skipjack management procedure is scheduled to be adopted by the WCPFC at its meeting on Nov. 27 to Dec. 3. This would fulfill a commitment made more than eight years ago after years of hard work and delays. **However, we are concerned by the PNA's position at the [WCPFC Science-Management Dialogue](#) meeting that its members are supportive of adopting this modern approach, but want to delay implementing it by up to six years. We think this would be a risky move for the population and fishery, and set a bad precedent for other management procedures globally.**

A [management procedure](#) is an effective, science-based approach that addresses shortcomings in traditional fisheries management via pre-negotiated decision frameworks. The use of a pre-agreed harvest control rule would permit levels of effort and/or catch to change based on stock status and objectives set for the fishery. This puts managers from the PNA and other nations in the driver's seat to steer the fishery to a sustainable future. It gives managers more control by letting them choose a harvest control rule that has been tested via management strategy evaluation to be the most robust to both current and future uncertainties.

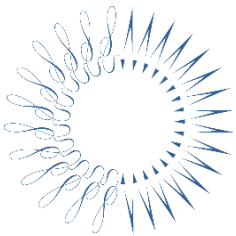
Further, while the stock is considered healthy now, it has been declining over the long term, according to successive stock assessments, and new challenges are on the horizon, such as: climate change; shifts in stock distribution; uncertain economic viability; increased competition;

and other drivers of overfishing. Without a management procedure in place to provide a science-based approach for addressing these shocks to the system, we are concerned that fishery managers would be under serious pressure to ignore the scientific advice in a crisis, thus risking the health of the fishery. On the other hand, if the biomass increases, the management procedure could just as quickly permit increases in catch or fishing effort, without risking stability in catch rates, allowing the PNA to reap the rewards.

Transitioning to a new approach naturally invites caution, especially given the skipjack fishery's importance in the region. We urge PNA members to take comfort in the rigorous analysis of the harvest control rules under consideration. Multiple options perform well by maintaining stability and catch rates in the skipjack fishery. As a further step, a simple comparison of how a management procedure would have performed during the last decade can answer most, if not all, of the questions that the trial period is purported to provide. A short period of transition is also likely while WCPFC develops the exceptional circumstances protocol.

Implementing the management procedure would mitigate risk and safeguard this valuable fishery for the future, and we urge the PNA to support its implementation as a matter of urgency.

Sincerely,



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