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**PREPARATORY CONFERENCE FOR THE COMMISSION FOR  
THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHLY  
MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS IN THE WESTERN AND  
CENTRAL PACIFIC**

First session  
Christchurch, New Zealand  
23 – 28 April, 2001

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**OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PREPARATORY  
CONFERENCE, AMBASSADOR MICHAEL POWLES**

Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

I appreciate very much the honour you have done me in electing me to the Chairmanship of this Preparatory Conference. I feel very privileged to have been given this opportunity – not least as a New Zealander who has spent many years living and working in both the island countries of the Pacific and the large and important countries bordering the Northern Pacific. I am very grateful for the confidence you have all placed in me. Of course I will endeavour to discharge my responsibilities to the best of my ability, and fairly. And needless to say, I will count on your help and cooperation.

Distinguished delegates,

In September 2000, in Honolulu, the delegations gathered around this table adopted the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific. The adoption of the Convention marked the culmination of a process which, for most of the Pacific island countries began in 1977. In that year, the heads of government of the Forum Island countries, recognizing the developments taking place at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea and in particular the provisions of the draft convention at that time relating to highly migratory species, decided that there was a need for an international body for the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks, whose membership should include all coastal States of the South Pacific region as well as foreign nations fishing in the region.

The Honolulu Convention was the product of five years of painstaking negotiations between coastal States and distant water fishing nations. It reflects a balance of interests between these two groups as well as between, developed and developing, and large and small States. Most importantly, it is based firmly on the principles contained in the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement, which we agreed at the outset of the negotiations would form the basis of any regional agreement for conservation and management.

At the same time as the Convention was adopted, participants in the negotiating process also adopted a resolution to establish this Preparatory Conference. In adopting such a resolution, the particular concern of the participants was both to promote the early entry into force of the Convention itself and to establish a process to make all necessary practical arrangements for the commencement of the functions of the Commission. The resolution clearly spells out the mandate of the Conference as well as the scope of its work. The agenda for this first session has been drawn up on the basis of the operative paragraphs of the resolution. In addition, the resolution makes provision in a relatively detailed manner for participation in the Preparatory Conference by all those who participated in the MHLC.

Distinguished delegates,

This first session of the Preparatory Conference is very much an organizational session. It is clear that there is a great deal of work ahead of us and many of the agenda items will require detailed consideration. It is clearly not possible to deal with all these matters during the course of one week. By the end of the week, however, I would very much like to see the Conference reach at least preliminary agreement on the fundamental issue of the process we will adopt to bring the Convention into force effectively and efficiently. This will require agreement on how we might handle some of the more complex issues over the next two or three sessions. In that respect, I believe it would be useful to encourage a free and frank exchange of views on as many of the agenda items as possible. I am very conscious of the fact that this is a first round of discussions and it is therefore essential that nobody should feel inhibited in making suggestions, proposals or in expressing their concerns since all these will help in better understanding of the preoccupations of participants. At this stage, rather than concentrate on specific and detailed questions, our efforts should focus on identifying the main issues of difficulty and the areas where broad agreement or convergence of views may exist. The objective should be to establish a working method which will enable us to address issues of concern in detail as the preparatory process progresses.

One matter upon which I feel it is important to make progress this week is on the question of arrangements for future sessions of this Conference and an interim secretariat. This is a matter upon which I would like to solicit the views of participants in due course, and I would draw your attention to the paper submitted by the New Zealand delegation on this issue. I do so because it discusses 'Key Issues in the Preparatory Process', including Funding arrangements, the issue of an Interim Secretariat, and the Timing and Location of the Next Preparatory Conference. I believe these are all important issues. We need to find ways to ensure continuity and establish practical means whereby we can fulfil the purposes of the resolution. This needs to be done of course in a manner consistent with the emphasis in the Convention on cost-effectiveness and an evolutionary approach to the establishment of the institutions envisaged by the Convention. I hope we can return to these issues later in the week.

Distinguished delegates,

Before we move on to consider the provisional agenda for the Conference and our programme of work, I should like to invite delegations wishing to do so to make opening remarks.

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