

Contribution of New Zealand to the 17th round of Informal Consultations of States Parties to the UN Fish Stocks Agreement (ICSP-17), 15-17 May 2024

Sustainable fisheries management in the face of climate change

Sustainable fisheries management is one of the most vital tools for maintaining resilient fish stocks and ecosystems in the face of climate change. New Zealand is working to incorporate climate considerations in our domestic fisheries management as well as supporting regional and international efforts to do the same.

New Zealand has an extensive marine area which is home to unique species and biodiversity. Like the rest of the world, we are experiencing the impact of climate change. This includes warming waters, extended marine heatwaves, ocean acidification, and an increase in extreme weather events, which all impact on key habitats and contribute to changes in fish stock distribution, abundance and productivity. These changes create further uncertainty in the fisheries system and affect our ability to respond.

1. New Zealand Domestic Fisheries Management

New Zealand uses a range of tools and management procedures supported by fisheries legislation to enable the effective management of fisheries. This includes regular stock assessments, setting catch limits for stocks at levels at or above their Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY), and the ability to set temporary area closures in places where stocks need time to recover. These processes can be resource- and information-intensive, and we are currently exploring opportunities to increase the agility of our decision-making to increase timeliness and efficiency. This involves understanding the gaps in the current system and identifying how we may be able to adapt to an increasingly changeable environment.

We are increasing the level of data we have to use in fisheries management, including through electronic reporting and global position reporting, particularly in our inshore fleet, alongside the rollout of on-board cameras across portions of this fleet. This provides faster reporting across all species, and will support us to make timely decisions with different levels of information. Having fine-scale information on fishing impacts will also allow us to further progress on ecosystem-based management (EBM) approaches, along with more localised management that is responsive to the dynamics of different habitats and ecosystems.

New Zealand invests in research to better understand the effects of climate change. Including research on:

- physical measurements and biological observations of the marine environment;
- fish stock abundance and recruitment, and how this changes in response to environmental shifts; and
- understanding the effects of changing marine environmental variables on fish stocks and their associated habitats.

We have conducted preliminary climate risk assessments for three stocks, and will develop a formal framework for fisheries climate vulnerability assessment in New Zealand, drawing from approaches already used in other jurisdictions. This research will identify which species will be most affected by climate change, and help identify next steps for management.

We take a collaborative approach to this work, working directly with the seafood sector to identify how they can plan for the impacts of climate change, by testing adaptation pathways for fisheries and aquaculture specific to individual stocks. New Zealand also funded the Sustainable Seas Challenge, a multi-disciplinary group where research focuses on improving marine resource decision-making and the health of our seas through EBM, and enhancing the blue economy.

2. Pacific Fisheries

To ensure the resilience of Pacific Island fisheries in the face of climate change, Members of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), including New Zealand have agreed a Climate Change Strategy and Implementation Plan. New Zealand remains committed to supporting the FFA in ensuring ambitious action on climate change in the fisheries sector.

Our role as a donor to the FFA reflects the high importance the New Zealand government places on partnership with our Pacific neighbours and working together towards common goals. Given the wide disparities among the FFA's 17 members in size, vulnerability to climate change and other natural pressures, and the degree of dependence on fisheries revenue, New Zealand's support seeks to boost management capability and fish stocks' sustainability as part of narrowing development gaps.

The core funding arrangement was finalised in 2021 for the 2021-2026 period at NZ\$3.6 million per annum. We also provide annual project funding of over NZ\$4.8 million focused on reducing illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing in the Pacific, improving management of the South Pacific longline fishery, and increasing economic returns to FFA members from their tuna fisheries.

We know that losses and damage caused by climate change are an urgent, lived reality in the Pacific – including in relation to fisheries. At the 28th UN Climate Change Conference last year, New Zealand was pleased to see the operationalisation, and pledges for the capitalisation, of a global fund for addressing loss and damage (the Fund). This reflects a concerted effort from the global community to find solutions for the negative impacts of climate change that occur despite or beyond efforts to mitigate and adapt. Through our role on the Fund's Board, we will continue advocating for the Fund to be efficient, accessible, and to prioritise working for Small Island Developing States.

In order to understand and plan for the impacts of climate change, we also need access to relevant information. Through another regional agency – the Pacific Community, or SPC – New Zealand supports the Climate Science for Ensuring Pacific Tuna Access (CSEPTA) project to address knowledge gaps about the effects of climate change on tuna fisheries. We were pleased to have fisheries leaders from across the Pacific in Wellington in February this year for the SPC-hosted CSEPTA Climate Awareness Workshop. In April, the New Zealand Parliamentary Under-Secretary to the Minister for Oceans and Fisheries opened the new CSEPTA-funded genetics, fish ageing, and fish taxonomy laboratories at SPC in Noumea.

New Zealand has also contributed NZ\$30 million to the development of SPC's integrated Climate Change Flagship programme, which has now completed the first year of implementation. This is one of four flagship programmes within SPC, designed to increase cohesion and integration across the technical divisions. It includes a work area on loss and damage, and also includes support that goes directly to SPC's work to help better understand impact of climate change on fisheries.

3. Southern Ocean Fisheries

New Zealand is an active participant in the Antarctic Treaty System, with long-standing connections to the Southern Ocean and Antarctic Region. As part of this, New Zealand conducts the stock assessment for Antarctic Toothfish in the Ross Sea Region which is presented to the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Following the CCAMLR Climate Change Workshop discussed in CCAMLR's submission to ICSP-17, several recommendations for incorporating climate considerations into the stock assessment are in the process of being implemented to further improve the ability of CCAMLR to continue to sustainably manage the stock. New Zealand was pleased to co-convene the workshop and to host a regional hub in Wellington.

Responsive and precautionary management continues to be the key tool for increasing a fishery's climate resilience, and the Ross Sea Stock Assessment, along with the other CCAMLR Toothfish Assessments, were recognised as in-line with global best practice by an independent review panel in 2023. New Zealand is committed to continuing to contribute to the use of best available science in CCAMLR and continuous improvement of precautionary management of Antarctic fisheries.

4. Broader International Processes

The implementation of climate considerations into fisheries management will be the responsibility of the fisheries manager, be that the State or regional fisheries body. However, there is still a role for other intergovernmental organisations, such as the FAO, OECD and APEC, to set standards, bring together global experiences and provide guidance on best practice.

New Zealand is committed to this work and encourages these bodies to consider how their guidance can move beyond high-level principles and into implementation-level advice. Climate change is impacting fish stocks now, and the scale will only grow over the short and medium term. Support for all fisheries managers to take meaningful steps to adapt to these changes and increase resilience in stocks will allow the vital food and economic security roles of the seafood sector to continue into the future in a sustainable manner.

Recently New Zealand participated in discussions on climate change and fisheries management in the FAO Committee on Fisheries – Sub-Committee on Fisheries Management, and presented on our own experiences at an OECD Workshop on climate change adaptation and mitigation for fisheries. The opportunity to learn from other Members across the globe is a useful tool in improving fisheries management at home and abroad.

A practical reality of such discussions is the need to strike a balance between the core functions of these bodies and the additional resourcing of climate work. In order to maximise both workstreams, New Zealand advocates for increased communication and cooperation between international bodies with a fisheries mandate, to reduce, or ideally prevent, duplication of work in the climate space. To this end, organisations should give consideration to where their specific expertise and capabilities lie and prioritise such work as they are uniquely suited for undertaking.