

**SIXTH MEETING  
OF THE FAO SOUTH WEST PACIFIC MINISTERS FOR AGRICULTURE**

Rarotonga, Cook Islands

1 – 3 June 2005

**COMMUNIQUÉ**

The Sixth Meeting of the FAO South West Pacific Ministers for Agriculture was held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands from 1- 3 June 2005. The Meeting was attended by Ministers from the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and representatives from Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and Tonga. Representatives from the Government of Italy, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the University of the South Pacific (USP), and the Apia-based Sub-Regional Office for the South West Pacific of the World Meteorological Organization also attended, as observers.

2. The Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Dr Jacques Diouf delivered the keynote address. The meeting was opened by the Honourable Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, Honourable Jim Marurai. The Honourable Minister of Agriculture of the Cook Islands was unanimously elected as Chairperson.

**THE THEME**

3. The Ministers of the FAO South West Pacific region adopted “*Building on FAO’s Comparative Advantage to Strengthen Partnerships for Food Security in the Pacific*” as the theme for their Sixth Meeting. They recognized the need for FAO to take a more strategic approach in designing its activities in the region focusing on areas where it has the comparative strengths and strengthening partnerships with other players in addressing the priorities of the Pacific Island Countries to facilitate the achievement of food security for all.

**OVERVIEW OF FAO ACTIVITIES**

4. Ministers welcomed the information provided on the activities of FAO in the region and noted the many achievements and progress made in several areas. They noted with appreciation, in particular, the increasing level of FAO assistance to the region since the inauguration of the Sub-Regional Office for the Pacific in 1996 in Apia, Samoa.

5. Ministers endorsed the broad areas of focus of FAO in the region, particularly in the area of trade facilitation, and expressed strong support for continued assistance in strengthening national capacities through technical assistance, advice and training. Recognizing the importance of fisheries as a source of food and livelihood for the island countries of the region, the Ministers expressed the need for increased assistance and involvement of FAO in the development of the sector.

## ENHANCING FOOD SECURITY AND TRADE

### Regional Programme for Food Security

6. Ministers noted the progress in the implementation of the regional project GTFS/RAS/198/ITA “Support to the Regional Programme for Food Security (RPFS) in the Pacific”. They acknowledged with gratitude the generous contribution provided by the Government of Italy and expressed appreciation for accepting the invitation and participating in the meeting. Noting its increasing interest in the region, the ongoing implementation of the existing project and the likelihood of its further contributions to the expansion of the Regional Programme for Food Security, Ministers welcomed the continued participation of Italy in future meetings.

7. Ministers also noted the valuable collaboration provided by the Governments of the People’s Republic of China and the Philippines under the South-South Cooperation (SSC) framework. They also acknowledged the financial assistance provided by FAO, which will facilitate the fulfillment of their obligations under the SSC Agreement. The Ministers in reaffirming their commitment to enhancing food security in the region:

- (i) Agreed to ensure their respective National Project Steering Committees continue to work closely with the Regional Project Management Unit in supporting and facilitating the implementation of all the activities under the Italian-funded regional project.
- (ii) Made a commitment to take full advantage of the technical support provided under the SSC arrangement to implement planned activities of the regional project, and to assist with national development efforts.
- (iii) Noted that considerable limitations had been met in language barriers particularly with the technicians under the SSC from the People’s Republic of China and also in cultural differences and strongly recommended to FAO the need for cultural and language training and orientation prior to their placement in countries.
- (iv) Recognized that food security is multi-dimensional in nature and agreed to encourage the active participation and involvement of other relevant ministries in the efforts to improve food security at both the national and household levels.
- (v) Emphasized the need for the urgent mobilization of the remaining technicians and experts under the SSC arrangement.
- (vi) Agreed to take the necessary measures to ensure the full integration of the SSC technicians and experts into the structure and operational set-up of their respective ministries responsible for agriculture.

## **Policy Assistance**

8. Ministers expressed support and appreciation to the work of FAO in the area of policy assistance and endorsed the need for continued support to strengthening national capacities in the areas of policy analysis and planning. Recognizing the need to ensure that the priority needs of the countries are addressed, Ministers endorsed the development of an agreed framework for the identification of national priorities, and to guide the development of FAO field programme activities.

9. Ministers recognized the increasing need for prudent policies based on more in-depth analyses of the prevailing macroeconomic conditions and taking into account non-economic concerns. Ministers agreed that studies be carried out to assess the impact of climate variability on agriculture and food security in the region, and the capacities of countries to implement international and regional agreements relating to agriculture.

10. Ministers expressed strong support to the continuing need for making a case for agriculture to ensure that it is accorded the priority it deserves at the national, regional and the international levels. They expressed strong support to the proposal for FAO to assist countries in reviewing their national strategies for sustainable agriculture and food security to reflect commitments towards fulfillment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, Ministers noted the importance of FAO working together with the other regional organization in this particular area.

## **Biosecurity and Plant Protection**

11. Ministers noted the critical role of biosecurity and plant protection in maintaining food security and facilitating trade in the region. They also noted the impact of the changing global environment on the context in which biosecurity and plant protection operates in the region and endorsed the need to strengthen efforts to raise awareness across the populations of the countries.

12. Ministers agreed that FAO take a more strategic approach to biosecurity and plant protection in the region by building and strengthening partnerships with relevant regional organizations and the donor community. Particular mention was given to the importance of close collaboration and harmonization with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), and by focusing FAO assistance and interventions on areas where it has the comparative strengths, including:

- capacity building through training and technical advice;
- generation and dissemination of information; and
- provision for technical assistance

### **Marketing and Farm Management**

13. Ministers commended FAO on its work and efforts to improve farm enterprise profitability in the region and endorsed its continued involvement and work in developing and promoting innovative approaches to improving enterprise profitability and higher incomes for rural people. Furthermore, Ministers:

- (i) Recognized the need for integration of farm management and marketing training into the decision support systems for farmers for better farm planning and in support of improved and sustainable small farm livelihoods.
- (ii) Endorsed the value of providing advisory support and training materials on farm management and agricultural marketing, particularly linking farmers to emerging markets such as tourism.
- (iii) Supported the need for a more inclusive approach to support farmers' decisions, such as ensuring that training programmes achieve a broad coverage of farmers across the spectrum; the use of modern communication tools for advisory services and disseminating farm management and marketing advice; and the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to addressing critical issues.
- (iv) Recognized the need to ensure the provision of adequate organizational and physical resources for farmer extension and training activities, and that such resources must be commensurate with the technical complexities faced in the effective application of farm management methods.

### **Food Trade and Nutrition Security**

14. Ministers endorsed the continuing efforts of FAO in promoting nutrition security in the region and noted the ongoing changes in global food systems and their impacts on the agriculture and fishery sectors as well as the populations and economies of the Pacific. They expressed support for FAO to continue its assistance to member countries in:

- (i) Strengthening their food control systems to become compatible with international requirements, with the dual aim of facilitating access to international food markets and protecting consumers from food borne illnesses;
- (ii) Enhancing their ability to participate in and contribute to the work of the Codex Alimentarius Commission and harmonizing their food standards and regulations with those developed by the Commission.
- (iii) Assisting in the area of quality assurance throughout the food chain, particularly with regards to small scale enterprises involved in food product development.
- (iv) Creating sustainable improvements in nutrition, especially among nutritionally vulnerable households and population groups.

## **Forestry Development**

15. Ministers noted the ongoing support of FAO to the development and conservation of forests and tree resources in the region. Recognizing the challenges faced by countries brought about by the ongoing process of forest degradation and deforestation, unsustainable forestry practices and the apparent lack of essential data and information for policy and planning purposes, Ministers:

- (i) Urged FAO to give priority attention to assisting member countries in reviewing and drafting appropriate forestry policies and legislation to enhance sustainable forestry management, in collaboration with regional organizations and the donor community.
- (ii) Agreed to institutionalize forest and tree resources assessment, in order to generate the relevant data and information for effective policy, planning and resource management purposes.
- (iii) Supported the need to institutionalize planning requirements and frameworks, in view of the apparent lack of forest management plans and planning framework in countries to guide forestry development.
- (iv) Encouraged multi-sector discussions and active stakeholder participations in forestry processes noting that issues affecting forests and trees are complex and cross-sectoral in nature.
- (v) Agreed that countries should be encouraged to enhance knowledge and understanding of forestry stakeholders on the potential benefits of non-wood forest products, realizing that forests and trees are natural capital.
- (vi) Recognized the need for harmonization of reporting requirements on forests and the forestry sector and agreed that countries actively participate in the FAO Global Forest Resource Assessment initiative.
- (vii) Encouraged countries to actively participate in the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) processes.

## **Sustainable Fisheries Development and Resources Management**

16. Ministers highlighted the importance of fisheries to the livelihoods and food security of the Pacific Island Countries and expressed appreciation to the ongoing work and support of FAO in addressing the challenges and constraints related to the sustainable development and management of fisheries resources. Ministers expressed their ongoing concern about the growing problem of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing in the region and the negative impacts of subsidies on efforts to control IUU fishing in the region. In recognition of this, Ministers agreed on the need for collaborative effort to

develop a regional agreement on the management and conservation of fisheries resources of the region.

17. Ministers expressed strong support to the need for sound management and sustainable use of coastal fisheries resources, which has sustained the livelihoods of the peoples of the Pacific for centuries. They also recognized the growing importance of aquaculture as a viable and sustainable option to declining inshore fisheries and as a tool for coastal fisheries management. Ministers:

- (i) Encouraged FAO to continue to assist countries in further strengthening fisheries management by improving data collection/fishery statistics in cooperation with regional organizations as a basis for effective policy-making and management of fisheries and aquaculture.
- (ii) Encouraged FAO to continue to cooperate with regional organizations in support of the management of highly migratory fish stocks in the region;
- (iii) Urged FAO to continue to assist countries in the further implementation of the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries at the national and regional levels, and in the development of their national plans for the implementation of the provisions of the International Plans of Action particularly for sharks and IUU fishing.
- (iv) Requested FAO to continue to assist countries in further improving the effectiveness of seafood quality assurance systems in the region in order to strengthen national capacities in seafood inspection and to meet the requirements of major international trading partners.
- (v) Supported the continuing need for FAO to continue to provide updated information on international trade-related issues, in particular on fisheries subsidies within the context of the WTO negotiations.
- (vi) Requested that FAO assist member countries with updating their fisheries legislation to ensure effective processing and prosecution of illegal fishing activities.

#### **Roundtable Meeting on WTO**

18. Ministers noted with appreciation the continuing efforts by FAO to promote awareness of Pacific Island Countries on World Trade Organization (WTO) issues and to enhance capacities in relation to the implementation of WTO agreement provisions relating to trade in agriculture.

19. Ministers acknowledged with appreciation the usefulness of the Roundtable Meeting (RTM) on WTO agreement provisions in building awareness and the capacities of countries to deal with issues currently under WTO negotiations, and expressed strong

support for its continuation. They expressed appreciation to the generous financial and technical contributions of New Zealand to the RTM and noted with gratitude the reconfirmation of its ongoing commitment to the meeting series. They also acknowledged the financial and technical contribution of the other partners including the Commonwealth Secretariat, the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat and Pacific Islands Trade and Investment Commission based in Auckland, New Zealand.

20. Ministers supported the continuation of the RTM process on an annual basis considering that WTO negotiations were still ongoing, and urged FAO to continue to seek donor support to facilitate the continuing participation of countries at future meetings.

#### **PROPOSAL FOR EXPANSION OF THE REGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR FOOD SECURITY IN THE PACIFIC**

21. Ministers welcomed the proposal by FAO to expand the current Regional Programme for Food Security in the Pacific, and expressed appreciation for the information provided by the Director-General on the approach to be adopted in the design of the expanded programme. They noted the continuing challenges and constraints to the development of the rural sector and the need to address issues relating to irrigation and water management; rural transport and communication infrastructure; post-harvest processing and storage; and marketing and trade.

22. Ministers endorsed the proposed Round Table on Food Security and Sustainable Development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) during the FAO Council in November this year and made a commitment to attend the Roundtable. Noting the rationale and justification for the expanded programme, the main objectives and components of the proposal, Ministers:

- (i) Endorsed the concept proposal as a framework for the development of the full proposal for the expansion of the current Regional Programme for Food Security in the Pacific.
- (ii) Agreed that FAO should organize a programming mission to develop the detailed proposal for the expansion at the earliest possible opportunity considering the time it will take and the process involved before implementation will commence.

#### **AVIAN INFLUENZA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS TO THE PACIFIC**

23. Ministers expressed appreciation for the useful information provided on the avian influenza pandemic and the potential threat to livestock and the lives of the people of the Pacific. They further noted the need to have in place effective biosecurity measures and for good management practices to minimize the potential spread of the disease into the region, as well as measures for mitigation in the event of its introduction.

## OTHER MATTERS

24. Ministers noted with appreciation the work of Australia and New Zealand in relation to the ongoing independent evaluation of the work of FAO and Australia's undertaking to keep South West Pacific members informed of developments through a proposed network of FAO SWP regional group members.

25. Ministers noted with appreciation the suggestion by New Zealand that the "noni" industry has potential for the Pacific Islands noting that it is common to all countries. Ministers recommended that FAO provide technical support to the noni industry. They further requested that recommendations be brought to the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat on the importance of developing a coordinated approach to ensure that the industry is developed in a sustainable manner. They further recognized the need to ensure a competitive advantage for the Pacific in this industry.

26. Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Director General of FAO for being able to attend the meeting and for the valuable information provided on the future work of FAO. Ministers and the Director-General expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the government and the people of the Cook Islands for hosting the meeting and for the hospitality extended to their delegations during their time in Rarotonga.

27. Ministers expressed their appreciation to the Chair for his able leadership leading to the successful conclusion of the meeting. They commended the Sub-Regional Representative (SRR) for the Pacific Islands and staff of FAO for the work and achievements over the past two years and for the efficient servicing of the meeting.

## VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

28. Ministers accepted the offer by the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to host the next biennial meeting in 2007.

## Signed in Rarotonga, Cook Islands on 3 June 2005.

1. Mr David Ingham (Australia)

2. Honourable Tupou Faireka (Cook Islands)

3. Mr Sakiusa Tubuna (Fiji)

4. Honourable Martin P Tofinga (Kiribati)

5. Honourable John Silk (Republic of the Marshall Islands)

6. Honourable Frederick Pitcher (Nauru)



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- 7. Honourable Damien O'Connor (New Zealand) .....
- 8. Honourable Bill V Motufoou (Niue) .....
- 9. Mr Matthew'wela Kanua (Papua New Guinea) .....
- 10. Seumanutafa Malaki Iakopo (Samoa) .....
- 11. Honourable Enele D Kwanairara (Solomon Islands) .....
- 12. Mr Haniteli Fa'anunu (Tonga) .....
- 13. Honourable Samuelu Teo (Tuvalu) .....
- 14. Honourable Barak Sope (Vanuatu) .....