



FACTSHEET

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PACIFIC ISLANDS
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Offshore Fisheries

ENSURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PACIFIC TUNA

The United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA)

“The United Nations Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 10 December 1982 relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks”



78 STATES AND ENTITIES HAVE RATIFIED THE UNFSA TO DATE.

The 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) took effect in 2001. It was initiated as a response to a fisheries management crisis involving a class of **transboundary** fishery resources. These fish stocks were found both within the coastal State's **exclusive economic zone (EEZ)** and the adjacent **high seas**. While much of the threat resulted from overfishing and the prevalence of “illegal, unreported and unregulated” (IUU) fishing, the root cause of the crisis was linked to inconsistencies within the U.N Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This gave rise to the development of the UNFSA.

The UNFSA builds on the basic principle set out in the UNCLOS, which declares that States should cooperate to ensure conservation and promote the best utilization of fisheries resources both within and beyond the EEZs.

The primary objectives of the agreement are:

- i. To ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of **straddling and highly migratory** fish stocks beyond areas of national jurisdiction.
- ii. To greatly improve the international management of fishing on the high seas based on the **precautionary approach** and the best available scientific information.

The UNFSA requires the management of straddling/highly migratory fish stocks on a sub-region by sub-region basis through Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs). Two were created as a result, namely, the South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) or the Tuna Commission.



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Knowing Your Terms:

Exclusive Economic Zone – a maritime zone over which the coastal state has sovereign rights over the exploration and use of marine resources. It usually extends to a distance of 200 nautical miles out from the coast.

High Seas – the open ocean which is not within the territorial waters or jurisdiction of any particular country.

Highly migratory stocks – fish species that regularly travel long distances across international waters. The term usually refers to tuna and tuna-like species.

Precautionary approach – a decision-making procedure to take action to prevent possible environmental damage even before there is scientific evidence that damage will certainly occur.

Straddling stocks – fish species that move through or exist in more than one exclusive economic zone and in the adjacent high.

Transboundary stocks – fishery resources that cross national and international waters, however, their movement is more limited compared to highly migratory stocks.

Source: United Nations, UN (2011)



“...this agreement gives us a tool for winning the battle to save the world’s fish....it confers on states both the right to fish and the obligation to manage fish stocks sustainably” – Satya N. Nandan (Chairman of the WCPFC)



For more information

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