



PALAU



PALAU MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

by

H.E. Mr. Stuart Beck

**Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary/
Permanent Representative**

**At the Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the
Law of the Sea**

25 June 2007

New York

Co-Chairs,

Let me first congratulate you on your appointment to lead us in these discussions on Marine Genetic Resources. We also thank DOALOS for facilitating this eighth meeting of the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea and for preparing the excellent Report we have before us today.

Before we begin, our delegation wishes to associate itself with the statement delivered by Papua New Guinea on behalf of the Pacific Island Forum.

Co-Chairs:

The Pacific is home to some of the world's largest and most important biodiversity hotspots and so this year's topic, "Marine genetic resources," is of particular importance for our region. The world's largest tropical reefs and sponge fields are found in the Pacific. These ecosystems and habitats nurture some of the world's best fisheries and are a key reason for the Micronesia Challenge. Launched by President Remengesau, Jr. in November 2005, the countries and territories of Micronesia, including the Marshall Islands, the Federates States of Micronesia and my own country, Palau, agreed to conserve 30 percent of their near-shore marine and 20 percent of their land resources by the year 2020. This project is the first of its kind in the world. It covers 6.7 million square miles of ocean, and will help protect 10 percent of the world's coral reefs, which comprise over half of all known corals, and more than 60 threatened species.

But this initiative, while an important one, is mainly domestic. To truly preserve the awesome biodiversity of our oceans, we need international action to address vulnerable marine ecosystems, such as such as seamounts, cold-water corals, hydrothermal vents and sponge fields.

Co-chairs:

In the deep oceans of our region, scientists have found many strange and awesome creatures whose unique biologies have adapted to the extreme difficulties of life in these environments. Last February, a research team off Samoa toured the crater of a volcanic seamount and found a precarious stew of emissions that supports a thriving biological community at its summit, but which is surrounded by a toxic "moat of death." Another team last March reported on the "Yeti crab," a ten-legged crustacean covered in silky-white hair found on the Pacific-Antarctic ridge. The biological adaptations that allow these creatures to thrive under such adverse conditions make them of great interest to science and industry. The imagination revels in the as-yet unrevealed secrets of the deep.

In this rich biodiversity we see both danger and opportunity—the danger that these resources will be targeted and overexploited precisely because they are rich, and the opportunity to appreciate far-reaching and long-lasting benefits from these resources through cooperation.

We are beginning to see the development of a framework for cooperation to ensure the sustainable use of these rich resources for us all. This framework is founded on the precautionary principle and ecosystem approach, as well as on the realization that 'freedoms' of the high seas are no excuse for irresponsibility about our common oceans.

The recent negotiations here at the United Nations and in the Pacific about destructive fishing practices, such as bottom trawling, are a good example of how this framework for cooperation is and should be developing. Palau, like a number of other small island countries, over the past few years began to realize that unregulated bottom trawling poses an existential threat to our economies, our cultures, and our way of life. As large and often heavily-subsidized factory trawlers began making their way into the Pacific where there is no established RFMO with the competence to regulate bottom fisheries, the need for concerted action became critical. The damage that bottom trawling causes to our oceans and its biodiversity can be seen by distant satellites from space, but it has been felt much closer to home in the population collapse of local species such as orange roughy.

And so we began trying to build a coalition to take action on the threat destructive fishing poses to our region's biological and genetic vitality. After a few false starts and much more hard work, the fruits of these efforts have been borne out over the past year both here at the United Nations and within regional negotiations over a new RFMO for the South Pacific. General Assembly Resolution 61/105 on 'Sustainable Fisheries' provides a clear—and we would say binding—consensus effort to enshrine the precautionary principle and ecosystem approach into fisheries management. This resolution requires that States and RFMOs, using the best available scientific information, close to bottom fishing areas where vulnerable marine ecosystems, such as seamounts, hydrothermal vents and cold water corals, are known or are likely to exist unless conservation and management measures have been established to prevent significant adverse impacts. This precedent has been extended to the interim measures recently adopted for the South Pacific, where vessel locator monitoring systems and observers will also be employed on every bottom trawling vessel to ensure compliance with this mandate.

Co-chairs:

As new opportunities for resource exploitation present themselves in ever-farther and deeper waters, we expect this precedent established by the regulation of destructive fishing practices to continue to serve as the model for how our ocean's biodiversity should be managed. The International Seabed Authority will be taking up this very challenge this year as it formulates environmental regulations for seabed mining activities, which both presents long-awaited economic opportunities as well as environmental risks that are only now beginning to be understood. This is a critical task that we all will be watching closely.

Co-chairs, we look forward to the discussions this week under your able leadership.