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**Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries**

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*Strengthening national capacity and regional solidarity for sustainable tuna fisheries*

**MEDIA RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Monday 27<sup>th</sup> June 2016

**Smiles for US Treaty as Pacific reaches six-year deal**  
■ **Pacific Islands Parties, US major breakthrough**

*FFA HQ, Honiara, SOLOMON ISLANDS*—18 negotiation meetings over the last seven years governing the world’s largest multilateral tuna fisheries deal have finally ended over the weekend with this news: the US Treaty has survived.

The access and aid envelope for Pacific Forum Fisheries members, which started life 28 years ago as the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, had been going through increasingly difficult negotiations and interim agreements since the last multi-year agreement ended in 2012.

The multilateral Treaty has paved the way for US vessels to fish in the Pacific since the 1980s as well as delivering critical economic assistance from the US Government. It had been under renegotiation since 2009 and while a series of annually negotiated 12-month deals had kept the arrangement working, recent signs did not bode well for its future.

“The sense of achievement and relief that regional cooperation has delivered a deal many doubted could be achieved, definitely tops a very long, often frustrating, and sometimes torturous negotiations process for the Pacific,” says FFA Director-General James Movick.

The process was mired by setbacks over the last 12 months leading to a major breakdown early this year over the US industry’s non-payment for the 2016 deal, taking both parties to a very public impasse where the Pacific’s refusal to issue licenses was met with a formal notice of Withdrawal from the Treaty, by the US Government.

Despite solving that impasse, allowing vessels to recommence fishing, the strained relationships between the Pacific and US continued, with a real chance the treaty would not survive past December 2016.

Speaking of the new long-term deal that has helped set the US-Pacific relationships back on track; Movick as he briefed FFA staff back in Honiara, recalled the sense of occasion when agreement from both sides was finally reached at 3am Saturday, NZ time.

“We have just concluded what was widely thought to be the last ditch effort to save the Treaty,” he says. “The Pacific should be incredibly pleased with the outcome of the session, which builds on earlier achievements. We have struck a six year deal that should provide for a secure yet flexible future for the US industry, stability in the delivery of US economic assistance and excellent financial returns to the Pacific islands.”

At this stage, the agreement remains “in principle”. The US will need to rescind its earlier withdrawal, a decision that can only be made at the highest political levels. The Pacific still needs the endorsement of the Fisheries Ministers when they meet in Vanuatu in early July. Nevertheless, the negotiation delegations have both indicated their strong support for the outcomes.

Speaking on the details of the package, stepped out in a 14-page briefing note to Pacific Islands officials, FFA Deputy Director-General Wez Norris noted the deal provides a “very valuable ‘first right of refusal’ to the US fleet for a significant number of fishing days. The US fleet also has a new flexibility to compete in the market place with other vessel owners”.

The overall package, he says, could be worth as much as US70m for 2017 “if the fleet takes up all its available opportunities.”

While that figure may seem lower than previous one-year deals that have been struck (which were worth up to US90m), it is for a far lower number of fishing days, and the rate of return to the Pacific for each fishing day has never been higher.

Says Deputy Director-General Norris, “By the end of the deal the Treaty will be providing returns of over US14,000 per fishing day in addition to the economic assistance that each country receives. At the start of the negotiation, that amount was somewhere in the vicinity of US2,000 per day.”

He says this “staggering increase, driven heavily by the strength of the Vessel Day Scheme implemented by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, is also a reflection of the strength that can be gained through collective negotiation and regional solidarity.”

The arrangement also has valuable provisions to encourage exploratory fishing in Pacific island waters where the purse seine fishery has not yet developed. These arrangements provide the potential for those countries to increase the benefits they enjoy from the fish stocks that occur in their waters.

FFA Director General Movick congratulated all of the negotiators on both the Pacific side and in the US, adding, “Once the new agreement has been endorsed at the appropriate levels it will enable us to begin a new phase for the US Treaty – one which is mutually beneficial and will secure our cooperative relationship on wider matters”. –ENDS

**ABOUT FFA:**

The Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) strengthens national capacity and regional solidarity so its 17 members can manage, control and develop their tuna fisheries now and in the future. Based in Honiara, Solomon Islands, FFA's 17 Pacific Island members are Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. Since 1979, FFA has facilitated regional cooperation so that all Pacific countries benefit from the sustainable use of tuna – a multi-billion dollar resource important for many people's livelihoods in the Pacific.

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