



## **New Zealand Government refuses NGO calls to back end to secret WCPFC Compliance Processes**

[Reykjavik, Iceland, 11 November 2024] -- The New Zealand Government has officially responded to a letter from NGO Accountability.Fish demanding the participation of observers in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) compliance processes and to end the practice of conducting key meetings behind closed doors. In his response, Hon Shane Jones, the Minister who holds the portfolio responsible for fisheries and related international matters, has refused to intervene at the upcoming WCPFC General Meeting to allow observer involvement in the full compliance monitoring process

Accountability.Fish, a global non-governmental organization dedicated to improving the transparency and accountability of Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMOs), has raised concerns for some time over the lack of transparency within the Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC).

On 9 September 2024, the organization sent letters to and publicly named 17 member states—including New Zealand—that refuse to allow observers into the full Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC) meeting where key sustainability data is reviewed and confirmed.

“New Zealand has a reputation as a country of laws with a commitment to international law. But its failure to stop WCPFC secrecy actually contradicts its obligations under the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA). The tone of the ministry’s response reflects a particular cavalier attitude towards those obligations and shames New Zealand,” said Ryan Orgera, Accountability Fish’s Global Director.

Despite previous calls for transparency, WCPFC remains the only tuna RFMO that continues to exclude observers from important sections of key meetings, particularly those where draft compliance reports are produced.

New Zealand’s response, delivered on behalf of the Rt Hon Christopher Luxon, Prime Minister of New Zealand, the Rt Hon Winston Peters, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Shane Jones, Minister for Oceans and Fisheries, clarifies the Island nation’s position that the

decision to allow observers to participate in the WCPFC compliance monitoring process lies solely with the WCPFC and that decisions within the WCPFC are typically made by consensus among its members.

“The lack of transparency stands in direct violation of several international agreements, including the United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement, to which New Zealand is a signatory. Article 12 of the Agreement clearly stipulates that “States shall provide for transparency in the decision-making process and other activities of subregional and regional fisheries management organizations,” Orgera added.

“Furthermore, the WCPFC’s actions are inconsistent with key international frameworks, including the Rio Declaration, the Aarhus Convention, the Almaty Guidelines, and the Escazú Convention, all of which call for the involvement of civil society in environmental decision-making processes.

“New Zealand citizens need to understand the gap between the country’s reputation as a leader on environmental issues and international law and its actual behavior. It’s time to walk the talk Orgera concluded.

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Accountability.Fish is a global initiative committed to increasing openness and accountability in international fisheries decision making. It is funded by the Oceans Five Foundation.

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