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"END THE YEARS OF SECRECY"

Accountability.Fish Applies for "Unconditional" WCPFC Observer Status

WASHINGTON: In a bid to end the practice of international fisheries decision-making bodies conducting some of their most crucial meetings in secret, the Accountability.Fish advocacy group has applied for "unconditional" observer status for the upcoming Western Central Pacific Fisheries Council meetings later this year.

"International fisheries decisions have far reaching economic and ecological consequences, and the citizens of the WCPFC countries, and indeed those of the world, have a right to know what decisions are being made and why. It's time to end the years of secrecy - particularly at the WCPFC, which is one that has a history of ensuring information used to make key decisions remains behind closed doors," said Ryan Orgera, Accountability.Fish's Global Director.

WCPFC members include: Australia, China, Canada, Cook Islands, European Union, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, Indonesia, Japan, Kiribati, Republic of Korea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Chinese Taipei, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu.

In addition, participating territories include: American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, and cooperating non-members are Curacao, Ecuador, El Salvador, Liberia, Nicaragua, Panama, Thailand, Vietnam.

Noting that observers who gain access to meetings of other Regional Fisheries Management Organizations often have to abide by conditions intended to shield nations from having their actions at the meetings appear in the public record, Orgera made a point of requesting "unconditional" observer status for the upcoming WCPFC meetings.

"Offering only conditional or partial access to NGO and other observers only reinforces bad practices in the international fishing arena. With the UN High Seas Treaty still taking some years to go into effect and a more holistic and sustainable approach to oceans management still to emerge, we need to be vigilant to make sure the industrial fishing industry doesn't do irreversible damage in the meantime."

Accountability.Fish is a coalition of citizens around the world seeking greater openness in international fisheries management. It is funded by the Oceans Five foundation.