

Opening Statement by Australia  
CCSBT 16  
Jeju Island, Republic of Korea

Mr Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Ahnnnyung haseyo, good morning.

I would like to thank the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting the 16<sup>th</sup> annual session of the Extended Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna and, in addition, for selecting such a special location for this important meeting. Our hope is that the serene surroundings of this setting will help focus our discussions and facilitate the development of a common understanding, and achievement of the Commission's primary objective, that is, the conservation and optimum utilisation of southern bluefin tuna. And although this beautiful place, Jeju Island, is known as 'Honeymoon Island', it is with all seriousness that I must say that the 15 year honeymoon of the CCSBT is over.

Southern bluefin tuna is one of the most highly valued fish in the oceans. The fact that southern bluefin tuna is good to eat, some would say delicious, has not worked in their favour. This fact, combined with the high price for southern bluefin tuna and its bluefin cousins has resulted in overexploitation of these species. We are experiencing a form of the often quoted "tragedy of the commons". In the case of southern bluefin tuna, it is a commons that spans a large part of the Earth and it will require cooperation among nations and fishing entities to reverse this overexploitation.

This year the CCSBT Extended Scientific Committee has completed a new stock assessment with some important revisions to the operating model used for these assessments. We believe that this assessment represents an improvement over previous assessments due to a range of factors, including the incorporation of new and better data, notably the fishery independent aerial survey to estimate juvenile abundance carried out by Australia in the Great Australian Bight. Nevertheless, the southern bluefin tuna spawning stock biomass is less than 10% of the spawning biomass that would have existed if the stock had not been fished.

This is an unacceptable situation for any fishery from a biological and an economic perspective. This point is clearly identified in the Australian Government Harvest Strategy Policy which identifies 20% of the unfished spawning stock biomass as the limit reference point, meaning the point below which the stock should not fall. The Harvest Strategy Policy also states that, for a wholly domestic managed fishery, if a stock falls below the 20% limit reference point, all targeted fishing for that stock should cease and a rebuilding strategy should be developed to rebuild the stock. Australia recognises that a globally managed fishery must be managed under different rules, but that the Harvest Strategy Policy principles are relevant.

Australia's Harvest Strategy Policy is consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Implementing Agreement on the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks. These treaties must guide all Members of this Commission.

Southern bluefin tuna has already experienced years of recruitment failure, the four years from 1999 to 2002. At CCSBT13 in 2006 the Commission sought to ensure that the stock would not decline below the 2004 spawning biomass in 2014, in anticipation of the possible negative impact of these poor recruitment years on the size of the spawning stock at that time. However, we do not have evidence of recovery of the spawning stock biomass and further years of poor recruitment are possible.

The Commission must act to reverse this trend and agree to a strategy to rebuild the stock. The Extended Scientific Committee has called for "...a meaningful reduction in catch..." to allow the stock to rebuild. The Commission has already taken the first steps towards rebuilding when the CCSBT Strategy and Fisheries Management Working Group agreed to an interim rebuilding target of 20% of the unfished spawning stock biomass. The Commission Members must work together and come to an agreement to ensure that we can achieve the goal within a reasonable timeframe.

Australia recognises the need to reduce the global total allowable catch of southern bluefin tuna. For Australia, such a decision is particularly critical. Although Australia is not a so-called 'fishing nation', and we are joined in this Commission by Members with far larger fishing industries, Australia does have some very important and valuable fisheries. Near the top of the list of Australia's most valuable fisheries is southern bluefin tuna, a fishery that is one of our largest in terms of both tonnage and value. Also, the fishery is centred on a single community, Port Lincoln, South Australia and, as a result, it is of great importance to that community and the region. Therefore, Australia expects all Members of the CCSBT to make a contribution to rebuilding the southern bluefin tuna stock.

Australia is all too aware that past behaviour and non-compliance with CCSBT agreements have played the key role in putting all CCSBT Members in the current difficult situation. We also are aware, that, had all Members abided by CCSBT decisions regarding national allocations, the southern bluefin stock would have nearly achieved, if not achieved, the current interim rebuilding target of 20% of the unfished spawning stock biomass by 2006. We remain deeply concerned about compliance with national allocations of southern bluefin tuna and the fact that not all Members are complying with decisions made by the Commission. As a result, we recognise that the global catch of southern bluefin tuna is well above the currently agreed Total Allowable Catch. These overcatches must be eliminated.

Australia will continue to work with all Members to ensure that effective monitoring, control and surveillance measures are in place and that catches are effectively controlled. We recognise that the Catch Documentation Scheme, agreed at CCSBT15, will play a key role in achieving that aim. Nevertheless, a Catch Documentation Scheme cannot be

fully effective in eliminating overcatches and illegal catches. Verification regimes must be both effective and widespread. Members and Co-operating non-members, port states and market states must all cooperate to achieve a fully effective management regime for southern bluefin tuna.

Finally, and importantly, we must minimize the impacts of fishing on ecologically related species. We need to meet not just our responsibilities to our own public, but also to the global public. The plight of many seabird species, in particular albatrosses and petrels, is well-recognised and the outlook for some species is dire. Further, we cannot ignore the impact that fishing has on sharks, sea turtles and other marine species and we must take positive steps to reduce these impacts, in accordance with our international legal obligations.

Australia looks forward to frank and constructive discussions and to measures decided upon at this meeting that will put southern bluefin tuna on a rebuilding trajectory.

Thank you, gamsahabnida.