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A Way Forward

Derelict fishing gear and related debris are responsible for broad degradation of the Pacific region's economic and ecological resources. Floating derelict fishing gear is a hazard to vessel navigation and poses a threat to life and property when encountered at sea, it can continue to function as designed catching target commercial species without economic benefit but with economic cost, and derelict fishing gear also regularly entangles protected and threatened marine species and destroys habitats of these and other species.

The problem of derelict fishing gear in the Pacific is exacerbated by oceanographic surface currents which ultimately concentrate much of the debris from the greater North Pacific Ocean in ecologically sensitive regions. For the United States, this problem is particularly acute in the Main and Northwestern Hawaiian Islands, which are fragile and remote islands and atolls with endemic coral reef ecosystems and endangered and threatened marine species. A broad-based coalition of organizations has worked to document and remove 330 metric tons of debris from these islands since 1998. Hawaii is also home to commercial and recreational fishermen, shipping interests, the tourism industry and many other sectors that make their living working with the sea.

These problems are not unique to the United States, however. APEC Economies like Australia, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and Mexico are experiencing the impacts of derelict fishing gear and related marine debris in their coastal zones, ports, and waterways, which have not only damaged sensitive areas and valuable marine resources, but have also resulted in the tragic loss of human life.

In August 2000, the International Marine Debris Conference was held in Honolulu, Hawaii, which, among other things, examined the problem of derelict fishing gear from an international perspective and made recommendations for action. The international community responded by taking note of the problem of plastic debris and derelict fishing gear and the results of the Conference in the United Nations Secretary General's Reports on Oceans and the Law of the Sea, which led directly to the problem being highlighted by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 55/8 of 30 October 2000. The need for international coordination and enhanced education and outreach about derelict fishing gear and related marine debris, including through FAO, IMO, regional and sub regional fisheries organizations and arrangements and other appropriate inter-governmental organizations, was identified as a priority.

Recognizing that this problem is a regional one that requires cooperation to solve, APEC approved a project proposal by the United States for an educational and outreach seminar on derelict fishing gear and related debris at its annual Fisheries Working Group in Lima, Peru in 2002. Our reason for choosing APEC as a potential venue for international discussion of this issue is the regional scale and multi-national scope of the problem and the linkages to sustainable development, business practices, and other issues that cross-cut the APEC mandate and its sub-bodies (i.e., the Marine Resource, Tourism, and Transportation Working Groups). We've also been impressed with the utility of APEC as a forum to promote dialogue between business and government interests, develop creative voluntary solutions to problems such as derelict fishing gear that can negatively impact trade, and provide capacity building for APEC economies in best practices.

The Seminar was held in January 2004 with representatives from ten Economies and five global, regional, or sub regional organizations participating, in addition to a broad range of industry leaders, fishermen, resource managers, and researchers and scientists. Through detailed panel presentations, case studies, and the ensuing discussions, derelict fishing gear and related marine debris was recognized as a critical problem in the marine environment and for living marine resources. The Seminar called upon APEC Economies to take action at the national, regional, and global levels, and to secure adequate

funding to do so. The participants in the Seminar recommended a series of specific actions or activities APEC Economies, regional fisheries management organizations, regional bodies, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, and individuals should pursue in order to make progress on this issue, including the need for a standing body of people from concerned Economies to dedicate time to addressing this issue.

Two other themes emerged from the Seminar. The first was that although the global problem of marine debris is not unique to any of the participants, the local and regional solutions can be and are. A variety of arrangements and organizations are available to address the problem, and cooperation should be sought from industry, fishers, non-governmental organizations, and Economy representatives. The second was that addressing this issue takes time. It is hoped that participants returned home committed to continuing to work on this issue in new and different ways. We who were involved in the development of this project hope that the reader finds the Seminar report and presentations useful in continuing to advance the international debate on this important topic. For sustainable development to truly be sustainable, all stakeholders need to recognize and respond to the interconnectivity of issues, including ones as seemingly diverse as fisheries management and derelict fishing gear.

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