PIoWR Newsletter · September 2026
Fair Conditions At Work
Newsletter · September 2026 issue · covering September – October 2026 · Suva, Fiji

Pacific Institute of Workplace Relations · www.piowr.org

LEAD STORY

A union home for Fiji's offshore fishers

The **Fiji Maritime Union (FMU)**, an affiliate of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF), is moving to start a **Fishers Branch in Suva**. FMU has **agreed in principle**, and side discussions with FMU will take place at the **Conservation International workshop in Suva in late October 2026**.

Offshore fishers in Fiji have waited a long time for a union of their own. An earlier attempt to organise them as a branch of the TCGWU has not succeeded since 2023. Working through FMU is a more direct path. **Conservation International — Fiji Programme supports** the set-up of the Branch.

PIoWR co-founder **Mr Banati Sefeti**, General Secretary-designate of the FMU Fishers Branch, may lead the Branch as Transitional General Secretary for its first year, subject to the FMU discussions. The aim is clear: by 2028 the Branch should stand on its own as a **self-sustaining, dues-paying** part of FMU, run by the fishers it serves.

Key dates

Date	What	PIoWR's role
23 – 29 Sep 2026	WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC22), Pohnpei, FSM. Its agenda includes early consideration of readiness for CMM 2024-04.	Watching
Late Oct 2026	Conservation International workshop, Suva, with side discussions with FMU on the Fishers Branch.	Taking part in side discussions with FMU
30 Nov – 5 Dec 2026	WCPFC23, the Commission's annual session, Port Vila, Vanuatu.	Watching, from published papers
Jan – Dec 2027	Proposed project period for the FMU Fishers Branch (Fiji).	Proposal being prepared
1 Jan 2028	WCPFC CMM 2024-04 crew labour standards become binding, alongside the FFA HMTC crew conditions applied through licences.	Fishers organised and ready

WCPFC dates checked on the WCPFC meetings website in October 2026. PIoWR is watching these meetings and follows them from published papers.

The 2028 deadline, in plain words

CMM 2024-04 is the first binding regional standard on fishing crew labour. It was adopted at WCPFC21 in Suva in December 2024 and is binding on WCPFC members, including the Pacific states of the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), from **1 January 2028**. FFA members also apply crew employment conditions through the **Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions for access (HMTCs)** in fishing licences. On covered vessels, fishers should have:

- a written contract, in a form and language they understand, agreed before the trip;
- decent and regular pay they can access, and insurance;
- rest, sleeping quarters, clean water and enough food;
- medical care, and safety training;
- no forced labour, abuse or mistreatment;
- access to their own identity documents and to communication to seek help;
- repatriation, paid by the operator when the operator ends the contract early;
- their next-of-kin details recorded on board.

Even if Fiji has not ratified ILO C188 (Work in Fishing), CMM 2024-04 and the HMTCs carry many of its key clauses, says Mr Sefeti. Fiji and Vanuatu have both ratified **C87** and **C98**, which protect the right to form and join a union and to bargain collectively.

Two proposals, one deadline

FIJI: FIRST HARBOUR

Establishing the FMU Fishers Branch

- Mobilising Fiji's offshore fishers for the 2028 HMTC and CMM 2024-04 labour standards.
- January – December 2027; draft budget FJD 46,300 (indicative).
- Target: 250 offshore fishers registered by Q4 2027.
- Funds sought for union capacity building and organising, and a fisher compliance and legal awareness project.

VANUATU: PLANNED NEXT HARBOUR

A fishers' union or branch, in formation

- Vanuatu has no dedicated fishers' union yet.
- A separate PIoWR proposal is being prepared, pending confirmation of the form of the union or branch and its partners.
- Focus: team and programme readiness for 1 January 2028, awareness in Bislama, and the welfare app pilot.

Separate project proposals for Fiji and Vanuatu are being prepared so that fishers in both countries are organised and informed before the 1 January 2028 deadline. Funders we are approaching include the ITF and ITF Seafarers' Trust, the ILO and embassy small grants programmes.

Coming in 2027: the Fishers Welfare App

PIoWR plans to pilot a **Fishers Welfare App** with members of the new Branch. It takes ideas that work in the SafeSeason seasonal-worker app (safeseasons.com) and shapes them for fishers:

- **grievance and incident reporting**, with a clear path for who acts and by when;
- **anonymous reporting**, so fear does not stop a report;
- **contract and wage records**: photos of contracts and pay slips, and days at sea;
- **rights information in vernacular** languages, light on mobile data;
- **alerts** for meetings, sessions and deadlines.

The app **complements, and does not replace**, existing reporting frameworks such as the Fiji Ministry of Employment, Productivity and Workplace Relations' labour reporting channels. It helps fishers prepare a clear, documented complaint for the right official channel.

What we are watching

- **TCC22, Pohnpei (23 – 29 Sep 2026):** the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee's agenda included early consideration of implementation readiness for CMM 2024-04. We are reading the papers and outcomes.
- **WCPFC23, Port Vila (30 Nov – 5 Dec 2026):** the Commission meets in Vanuatu, our planned next harbour. We will follow the published papers and report what matters for fishers.

GET IN TOUCH

Mr Banati Sefeti, Co-founder, PIoWR; General Secretary-designate, FMU Fishers Branch · bsefeti@piowr.org · +679 779 7978
John Robert Simelum, Co-founder, PIoWR · www.piowr.org

Fiji is our first harbour. Vanuatu is the planned next harbour. Share this newsletter with a fisher or a fisher's family.