Cabinet has approved the Offshore Fisheries Management Decree 2012.

The Decree is a result of the review of the Fisheries Act (Cap.158) and the Marine Spaces Act (Cap. 158A).

The Decree modernises Fiji's laws, updates enforcement procedures as well integrates the international agreements related to fisheries which Fiji is a party to.

Cabinet based its decision on a submission by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests, Mr Inia Seruiratu.

The Minister said that the Decree integrates international agreements into Fiji's laws and also recognizes the need to adopt those arrangements and treaties when and as necessary.

He said that the monitoring, control and surveillance procedures have been well defined in the Decree which sets in place the appointment of authorized officers who are empowered to search any vessel and seize any instrument they believe are illegal or may have been used in illegal fishing activities.

In an effort to preserve Fiji's fisheries resources and to ensure sustainable use and management of these resources, the Minister said that the penalties and fines for breaches of this Decree are substantially high to deter potential offenders and to align our laws with other regional countries on this issue so Fiji does not become vulnerable to fishing vessels and fishing companies who may choose to conduct illegal fishing practices in our waters because our laws are more lenient compared to those of our neighboring countries.

The Minister said that the Decree establishes the Offshore Fisheries Advisory Council whose function shall be to advise the Minister on policy matters relating to fisheries conservation, management, development and sustainable use.

The Minister will be responsible for appointments to the Council.

The Decree will come into force on 1st January, 2013.

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