

News from the Tuvalu Fisheries Department (TFD)

Total tuna catches in Tuvalu waters in 2016 are provisionally estimated to have been over 110,000 tonnes, which is by far the largest ever recorded and almost double the amount of tuna that is usually caught in these waters. Catch transshipment in Funafuti harbour also reached an all-time high. These record fishing levels are due to a combination of factors including the growing familiarity of purse seine fishing fleets with Tuvalu fishing conditions, environmental factors, and developments in other countries in the region. In addition, Tuvalu has clear fishery rules, which are enforced strictly and without favour or discrimination, so that licensed vessels know the rules and are confident that they will be implemented fairly and reasonably. And of course all fishing in Tuvalu waters takes place according to management measures that are established through national legislation as well as the Parties of the Nauru Agreement, the Tokelau Arrangement, and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

2017 has been a busy year for the TFD so far. Several major events have taken place, including the following:

Industrial tuna development

Tuvalu's one and only tuna purse seiner, the *Taumoana*, will soon be joined by a sister ship, the *Tautaloa*, which will also operate under the Tuvalu Tuna Fong Haur (TTFH) Company. In addition, another vessel, the *Taina*, has just commenced operations under the Tusa Fishing Company Limited. Both companies are joint ventures between the Government of Tuvalu and partners, in Taiwan and Korea respectively. Discussions are also under way with foreign longline companies about the prospects of establishing locally-based operations in order to create onshore processing and eventually exporting of processed tuna products.

Funafuti Reef Fisheries Stewardship Plan (FRFSP)

The TFD is working with the Funafuti *Kaupule* (island council), *Falekaupule* (elders), Fishermen in Funafuti Association (FOFA) and the community, in order to develop a comprehensive plan for the management of stressed fishery resources on Funafuti Atoll. The plan aims to help reef fisheries recover to more productive levels, and will focus on smart use of the already established Funafuti Conservation Area (FCA), avoiding the use of too many complex rules, and preserving and enhancing livelihoods and food and nutrition security for Tuvaluans living in Funafuti.

Outer Island Resource Assessment and Management

TFD staff members have undertaken several trips to Tuvalu's eight outer islands to carry out creel and household surveys, and to discuss fisheries management and development needs and opportunities with outer island residents. This will ultimately lead to the production of fisheries development and management plans for each island, which will then be financed using the Community Vessel Day Scheme (C-VDS), a mechanism under which some of the revenues from foreign fishing in Tuvalu waters are channelled to support outer islands development.

Tala Moana

The Department has been making full use of the Fisheries research vessel *Tala Moana*, which was purchased in January 2016 using Global Environment Facility (GEF) funds available to Tuvalu. The liveaboard vessel can accommodate 15 passengers as well as 8 crew members, and is being used to transport teams of TFD staff members to the outer islands and to carry out fishery patrols in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). When not in use for official purposes, the *Tala Moana* is made available for charters to private users. The vessel has just undergone major maintenance and refit in Fiji.

Construction of the new TFD headquarters building

Demolition of the old fisheries extension building at Teone commenced in December 2016 and construction work on the new headquarters soon followed. When the new building is completed, it will house the entire TFD, which is



Tala Moana inauguration day.



TFD's new office building should be completed in October 2017 (image: Garry Preston).

currently split among five separate offices. The new facility includes not only office space but also a conference room, vessel monitoring system (VMS) room, dive bay, wet and dry laboratories, and a storage/work area for fish aggregating device (FAD) construction and practical training courses. The building, which should be completed in October 2017, is being funded by the New Zealand government, with IT equipment being procured via World Bank funds, and office furniture being co-funded by the Government of Tuvalu.

Small-scale fisheries development

A major project is currently being formulated to upgrade the vessels and facilities in use by local fishers in Funafuti so that they can make more use of the abundant tuna stocks instead of increasing fishing pressure on reef and lagoon resources. A feasibility study will soon be launched into the technical and financial aspects of establishing a small fleet of seaworthy fishing vessels that are capable of staying at sea for several days at a time, as well as renovation of the fishing jetty and cold store so that catches can be preserved. This project is closely linked with both the FRFSP and the possible development of onshore processing facilities for longline catches.

Marine resources legislation

The Tuvalu Marine Resources Act has been subject to a lengthy period of review and improvement and is now ready to be submitted to Parliament, which should take place before the end of the year. The revised Act strengthens the implementation of international fishery management treaties and agreements to which Tuvalu is a party, and significantly increases the penalties for most fishery offences. Once the new Act is approved, several new regulations will also be promulgated to ensure precautionary management of sensitive resources such as beche-de-mer and sharks.

This is just a small portion of some of the key activities that the TFD has been working on in 2017.

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