

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

4th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

(30 August – 3 September 2004, Noumea, New Caledonia)

Background Paper 9

Original: English

Extract from the “Report Of The Thirty-Third Meeting Of The Committee Of Representatives Of Governments And Administrations (Lami, Fiji 5-7 November 2003)” pp 4-12



Extract from the “Report Of The Thirty-Third Meeting Of The Committee Of Representatives Of Governments And Administrations (Lami, Fiji 5-7 November 2003)” pp 4-12

2.1 Marine Resources Division

13. The Director of the Marine Resources Division (MRD) gave an overview of the Division’s structure and work programme. He highlighted the Division’s three primary programmes: the Coastal Fisheries Programme (CFP), Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP), and the Regional Maritime Programme (RMP). He explained that although the three programmes addressed diverse issues, all of the Division’s work had a dual focus: building national capacity, and maintaining and strengthening regional capacity. He made reference to upcoming presentations that would focus on reviews that had been undertaken of CFP and RMP, and then presented additional detail regarding the work of OFP. In addition to outlining the various services that OFP provides to member PICTs, he gave a brief overview of the status of the primary tuna stocks. He indicated that skipjack tuna stocks continue to be in good condition, with the 1.2 million tonne catch believed to be at a sustainable level. He indicated that albacore catch levels were also sustainable, but that declines in catch rates were being experienced in some areas, and stated that additional data were being collected to enable a better assessment of the causes of these local declines. He stated that yellowfin tuna stocks were close to being fully exploited, saying that OFP’s current recommendation was that there should be no increase in exploitation of juvenile yellowfin stocks. Finally, he observed that bigeye tuna were currently being fished at levels that would lead to overfishing if the over-average recruitment of the past decade was not sustained in the future, but stressed that there was a high level of uncertainty in this assessment. However, he suggested that there should be no increases in bigeye fishing mortality, and that a reduction should be considered. He mentioned two priorities for OFP: getting better information on tuna stocks that are fished internationally (particularly in Indonesian and Philippine waters), and implementing additional tuna tagging activities.

14. The Representative of France expressed his appreciation to the Director of Marine Resources for his presentation, and stated that the positive impact of MRD’s work could be clearly seen in all PICTs. He indicated that OFP had already contributed significantly to the work of the future Western-Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. He stated that in the Commission’s preparatory meeting (PrepCon) held in October 2003 in Rarotonga, all members indicated that OFP’s scientific expertise should be utilised in setting up the Fisheries Commission. He said that France hoped that the cooperation between OFP and the Fisheries Commission would continue after the interim period while the Commission was established, and welcomed the effectiveness of ongoing cooperation between OFP and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). He would have appreciated a more detailed breakdown of donor contributions to MRD and, in this regard, highlighted the extensive support that was currently being provided by the European Union.

15. The Representative of Fiji Islands first commended the Director-General’s report, and agreed with France. He commended the Director of Marine Resources for his excellent report, and highlighted the work MRD does in conjunction with the FFA. He applauded RMP’s success in helping member states achieve international maritime “White List” status. He noted the outcomes of the CFP review, and stressed the importance of implementing the recommendations therein. He indicated that local industries have benefited from the work undertaken by SPC, particularly in the areas of research,

training and capacity building. In the case of Fiji, its marine sector policies (as reflected in the National Strategic Development Plan 2003-2005) supports the sustainable utilisation of marine resources (both inshore and offshore). The policies and work undertaken to develop institutional capacity are consistent with the recommendations of the two programmes (OFP and CFP). He noted that other initiatives, such as the Tuna Management Plan, recognise the importance of enforcing compliance among industry players relative to international standards. He also observed that training and capacity building among small-scale fishermen are consistent with regional efforts to develop fisheries as a means to sustain the livelihood of Pacific Islanders.

16. The Representative of Australia stated that his country was pleased by the fact that MRD was responsive to changing circumstances in the region. He indicated that while Australia certainly saw the potential for OFP to provide services to the future Fisheries Commission, the issue of who would pay for these services was an important one, noting that OFP's work was now fully funded by donors, for the benefit of island members. He observed that the Fisheries Commission would have a different agenda to that of SPC members. He also said that overlaps exist between the work of MRD and that of other regional organisations, and suggested that there should be a strategic approach to their cooperation and that appropriate and effective lines of communication are in place.

17. The Representative of American Samoa commended the Director of Marine Resources on his report. He observed that the declining size of the American purse-seining fleet, the increased reliance of American Samoa's tuna cannery on imported tuna, and declining size of skipjack being caught by vessels fishing out of Pago Pago all appeared to suggest a decline in skipjack tuna stocks, which was at odds with the observations that the Director had made.

18. The Director of Marine Resources suggested that the declining size of the fleet was possibly due to economic rather than resource factors, and asked SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme Manager to comment. The Oceanic Fisheries Programme Manager concurred with the Director, stating that OFP saw no indications of a decline in the size of skipjack tuna that would indicate real pressure on stocks, and observed that the decline in the number of vessels in the American fleet was due to economic factors.

19. The Representative of Solomon Islands expressed his thanks to the Chairperson, to SPC and to the government of Fiji Islands, and extended greetings from the government and people of Solomon Islands. He thanked the Director of Marine Resources for his presentation, and observed that fisheries were a very important industry for his country. He posed several questions to the Director:

- a. To what extent do countries access and make use of the services of MRD?
- b. How does SPC ensure that MRD goals are compatible with country needs?
- c. What is the comparative advantage of having MRD located within SPC, in place of within another organisation?

20. The Director of Marine Resources responded to each question in turn. Regarding the first question (To what extent do countries access and make use of the services of MRD?) he stated that MRD's work was currently in two areas: regional work that benefits all countries, and country-specific work. He stated that it was currently possible to access information on SPC's website indicating the activities that staff were (and had been) involved in, and said that MRD was developing a listing that would indicate the various MRD projects that were being implemented in each member country. Regarding the second question (How does SPC ensure that MRD goals are compatible with country needs?), he stated that the Division's current goals had been set through a comprehensive strategic planning process, which was undertaken in 2002, with input from a variety of stakeholders. With reference to the representative's third question (What is the comparative advantage of having MRD located within SPC, in place of within another organisation?), the Director stated that this issue was currently under review. He indicated that discussions were ongoing regarding the role of OFP, FFA, and the future Fisheries Commission, and said that through this process the specific activities of each organisation would be determined.

21. The Representative of Niue, speaking for the first time, extended her appreciation for the CRGA and Conference arrangements and the hospitality extended by the government of Fiji Islands. She stated that her country had taken full advantage of the services offered by all of MRD's programmes. She made reference to recommendations 12 and 13 of the CFP review (Working Paper 2.1, Annex 8), and inquired how SPC intended to improve its working relationships with other CROP agencies, as suggested by these recommendations.

22. The Director of Marine Resources observed that this might be best addressed through the CROP process. He also stated that SPC's very successful cooperation with FFA was based on specific technical agreements, indicating that such agreements might be necessary between SPC and other CROP agencies as well. He suggested, for instance, that a specific MOU could be established between collaborative CROP agencies at the operational level.

23. The Representative of Samoa indicated that his country placed a high value on the work undertaken by MRD, and observed that the information the Division provides is very important for PICTs. He said that while in the past he had believed that OFP's outputs were underutilised, he thought that the future Fisheries Commission would be able to make good use of OFP's expertise, and stated that Samoa supported an arrangement by which OFP assisted the Commission, at least on an interim basis. He inquired if it had been formally decided that OFP would provide services to the Commission, and indicated that he believed the issue of cost-recovery was important.

24. The Oceanic Fisheries Programme Manager indicated that the issue had been discussed at the prior PrepCon meeting, and stated OFP had been requested to provide services to the Commission during its establishment, and for an interim period (possibly three years) after this. He said that the services requested by the Commission were largely the same as those already being undertaken for member PICTs, and that providing these would thus be very cost-effective. He stated that the Commission might well have other requirements that would require additional work on the part of OFP, and said that funding arrangements for such work would have to be discussed. He stated that the issue of interim cooperation with the Commission was first discussed at the 2001 Heads of Fisheries (HOF) meeting, and that the 2001 CRGA approved HOF's recommendation that this cooperation be undertaken, with the following provisos:

- That any work for the Commission not be to the detriment of OFP's other activities; and
- That any additional activities (not currently carried out by OFP) be paid for by the Commission on a user-pays basis.

He stated that OFP was committed to expanding services to members, and said that if OFP's regional role were expanded it would also allow the organisation to better serve individual countries.

25. The Representative of Wallis and Futuna commended the work of MRD in his country, and stated that Wallis and Futuna acknowledged MRD's inputs, particularly in the areas of training of trainers, and capacity-building in the area of community marine resource management. He emphasised his Territory's participation in the preparatory meetings for the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. In this regard, he supported the comments by the Representative of France in favour of partnerships, such as that between FFA and OFP. He indicated his view that sound scientific input would help members make informed decisions about management of marine resources.

26. Mr Tim Wilson presented the findings of the Regional Maritime Programme review. He noted that the RMP team had performed quite well with regards to responding to country needs, noting that staff had a very good understanding and awareness of the various issues and challenges facing the region with regards to maritime matters. He also noted the success RMP had in attracting donor funding of 3.9 million Fiji dollars. He presented several recommendations regarding areas where RMP needed to continue and expand its efforts. These include:

- The need for RMP to initiate strategies to enhance better understanding of the issues in the maritime sector at the political level.
- The need to ensure ports operations and security in PICTs comply with the new "IMO International Ship and Port Facility Security Code" before its coming into effect on 1 July 2004. This will ensure International Ship Operators can still continue to operate in Pacific Ports.
- The need to ensure a continued presence of Maritime Legal expertise in the programme.
- The need for an overarching Maritime Policy to guide "national Policy development in the Maritime Sector".
- The need for longer term funding for long-term effective change in the sector.

27. The Representative of Palau thanked the Director of MRD for his presentation, and said he endorsed the continuation of the Regional Maritime Programme. He asked whether seafarers working on commercial fishing needed to be certified.

28. Mr Wilson said that to date, no certification was required.

29. The Senior Deputy Director-General explained that the Regional Maritime Programme had originally been a part of the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, but that in 1997 it was handed over to SPC as a “sunset programme”. He pointed out that RMP had a very high work output and was quite focused. He noted that this was brought out by the review, and observed that the review had also highlighted important gaps in the maritime sector. He explained that the New Zealand government had funded the training component of RMP, and that the legal portion of the programme was funded primarily by the Secretariat through its core budget. He also noted the important contributions from AusAID, DFID, Taiwan/Republic of China, and Japan, as well the International Maritime Organization and the Commonwealth Secretariat. He said that DFID funding was coming to a close, and that RMP would then be dependent on New Zealand and SPC’s core budget for funding. He said that the Secretariat was still considering the recommendations of the review.

30. The Representative of the United States, remarking on the issue of security, said that he welcomed the news that SPC will address this as a priority. He said that the consequences from accidents or terrorism were very serious, and that this was not only of concern to the United States, but was also raised as a concern at the recent meeting of APEC leaders.

31. The Representative of New Zealand congratulated the Director of MRD and the Head of Oceanic Fisheries on MRD’s achievements. She noted that New Zealand and SPC were now moving towards a programme-based approach, which would provide a better support base.

32. The Representative of the Marshall Islands commended and expressed his country’s appreciation for the recent work and achievement that was carried out by the Regional Maritime Programme in the Marshall Islands. He further indicated that the Regional Maritime Programme had recently conducted workshops in Majuro to ensure that the Marshall Islands meets the international safety regulations and other international operational standards. His country has greatly benefited from assistance provided by the Programme and he said he supported the request from Palau for the continuation of the Programme.

33. The Representative of Tuvalu extended his country’s thanks for the presentation on MRD. He stated that his country benefits from all MRD programmes, and that he supported the continuation of these programmes. He noted that Tuvalu had an active maritime training school, and expressed interest in having RMP continue its activities in the region. He also expressed his hope that the fisheries programmes would be more nationally oriented, focusing on national capacity building. He stressed the need for the transfer of technical, scientific and management expertise to local counterparts in all areas of fisheries programmes targeted at the national level.

Review of SPC Coastal Fisheries Programme

34. Ian Cartwright presented the Coastal Fisheries Programme (CFP) review carried out in 2003 by a team of independent consultants, consisting of himself, Bob Gillett, Esaroma Ledua and Garry Preston. The review addressed the work carried out by the different sections that make up the Coastal Fisheries Programme. The review report was presented, together with the Secretariat’s preliminary response, to the Third SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting. The review commended the high quality, appropriateness, and timeliness of CFP’s outputs. The review found approaches to capacity building were generally appropriate but the consultants noted a lack of capacity to develop and implement strategies. The review found that planning for sustainability was considered effective but that there was a need for more follow-up. Overall, CFP was considered to be very effective, with all six sections

making good progress to meet their objectives. The report also contained recommendations on directing the work programme more closely towards the changing needs of member countries.

These recommendations related mostly to:

- greater CFP focus on fisheries management assistance,
- the capability to undertake economic assessments,
- the establishment of closer links and communications with countries,
- increased coordination of CFP services,
- spearheading cooperation with environmental agencies,
- clearer understanding of roles and responsibilities,
- increased documentation of “lessons learned”,
- information flow analysis,
- the need for capacity needs analysis,
- the need for increased cooperation and communication with USP,
- the review of post-harvest assistance, and
- a new CFP objective relating to a long-term vision for the sustainable development and management of coastal resources.

35. SPC’s Director of Marine Resources thanked the consultants for their work and remarked that SPC had asked for a critical review. He said that the review had been considered at the recent Heads of Fisheries meeting. Following consideration at that meeting, almost all the suggestions have been taken on board by the Division and are being acted upon. The Secretariat had been asked by member country and territory fisheries representatives to report to the next Heads of Fisheries Meeting on progress with implementing agreed changes.

36. The Representative of Samoa inquired which of the review’s recommendations was not endorsed by the Heads of Fisheries meeting. The Director of Marine Resources said that the only recommendation not endorsed was the recommendation for analysis of web-based information systems, which was felt to be too obvious to need an in-depth analysis.

37. The Representative of Niue thanked the MRD staff and Mr Cartwright for the presentation. She then asked where SPC drew the boundary between oceanic fisheries and coastal fisheries. He said that Niue faced this question when trying to work out the boundaries for its international waters project. The Director of Marine Resources replied that SPC did not have this problem, as SPC’s Oceanic Fisheries Programme focused on the science of oceanic fisheries and tuna, whereas the

Coastal Fisheries Programme focused on training and development activities. He agreed that the boundary between coastal and oceanic fisheries within the International Waters Project context was difficult to define. He noted that the issue was discussed in the context of the GEF project, and that other CROP agencies were also considering this issue. He added that SPC and other CROP agencies did not see themselves as working in mutually exclusive areas, but rather sought to identify one agency to take the lead in a particular area.

38. The Representative of the Marshall Islands congratulated the Director of Marine Resources on his presentation. He expressed concern about the state of tuna stocks, as reported in the annual stock statistics. He noted that, although previously, SPC had reported that tuna stocks were healthy, this year the yellowfin tuna stock was reported as being less healthy. He asked how SPC was addressing threats to tuna stocks, and how quickly SPC would respond. He also made reference to cooperation with Indonesia and the Philippines. The Director of Marine Resources noted that SPC's statements on tuna stocks are based on the assessments of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB). These reports have not always been entirely positive with respect to stock status, and the Director noted tuna stocks show variations due to environmental factors as well as fishing pressure. He said that problems appear to be emerging this year, and noted SPC will continue to monitor and assess the situation. He said it was the responsibility of individual countries to take action and to work together through the Forum Fisheries Committee. He added that SPC would continue to try to obtain statistics from Indonesia and the Philippines.

39. The Representative of Tokelau expressed gratitude for the warm welcome and support given to her delegation by the Fiji government, and thanked SPC for all its support. She also expressed appreciation for the work of SPC's Regional Maritime Programme, the Reef Fisheries Observatory and the PROCFish project, and also the Coastal Fisheries Programme, especially the FAD work. While acknowledging OFP's assistance on tuna management, she remarked that government leaders needed more information on stock assessment, particularly of tuna, in order to make effective decisions. She noted that Tokelau needed further training in the area of tuna statistics. In regard to aquaculture, she noted Tokelau's interest in pearl culture and clam farming. With these industries developing, Tokelau is concerned about the risk of introduction of exotic pests. She expressed appreciation for the Fisheries Development Programme and looked forward to SPC conducting a feasibility study on Tokelau's Ika Project. She mentioned Tokelau's full support for the training component of the Fisheries Management Programme, and re-emphasised Tokelau's interest in PROCFish Phase 2.

40. The Representative of Solomon Islands thanked the review team and congratulated Mr Cartwright on his presentation. He expressed appreciation for the opportunity to re-examine the role and effectiveness of CFP, and consider new initiatives. He agreed with the review's concern regarding the vulnerability of coastal fisheries, and also agreed that there was a need for CFP to interface with other agencies, particularly with respect to environmental issues. He endorsed CFP's new practical focus on fisheries development and management. His only concern, was the capability of the Secretariat and the programme itself to accommodate all the recommendations of the review, and in particular the refocusing of CFP in the area of management. In response, the Director of Marine Resources said that it was too early for SPC to provide a comprehensive response to all the review's recommendations. He said that the Heads of Fisheries meeting had asked SPC to report back to their next meeting on the response to the review, and after this SPC will be able to report back to the following CRGA. He said that the change of emphasis from development to management had not been difficult, and was simply a matter of reorienting existing programmes. He added that, in the past there

had been pressure from countries to consider development as the top priority, and that he was glad to be able to put more emphasis on management. In regard to SPC's capability to take up this expanded focus, he said that the Commonwealth Secretariat has already expressed its interest to support this new emphasis.

41. The Representative of Tonga reported that her country wished to extend to the Director-General and her staff a deep appreciation for the assistance received. She applauded the presentations by Mr Cartwright, as well as the ones by the Director of MRD and his team. She endorsed the need for assistance in the development of coastal fisheries management strategies, particularly to ensure sustainability. She highlighted the need for SPC to focus more on the training of trainers, and on additional counterpart training. She took the opportunity to thank the Fiji government and SPC for the excellent meeting arrangements.

42. The Chairperson of the Third Heads of Fisheries Meeting, the Representative of Nauru, Anton Jimwereiy, presented the outcomes of HoF3, held in Noumea in August. The report is annexed to Paper 2.1, divisional presentation on marine resources. The Chairperson of HoF3 noted that the Heads of Fisheries meetings generally have a positive impact on SPC's marine resources programmes. He noted that HoF3 agreed that both CFP and OFP were on the right track and that the region could be proud of their work. HoF3 had made a number of recommendations to keep them on track, the major ones being:

- Endorsement of the SCTB recommendation and emphasis on caution relating to the status of yellowfin tuna in the region, as presented to the Forum Fisheries Committee and PrepCon 5;
- The shift from development to sustainable management;
- Development of regional guiding principles for the introduction of aquatic animals and pests in relation to aquaculture.

43. The Heads of Fisheries agreed to meet again in 2004, as there had been general consensus that these meetings provided the best opportunity to discuss these issues at the regional level. HoF3 was, however, mindful that no SPC Core Budget funds were available to hold another meeting in 2004, but expressed confidence that such funds could be found by the Secretariat.

44. The Representative of the Cook Islands stressed the importance of the Heads of Fisheries Meetings and expressed full support for holding HoF4 in 2004, and for these meetings to be held annually.

45. The Chairperson thanked all the presenters for their interesting presentations.