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Outcomes of the Heads of Fisheries Meeting #5
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Outcomes of the Fifth SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

The fifth SPC Heads of Fisheries (HoF) Meeting took place at SPC Headquarters in Noumea, from 3rd to 7th April 2006. It was chaired on behalf of New Caledonia by Vincent Denamur.

HoF is a regional meeting of Pacific Island countries and territories that covers the entire range of interests under the purview of national and territorial fisheries services. As such it plays a unique role in promoting dialogue and experience-sharing between island nations and territories, as well as guiding the work of the SPC's fisheries programmes. It complements the role of the Forum Fisheries Committee and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, which have a primary emphasis on tuna fisheries management, whilst HoF covers aquaculture, coastal fisheries management and development and living marine resource science, and has a broad-ranging and relatively informal remit for discussion that can cover any arising issue of interest or significance to participants.

The following paragraphs constitute the points of consensus agreement of SPC member country and territory fisheries service heads on issues that arose during the meeting, and which the meeting felt necessary to document, either to help in the management of the SPC work-programme, to draw to the attention of a wider audience, or to signal agreement on issues that require attention by members themselves.

Output 1. *Deepsea Bottom Trawling and high seas fisheries management:* HoF5 discussed the options (included at annex A, as forwarded by the joint SPC/FFA informal workshop on the subject held the previous week) in order to get a better understanding of the issues involved and of the range of views available. HoF recognised that the issue of high seas bottom trawling is important. The meeting asked SPC and FFA continue to provide advice on these options including possible suggested texts, merits, timeliness, costs and benefits, and geographic applicability in accordance with international agreements and decisions, to Heads of Fisheries, and to the Forum Fisheries Committee, as required over the forthcoming period leading up to the Forum leaders meeting.

Output 2. *Coastal Fisheries Science:* The PROCFish and CoFish Steering Committee met in Noumea on 1 April 2006 to review progress and to discuss the findings of the mid-term evaluation of the coastal component of the EC/SPC PROCFish project. Eleven Pacific ACP and French OCT countries were present at the meeting, along with observers from several non-ACP countries, programme and other SPC staff. Staff of the PROCFish/C team presented results of the work so far in regard to socioeconomics, finfish, invertebrates, and database development. These presentations were very well received. Presentations were also made covering a general overview of the programme and the work conducted so far, the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, and the proposed workplan for 2006. Four main outcomes came from the Steering Committee as follows:

- (a) The Steering Committee strongly supported the finding in the mid-term evaluation to seek a no-cost extension of the programme to ensure it would fully meet its stated objective. It was obvious that with only 11 months remaining for the PROCFish/C and CoFish programme, there was insufficient time to complete necessary fieldwork, let alone complete the data analysis and report writing to get the results back to country. A no-cost extension for the programme was essential and there was funding in the budget to support this.

- (b) All members of the Steering Committee expressed concern that no country reports had been completed and provided back to countries, and this situation needed to change. Fisheries Departments could not keep justifying to their governments the funding spent in support of PROCFish/C fieldwork activities, with no results or report to show. Countries needed their reports in a timely manner so they could use this information for the management of inshore resources. The Steering Committee clearly stated that a strategy needed to be developed between PROCFish/C and countries to ensure reports, even at a site level in draft form, started to be provided in a timely fashion.
- (c) Capacity building within countries was also highlighted as an area the programme should focus. Capacity building was occurring in regard to survey methodologies and data entry, however data analysis and interpretation of data was highlighted as one area of capacity building countries needed. The Cook Islands offered to host such a workshop, making sure that adequate computers would be available. A second area for capacity building was in the area of using GIS and Map Info data. Countries needed the skills to present information visually to senior decision makers and Ministers, to be able to get different messages across, especially in regard to inshore resources and local marine habitat. In-country capacity building in general was an overall theme for the countries and territories present at the meeting.
- (d) In reviewing the logical framework for the PROCFish/C programme, the Steering Committee supported the proposed changes made by the reviewer and presented in the mid-term evaluation of the programme. These changes are provided in Annex B.

Output 3. *Oceanic Fisheries Science:* The meeting noted the continued work of the Oceanic component of PROCFish in fishery monitoring and ecosystem modelling and assessment. The Pacific Community expressed strong support for SciFish, a project planned for continued European Community funding support that will continue several PROCFish/Oceanic activities. The meeting supported the directions that the SciFish project design is taking, notably:

- (a) continued support for ACP and OCT members in fishery monitoring, with emphasis on operational support, training and coordination for national observer and port sampling programmes;
- (b) continued development of ecosystem models to provide advice on the ecosystem approach to management of the region's tuna fisheries;
- (c) a major focus of the project on regional tuna tagging, including both tropical tunas (skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna) and South Pacific albacore tuna; and
- (d) the development of national capacity associated with the above activities.

The meeting recommended the project to the EC for favourable funding consideration, and the region looks forward to its early implementation.

Output 4. *Southern albacore fisheries* – the meeting directed that SPC, in the development of new funding proposals, be careful to ensure that priority continue to be attached to the investigation of stock status and prospects, and local development, of southern albacore fisheries. The meeting noted that, whilst the total quantity of southern albacore captured within the region as a whole is much less than that of the tropical tunas, many Pacific Islands have very significant investments in fisheries that depend upon albacore. The meeting welcomed the FFA/SPC initiative to develop an albacore research plan, and requested that this item be added to the OFP work plan for 2006.

Output 5. *Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF)*

- Coastal Fisheries Programme: Assisting SPC members with the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries by 2010, concentrating on coastal fisheries and aquaculture, was endorsed as the main overall objective of the Coastal Fisheries Programme. The meeting emphasised that although the EAF is the way forward, the region should not lose sight of the need to achieve sustainable development of fisheries and aquaculture – that implementing the EAF is not an end in itself, but is only a tool to better achieve the main aim of sustainable development, including maximising value of fisheries production. The meeting endorsed the new CFP Strategic Plan, noting that annual workplans should pay particular attention to the quantification of indicators so progress can be readily assessed.
- Oceanic Fisheries Programme: The role of the SPC Oceanic Fisheries Programme in developing scientific information about oceanic fisheries ecosystems, for application by SPC member and regional oceanic fisheries management processes, was noted by HoF. The OFP Strategic Plan was endorsed as an appropriate framework for expediting this work.

Output 6. *EAF Methodology*: The meeting directed that SPC, in assisting members to apply the EAF to coastal fisheries and aquaculture, should use the EAF principles established by FAO and build upon the implementation framework being developed by FFA for application to oceanic fisheries by its member countries and territories, and not develop an independent framework for coastal fisheries. The meeting noted the importance of developing formal linkages between CROP organisations at the regional level, and between government departments and other relevant stakeholders at the national and local levels, for the application of the EAF.

Output 7. *EAF implementation* – the meeting noted the importance of the “bottom-up” approach in application of the EAF – in which all relevant stakeholders are consulted both during the design of the system and in its operation. The meeting also noted the need for regular information and communication with and between members during the application of the EAF.

Output 8. *Regional Aquatic Biosecurity Proposal* – The meeting drew attention to the problems of transfer of aquatic organisms both imported to and exported by Pacific Islands. As well as being an environmental protection issue there are major economic implications, both in maximising the value of exports and minimising the import of economically damaging diseases. Furthermore, aquatic biosecurity is a necessary principle for applying the Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries and Aquaculture. The issue was recognised as being complex, involving the jurisdiction of several government departments, as well as several regional agencies including SPREP and SPC itself (Land Resources Division). Heads of Fisheries were convinced that there was a definite gap to be filled, and an urgent need for a regional level of support in helping members to fill it. However, the meeting was concerned that the proposal by SPC for the establishment of a regional aquatic biosecurity support unit should not duplicate in part the capabilities of other agencies, and that it would need to take account of all the necessary linkages and potential issues. The meeting endorsed the SPC pre-proposal for regional aquatic biosecurity and SPC was requested to seek its implementation noting the target is for full regional coverage by 2010.

Output 9. *Enhancement of CFP skills base under new strategic plan* – the meeting was strongly of the opinion that in order to effectively assist members in implementing the ecosystem approach to coastal fisheries and aquaculture it would be necessary to expand the capacity of the Coastal Fisheries Programme, and recommended that expertise be sought in Project Economics, Mariculture, Coastal Legislation, and that existing project-based capacity in coastal fisheries resource and socio-economic scientific assessment be consolidated on a more stable funding base. However, when new programme funding becomes available, the priority is for new skills in economics, mariculture and legislation to be acquired.

Output 10. *Linkages between sectors and fisheries ecosystem services* – the meeting noted the need for a coastal ecosystem services study with the aim of helping countries make decisions about different potential “trade-offs” in coastal fisheries ecosystem use. SPC was requested to expedite such a study if resources were available. The meeting also noted that the application of the EAF to coastal fisheries and aquaculture needs to include inland waters and mangroves, and that the application of the EAF to nearshore pelagic fisheries overlaps both “coastal” and “oceanic” work programmes.

Output 11. *Regional Fisheries Meeting Noticeboard* – Heads of Fisheries noted that it would be useful for SPC to compile and actively maintain a calendar of the meetings that are likely to involve Pacific Island fisheries heads and fisheries departments, looking as far ahead as possible. This calendar should be available on a public website, as well as a summary of the current year’s events disseminated monthly by email to fisheries departments;

Output 12. *Information-sharing* – several countries mentioned the continued difficulty of obtaining directly relevant information applicable to Pacific Island fisheries and aquaculture management and development from extra-regional sources, and the meeting strongly emphasised the need for SPC to increase and enhance its role as the pivotal point for the sharing of information between Pacific Islands on fisheries and aquaculture, particularly the sharing of Pacific Island successes and failures. The meeting also re-emphasised Output 24 of the previous (4th) Heads of Fisheries Meeting referring to the importance of the European Community proposed “ACPFISH2” project and requested that SPC explore avenues for the inclusion of SPC member territories in the activities of the project, which currently addresses only the needs of ACP countries.

Output 13. *HOF Meeting frequency* – HOF expressed a preference for meeting in full session every two years in future, but that intermediate technical sessions concentrating particularly on coastal fisheries issues could be held during intermediate years, coincidental with any member country and territory input into project steering committees. Niue, as the next in line for the chair of HoF, made an offer, subject to Cabinet approval, for hosting the next full meeting;

Output 14. *Spearfishing* – HOF recommended that SPC develop targeted information products to assist fisheries managers in publicising the different spearfishery management issues in member countries and territories. The meeting noted that there was a general consensus that the use of certain modern extensions to the traditional equipment, particularly underwater breathing apparatus, and torches, should be targeted for prohibition, but that the region should not lose sight of the high potential selectivity of spearfishing and the fact that this is the one fishing method that requires the fisher to enter the fishes own habitat and acquire an understanding of the underwater environment.

Output 15. *Economic component to national scientific reports on tuna fisheries* – the meeting noted that most of the territory members of SPC do not have access to the economic fisheries development and planning advice that FFA provides to SPC/FFA members, and that some mechanism needs to be developed by collaboration between SPC and FFA, by a mechanism of more substantive observer participation in FFA processes, or by SPC alone, to make a full regional economic/scientific service available to all Pacific Islands, including non-FFA territories, for the planning and development of tuna fisheries. The meeting requested that SPC discuss the issue with FFA in the first instance, and noted that it was mutually beneficial for all Pacific Islands, whether countries or territories, to work within a shared regional framework for the development of shared fisheries resources.

Output 16. *CITES* – The meeting requested that SPC, as a result of the CITES regional workshop to be held in Australia in May 2006, quickly develop an information product for Pacific Island fisheries managers describing the practical implications of CITES Appendix 2 listing of humphead wrasse, and further maintain linkages with CITES and keep HoF members informed about the potential listing of other Pacific Islands fishery species, including sea cucumbers, in future;

Output 17. *General capacity building* – It was proposed that one of the primary tasks of the SPC Director of Marine Resources would be, with the cooperation of national and territorial fisheries heads, to put together a comprehensive database of SPC member capacity, building on the information that will have already been collected for the Forum members. A questionnaire should also be circulated to provide some initial guidance. *[This is carried forward from HoF4 output 29 since it has not yet been achieved. SPC will need to develop the information from first principles since no information was available from the Pacific Plan process]*. The meeting further recommended that, arising from this activity, a capacity-building planning exercise, setting out existing strengths in different countries, needs, and opportunities, and taking into account the findings of previous regional analyses, be carried out. Heads of Fisheries recognised that the problem of capacity is not simple and cannot usually be solved simply by providing more training – that personnel mobility and the capacity of small islands to absorb continuous training, were also factors, and that these should be taken into account by the Plan. The meeting suggested that this might usefully form the subject of an SPC workshop for senior fisheries staff.

Output 18. *Strategic Plan for Fisheries Management and Sustainable Coastal Fisheries in the Pacific Islands* – the meeting noted that this strategic plan was the first formal regional mechanism produced by the countries of the region for harmonisation of national policy on coastal fisheries management, particularly underlining the role of communities and the “bottom-up” approach – that it was a member-owned regional policy instrument and should not be confused with institutional work-programming documents like the SPC Coastal Fisheries Programme Strategic Plan. The meeting also noted that the regional plan does not cover the entire CFP work area, and that the time was ripe for review of the regional plan to take account of new institutional and policy developments and the need to coordinate and harmonise regional fisheries management activities at the coastal, oceanic and now ecosystem scales.

Output 19. *Regional collaboration on Seaweed* – The meeting deliberated upon the SPC framework for regional collaboration to increase the level of mariculture of kappaphycus seaweed in the Pacific arising from a technical consultation with key stakeholders in the region. It was recognised that seaweed offers an alternative livelihood to fishing coastal resources, and in countries where it is being produced it is an important economic commodity at a local scale. However the price paid to seaweed farmers could motivate or deflate expectations. There is a need for strengthen marketing and processing opportunities utilising the regional collaboration outlined in the SPC framework.

Output 20. *Feed formulation:* Feed sourcing is a common bottleneck inhibiting the efficiency of the aquaculture sector. HoF urged SPC to coordinate regional efforts to promote the adoption of local farm-made feeds and facilitate the development of cost-effective formulated feeds, making maximum use of locally available materials. *[In view of the importance of the issue, and the need to make sure that it continues to be seen as a high priority by development agencies and partners, the meeting carried forward this Output 15 of the 4th HoF meeting]*

Output 21. *Pearl mariculture* – After reviewing the current status and trends of pearl mariculture the meeting discussed recommendations for regional collaboration by SPC and endorsed them in principle. It was noted that there had been in the past exchanges of expertise between countries and the meeting encouraged the continuation of this spirit of goodwill in the region. There are critical training needs within the industry which need to be addressed and the meeting aligned itself with the opportunities for upskilling provided through institutions such as James Cook University and donors such as ACIAR. Farmers may also increase profitability by utilising advances in technology, for example triploid oysters, and the meeting urged SPC to develop regional guidelines for the appropriate implementation of pearl mariculture technology.

Output 22. *Fisheries MPA brief* – Heads of Fisheries urged SPC to produce a briefing on the use of Marine Protected Areas for the achievement of fisheries ecosystem management goals, and in particular to implement Output 6 from the 4th Heads of Fisheries Meeting which was as follows: *The (4th HoF) meeting requested SPC to coordinate a review of the effectiveness, in terms of fisheries management, of Marine Protected Areas with fisheries management objectives, for discussion at HoF and for the information of member countries and territories. This review would also make clear the definition of the term “Marine Protected Area” itself.*

Output 23. *Safety at sea for small fishing boats* – The meeting noted the progress towards HoF 4 output 27¹ by various agencies, and welcomed the prospect of implementation of the technical cooperation project by FAO to assist countries in addressing this problem;

Output 24. The meeting endorsed the University of the South Pacific's "Fisheries Training Program" proposal which was presented following recent discussion and development by USP and SPC. The proposal outlined a flexible and incremental program of learning for a Certificate, Diploma, and Degree in Sustainable Fisheries. The proposed Certificate in Sustainable Fisheries will replace the SPC/NMIT Fisheries Officer's certificate course in 2007 or 2008. In endorsing the proposal for further development and implementation, the meeting asked that an appropriate balance between theoretical and practical components be achieved in course contents. The meeting also commended the New Zealand School of Fisheries of NMIT for its long-term and valuable inputs into the capacity building of fisheries administrations, and requested that SPC maintain close links with NMIT at all levels of training, and also continue with the provision of short vocational training courses aimed at the fisheries private sector of PICTs.

Output 23. The representative of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries (QDPI&F) provided an update on the status of the Sustainable Aquaculture Project funded by ACIAR - with key partner agencies being QDPI&F, the WorldFish Center and SPC. Particular emphasis was placed on describing the mini-project component coordinated by SPC which has placed 14 small research and development projects, worth a total value of AU\$184,000, within the Pacific region. The meeting noted that the Sustainable Aquaculture Project is coming to an end in 2006 and that there is a possibility of ACIAR funding a second project, building on the mini-project concept. Representatives noted that the project had provided direct, practical assistance in aquaculture and, provided the availability of mini-project support is well-publicised and opportunities continue to be equitably provided, strongly endorsed the value of a second phase project.

Output 25. After a presentation on the application of aquaculture economics in the Pacific and noting previous interventions from the meeting calling for coastal fisheries economic assistance at the regional level, the meeting was supportive of further work being proposed by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries & Fisheries in conjunction with SPC. The meeting particularly requested that the Aquaculture Economic Decision Toolkit be updated with additional commodities.

¹ HoF4 Output 27 was as follows: *Safety at sea for small fishing vessels* – Heads of Fisheries reviewed and endorsed the outcomes of the recent FAO/SPC regional expert consultation on sea safety in small fishing vessels. While recognising that sea safety is most effectively pursued at the national and local level, Heads of Fisheries welcomed external assistance, provided that this was very clearly targeted at the practical implementation of national initiatives. The meeting urged SPC to approach FAO and IMO for potential assistance to member countries to facilitate sea-safety strategies and improvements in sea accident data recording and analysis. The meeting also recommended that SPC establish a Sea-Safety Special Interest Group bulletin and provide information to its members covering electronic location solutions to improve search and rescue operations.