

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

6th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting
(9–13 February 2009, Noumea, New Caledonia)

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Director's Overview of the SPC Marine Resources Division February 2009

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6TH SPC HEADS OF FISHERIES MEETING, 9–13 FEBRUARY 2009, NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIA
6^e CONFÉRENCE DES DIRECTEURS DES PÊCHES DE LA CPS, 9–13 FÉVRIER 2009, NOUMÉA, NOUVELLE-CALÉDONIE

INTRODUCTION

1. This paper provides a brief overview of the Marine Resources Division, and covers some of the issues from the perspective of the new Director. A more comprehensive report on the work of each programme will be presented separately.
2. SPC's corporate plan calls for the organisation to make sustainable improvements in the lives of the people of its member countries and territories. Ultimately, the success of the Division must be measured against the extent that it contributes to this goal.
3. Services to members are delivered in three ways:
 - *capacity building* through which the capacity in member countries is developed so they can meet their own needs;
 - *capacity supplementation* involves the direct provision of services to members in specialised areas in which it is not practical or economic for them to develop their own services;
 - and *regional coordination* which involves dealing with issues that affect a number of countries and are best tackled through a regional approach.
4. The Marine Resources programmes operate in all three of these ways, but it is important to be clear about the purpose of different activities.

ORGANISATION

5. The Marine Resources Division is now, essentially, a Fisheries Division. With effect from 1st January 2009, the Maritime Programme has separated from MRD and will move to a proposed new Division focused on transport, infrastructure and security.
6. The Division therefore has two programmes:
 - **Oceanic Fisheries (OFP)** – which has three major objectives in the areas of stock assessment; scientific fisheries data; and pelagic ecosystems – with one section addressing each of these areas.
 - **Coastal Fisheries (CFP)** – which has objectives in the areas of ecosystem management; sustainable aquaculture; and nearshore fisheries development. The organisational structure does not mirror these priorities quite so neatly, with five separate sections.
7. Outside the Division but with complementary activities, there is one senior fisheries scientist based in the SPC Planning Unit; and the coordinator of the French-funded Coral Reef Initiative for the South Pacific (CRISP) Project. At the end of 2008, staff of the Pacific Worldfish Centre, which had been based at SPC for some years, left Noumea. The organisation will now have its regional office in Honiara.

STAFFING AND FINANCE

8. Although the Heads of Fisheries has always been a technical meeting – with budget and staffing matters considered at CRGA for the whole of SPC – it is hard to consider priorities for the work of the Division without an understanding of the resources available and current constraints.
9. At the beginning of 2009, the Division had a total of 60 staff (of whom 21 are female), made up as follows:

Table 1: Staffing of the MRD as at January 2009

	Director	OFP	CFP	Total
Professional	1	23	20	44
Technical		8	2	10
Administrative	1	2	3	6
Combined	2	33	25	60

10. Professional staff are internationally recruited, and currently 10 of the 44 positions are held by Pacific Islanders. Technical staff are mainly data entry personnel but include laboratory technicians and publication design specialists. Together with administrative staff, they are recruited locally.
11. The approved budget for 2009 is CFP 850 million (equivalent to US\$9.8 million in mid-January). Funding can be divided into three categories:
- *core*, which comes mostly from member contributions and is mainly used for Division and Programme management;
 - *programme*, which is contributed by Australia, France and New Zealand on an agreed multi-annual basis to support a range of programmed activities; and
 - *project*, which is provided to specific projects of fixed duration, requiring separate accounts and reporting. Major project donors in the fisheries sector include the EU, Australia, GEF, and the WCPFC.

Table 2: Budget of the MRD for 2009 in million CFP Francs

	OFP	CFP	Combined
Core	15	15	30
Programme	99	168	267
Project	401	152	553
Total	515	335	850

12. Some important differences between the finances of the two programmes include:
 - A much greater proportion of project funding in the OFP, from diverse sources. In contrast the CFP has no immediate replacement for its largest donor funded project (ProcFish) which ends in early 2009;
 - A high proportion of the total budget of the CFP committed to staff costs, while OFP has more operational funds (although much of this is committed to tagging work);
 - A general reliance on programme funding to meet staff costs for the main activities the Division.
13. There have been two negative impacts on funding recently:
 - i) As a result of the global economic crisis, exchange rate movements of the Australian and New Zealand dollars against the CFP have resulted in an effective loss of over 20% of programme funding. While this has been largely offset by additional project funding from Australia for 2009, the outlook for 2010 and beyond is uncertain.
 - ii) Due to delays in approval of the Regional Indicative Programme for EDF10 funding, no additional EU funds can be expected until 2010 at the earliest. When this paper was prepared, it was still unsure which of SPC's concept notes for EDF10 fisheries projects would be approved, if any.
14. While other sources will be explored fully, the future availability of funding for the programmes will therefore depend very much on the outcomes of SPC's discussions with Australia and New Zealand on programme funding for 2010-2012, and the success of applications for EDF10 project funding.

OFP OVERVIEW AND ISSUES

15. The programme's goal is to ensure that the region's resources of tuna, billfish and related species are managed sustainably, using the best available scientific information. In recent years, the programme has identified and raised awareness of the dangers of overfishing on bigeye and yellowfin stocks, as well as playing a very active role in the analysis and development of management measures to combat these threats, working with the WCPFC, FFA and at the national level. The programme continues to receive favourable evaluations of its technical achievements and cost effectiveness, most recently in the independent review of scientific services provided to the WCPFC.
16. A key part of this work has been carried out by the Stock Assessment and Modelling Section, which prepares regional assessments and national tuna fishery status reports (NTFSRs) to inform fishery managers. Important outcomes to which this work has contributed during the last year have included the agreement on new management controls for the purse-seine fishery by the Parties to the Nauru Agreement, and the adoption of new Conservation and Management Measures by the WCPFC. In recent years, the Section has increased its capacity-building role, through the conduct of annual stock assessment courses, counterpart training in the production of NTFSRs and through extensive involvement in FFA initiatives, such as the development of EAFM-based fishery management plans and involvement in a range of regional and sub-regional fishery management workshops. The demands for this type of support continue to increase as the WCPFC and FFA develop their respective fishery management initiatives.

17. The Statistics and Monitoring Section, of course, provides much of the data on which the models depend; but members also rely on this information for monitoring of their own fisheries, economic analysis, negotiation of access agreements and the distribution of fees under regional licensing arrangements. Support is provided for national databases, with the TUFMAN system now used by many members. Support to observer programmes plays an important and growing role in both the collection of scientific data and monitoring the activities of the fishing fleets. An important activity during the year was a thorough analysis of observer and port sampling data which will result in improved sampling methods and catch estimates.
18. The Ecosystem Monitoring and Analysis Section also has a crucial role in validating and improving the information used for stock assessments. The development of an ecosystem based model has continued, promising better analysis of environmental impacts on the fishery, as well as more detailed spatial modelling that could be used to investigate national management measures. A major achievement is the Pacific Tuna Tagging Programme, with successful cruises that continue to exceed targets for tag releases.
19. Issues in respect of the Oceanic Fisheries Programme mainly revolve around the increasing workload and include:
 - Scientific support for FFA member countries both in the development of national management arrangements under the EAFM approach; and the increasingly active development of measures at the regional and sub-regional levels;
 - The proposed increase in observer coverage, and the training and quality control that this will require, as well as processing the data produced;
 - The level of resources devoted to work for the WCPFC, under the scientific services agreement;
 - Capacity building and assistance to members in meeting their obligations to WCPFC;
 - Some difficulty with donor interest in 'new' projects, when much of the work is ongoing and expected to be needed for many more years.
20. In short, some tough decisions may be necessary in setting priorities if the funding situation does not improve.

CFP OVERVIEW AND ISSUES

21. This programme has the goal of assisting members in their commitment to apply the ecosystem approach to coastal fisheries and aquaculture. The relevance of this goal, and the feasibility of achieving it by 2010 as originally proposed, requires re-consideration. The last programme review in 2003, while generally favourable, made 14 main recommendations, most of which have not been fully implemented.

22. The work of the Fishery Management Section has generally focused on promoting community based management, although recently assistance has also been provided with fisheries regulations. A highlight of the section's work last year was the approval of the 'Apia Policy' which lays out a regional framework for the improved management of coastal fisheries.
23. Under the Reef Fisheries Observatory, the long-running ProcFish project has struggled with an unrealistic project design, but fieldwork has been completed and most of the national reports drafted. The project has provided a comprehensive set of baseline data across the region. Some attention has been given to developing practical management guidelines for major fisheries, and efforts will continue to develop simplified monitoring methods. Ideally project results would now be presented in-country, but the project is running out of time. More specialised assistance with the management of live reef fish fisheries is provided by a 'one-man' project, focusing mainly on the aquarium trade. A useful workshop on this important industry was held at the end of 2008.
24. The Nearshore Fishery Development and Training Section has seen a shift away from requests for assistance with longline fishing, and more emphasis on FAD deployment, FAD fishing skills, and other fishing methods; but it has a wide remit, including support for national fishing industry associations. This is illustrated by two activities during the year: a project on fish silage production from processing waste in New Caledonia; and a training course for fishery products sanitary inspectors from three countries which export to the EU.
25. The Aquaculture Section aims to provide a regional support framework for aquaculture planning, research and development. Commodities that are considered suitable for development in the Pacific are prioritised in the 2007 action plan. Activities in the last year included networking, advice on specific aquaculture development projects, and work on biosecurity and export requirements. Agreement by the European Commission for SPC to act on behalf of member countries in facilitating the import of live aquarium products was a significant step.
26. The information Section has continued to produce a series of regular publications, including the Fisheries newsletter, address book, and special interest information bulletins. Highlights during the year include the production of a digital library of all SPC technical publications on fisheries, available as a DVD.
27. Issues in respect of the Coastal Programme relate mainly to the definition of realistic and relevant goals and effective activities across a range of members with very different needs and capacities, specifically:
 - The balance between a commitment to Ecosystem based management, and the urgent need to develop some simple monitoring methods and effective management measures for key inshore fisheries;
 - The need to provide effective support to coastal fisheries enterprises, in the areas where they most require help, including post-harvest and export market requirements;
 - A continuing problem with the capacity of some member fisheries administrations, and the need for a strategy to address human resource constraints that goes beyond short-term training courses;

- A need to ensure that fisheries information products are relevant to, and reaching, the people that can use them;
- Opportunities for greater engagement with the private sector and other key stakeholders in programme activities;
- Limited capacity in the programme in to deal with work in the legal and economic areas;
- Perhaps even more than in the OFP – a need to prioritise activities in a difficult funding situation.

SOME BROADER ISSUES

28. Some of the issues at the programme level are identified above. There are doubtless others that will be raised in the more detailed discussions ahead. There are also some broader issues which are being addressed at a SPC-wide level, which affect the Division.

Efficiency of service delivery and decentralisation

29. SPC is committed to greater decentralisation to ensure that assistance is available nearer to where it is needed. Another benefit of this approach is that staff costs in many Pacific Island capitals are lower than in Noumea, and travel costs can be reduced. The Aquaculture Section will look at the merits of relocating one position to Suva in 2009. SPC has also made a commitment to provide a fisheries specialist for the Northern Office in Pohnpei.
30. There may be a possibility of increasing the use of nationally recruited staff in some countries for specific activities. The OFP has funded observer coordinators in some key locations for several years. This approach may be appropriate for some other activities that otherwise require a staff member to be sent out from Noumea. Decentralisation poses some challenges in terms of staff management and coordination, however. Best results have been achieved with individuals who are self-starters, have clearly defined work, and can do it without much supervision.

Services on request - a more programmed approach

31. Requests for SPC services have always been made by a request through the national point of contact. While this is flexible, it can lead to somewhat ad-hoc requests; the countries that are 'good' at making requests are not always the most needy; and SPC can have difficulty in planning for some demands. In the last two to three years, a team from SPC has visited members to draw up a four year joint-country strategy (JCS) which aims to plan a programme of assistance in different sectors.
32. For various reasons, Marine resources staff were unable to participate in many of the early JCS missions, and some of the activities programmed will be difficult to implement. In future the Division will pay more attention to the JCS missions with a view to ensuring a better match between what is programmed and what can be achieved. Activities included in the JCS do not require a further formal request, although additional requests will still be accommodated where possible.

Direction and oversight of the Marine Resources Programmes

33. Historically, the Fisheries work programmes were guided by the Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries – an annual event which was attended by most heads of fisheries and which reviewed the work of the programmes and agreed recommendations to CRGA. In recent years, HoF meetings have been less frequent due to other priorities for funding (the last was nearly three years ago) and have often devoted time to technical workshop sessions on special issues which may have discouraged high level participation. This has led to a feeling that the programmes are not responsive to the views of stakeholders. This meeting aims to counter that view, but for the future there would seem to be several possibilities which are not exclusive:

- Try to restore the HoF to an annual high level meeting which provides a thorough review of programme activities and seeks guidance for the future – bearing in mind the cost of such meetings and the many other demands on the time of senior fisheries personnel;
- Refer more issues to the FFA Ministerial meeting – problems with this include the focus on oceanic fisheries of the FFA, the need to organise a separate debate on these issues before sending them up to Ministers, and the fact that some SPC members are not represented;
- Seek other input into the work programme through more country visits by staff and greater participation in other regional fisheries meeting – this seems to work well in ensuring that the OFP is attuned to members' concerns, but may be more difficult for the CFP.

CONCLUSIONS

34. Both the Coastal and Oceanic Fisheries Programmes are currently undergoing an independent internal review, as well as developing new strategic plans. This meeting will provide feedback on current work programmes and identify the priorities of member countries and territories for the next 4 years. The new strategic plan for Coastal Fisheries is expected to be rather different from the current one. Less change is anticipated in the OFP plan, although there may be some shift in emphasis. In both programmes there is a need to prioritise, so that the Division can identify the most important outputs in a situation where the outlook for funding is uncertain. Options to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of service delivery will be fully explored.
