

**FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS**
(17–19 November 2020, Virtual Meeting)

Working Paper

AGENDA ITEM No. 3: Director-General's report

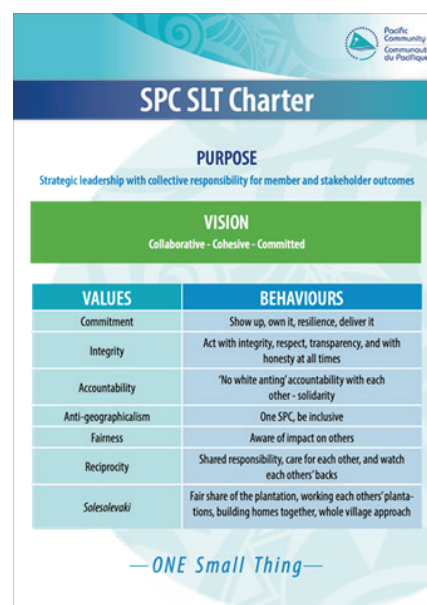
(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

Summary

1. I began my tenure as Director-General on 23 January 2020. My first four to five weeks were spent meeting staff and stakeholders both in Noumea and Suva and familiarising myself with internal processes and policies. Shortly after, the COVID-19 crisis arrived in the Pacific. It is fair to say the last 10 months have been a very different start to my tenure as Director-General than I had planned, but I am supported by a great leadership team and all our fantastic SPC staff, who have worked together to keep servicing our member countries and territories during this difficult period.

Senior Leadership Team retreat

2. One of my first actions this year was to organise a short retreat for the SPC Senior Leadership Team (SLT), including a facilitated workshop with leadership consultants. The retreat was a significant opportunity to forge a new team dynamic, given the change in Director-General, and to commit to a new way of operating in the organisation.
3. SLT developed a team charter and committed to meet weekly to improve management and communication across SPC. In the lead up to this workshop, SLT had only met sporadically but has now maintained these weekly meetings for the entire year to date. For transparency and accountability, notes from SLT meetings are available to all staff on the intranet.
4. The team also kicked off a 'One Small Thing' campaign to discuss work-life balance with all SPC staff as a measure to improve their well-being.
5. The final task of the SLT retreat was to work together to plan a risk-based response to deal with COVID-19 as an organisation in preparation for potential impacts in the Pacific. This proved a most timely and useful exercise, laying the groundwork for an effective SPC COVID response.



COVID-19 response: Internal

6. The SPC COVID-19 Response Framework articulated different readiness levels and actions, depending on the impact of the pandemic in SPC host countries, ranging from preparedness through to targeted action, including lockdown and use of personal protective equipment (PPE). The response framework nominated key roles and planned actions across incident management, hygiene, communications, containment strategies, finance, human resources (HR), travel considerations, and psycho-social and other impacts. This framework allowed SPC to respond to the escalation of the COVID-19 crisis in a planned and measured way, and was instrumental in providing confidence to staff and stakeholders. SPC shared the framework with other CROP¹ agencies to assist with their planning.
7. All of SPC's sites were affected by lockdown measures in the March–April period as host governments implemented action to halt the spread of COVID in the region. SPC was able to rapidly prepare staff for working from home and facilitated the ICT and networking equipment required to assist those working remotely.

COVID-19 response: External

8. Alongside the World Health Organization, SPC, through our Public Health Division, played a very active role in the Pacific Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT) in advising member governments about responses to the COVID threat, and conducting training and planning with many members to ensure the region's action was as effective as possible.
9. SPC, through JIMT, is providing leadership and technical expertise in the areas of coordination, surveillance, infection prevention and control, laboratory services, risk communications and clinical services. Key efforts include our support for improved case and contact surveillance, laboratory testing capacity, building nurses' capacity in critical care, and strengthening intensive care units.
10. Early in the crisis, SPC, through the JIMT, recognised that testing capability was going to be crucial for control of COVID-19. Given the lack of suitable laboratory facilities in the region, an approach was made to the manufacturers of the GeneXpert devices used by all members for tuberculosis testing to see if they could develop a cartridge for COVID testing. This was successful and 100,000 cartridges were ordered for distribution to Pacific Island members to enable them all to test for COVID-19.
11. CROP heads met once a fortnight during the peak of the crisis in the region to share approaches and responses with each other, with SPC providing the latest intelligence on the status of the pandemic. CROP coordination was particularly effective during this period (as detailed in CRGA 50 Paper 10c.)
12. In a great example of CROP coordination and cohesion, the concept of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19 (PHP-C) was born after JIMT approached the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) about the challenges that teams faced in getting COVID test cartridges and PPE into countries with closed borders. SPC worked closely with PIFS to develop the concept, present it to foreign ministers, and formulate the protocols to realise this important mechanism. The PHP-C has been fundamental to ensuring members have access to the critical testing and medical supplies required to tackle the COVID crisis.

¹ Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific.

SPC's COVID-19 pivot

13. We had to urgently pivot our focus to meeting the challenges of COVID-19 and continuing to support the region. All staff duty travel was suspended from 23 March and, with lockdowns, there was a rapid move to remote work and working from home. Many staff were isolated, or caught by travel restrictions and unable to return to their duty station. A task team was set up to meet the urgent need to locate and repatriate staff.
14. SPC staff were willing and able to pivot creatively, particularly in areas with programmatic funding. Donors were engaged in discussing flexibility in relation to (a) milestone dates, (b) service delivery, and (c) changes in activities in response to the COVID challenge. We reviewed and reprioritised activities, programmes and budgets (including the strategic planning process), and demonstrated rapid development, uptake and use of online platforms for capacity building and convening. These adjustments, along with innovations in developing online simultaneous translation and using new tools (e.g. Conceptboard) for active, collaborative online meetings, were fundamental to continuing our delivery of services in the region. SPC was able to respond to urgent requests while still maintaining most of the existing services and support that members rely on.
15. Examples of COVID-related pivots of SPC services included:
 - i. rescoping the **Pacific Fisheries Leadership Programme** to enable the course to be delivered fully online. Also for the first time, a Leadership in Times of Uncertainty course, targeting senior fisheries leaders (directors, heads of fisheries), was delivered in September/October.
 - ii. reviving the Thursdays in Black campaign in response to evidence of a significant rise in violence against women and girls, week on week, since the lockdowns and restrictions began in March 2020. Thursdays in Black is a 'ONE SPC' activity – that is, a coordinated, organisation-wide approach to increasing rates of violence against women and girls, which has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19.
16. Many more examples of such pivots can be found in the results section below.



Image: Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division staff, based at Mead Road, take a bold stand on violence against women and girls

SPC's financial sustainability

17. The efforts made over the past few years to manage SPC's finances sustainably and increase the level of reserves have never been more significant than in 2020. The strong financial position that SPC is in ensured we were able to continue operations with confidence despite the COVID crisis, albeit with appropriate adjustments. The mid-year budget review and close tracking of expenditure and project execution rates have led to a balanced budget being forecast for 2020 despite the crisis. The proposed budget for 2021 is based on conservative planning, with significant assumptions about constrained travel options until late in that year. SPC's financial statements for the 2019 year have again received an unqualified opinion from the external auditor, underscoring the strength of the policies and procedures we have implemented to ensure financial viability.
18. Looking forward to 2021/2022 and beyond, SPC is focused on developing projects and programmes to support members' COVID-19 response and recovery and to continue the long-term transformation of development outcomes in the Pacific to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This work will be done in close cooperation with both existing and newly mobilised donors and will centre on member needs and integrated delivery.

Ongoing local staff contracts and policy reform

19. A full review of HR and staff policies resulted in the publication of a new Manual of Staff Procedures and a suite of new policies and procedures in June 2020. As well as bringing policies up to date and clarifying many long-term issues, the review also laid the groundwork for the delivery of ongoing contracts to over 50 long-term local staff. It was my privilege to sign the ongoing contract for our longest-serving staff member, Yvana Routier, who has been with SPC for over 45 years on a succession of short-term contracts. Better late than never!



Image: Signing the ongoing contract with Yvana Routier

Staff engagement survey

20. The second SPC staff engagement survey was conducted in September 2020 following a similar one in 2018. The results are outstanding, showing an increase of 5% in staff engagement across SPC and bringing overall engagement to 80%. This is a great outcome given the challenging year we have all had and the impact of COVID-19 on travel and on the ability of international staff to take leave or spend time with their families. The largest positive movements, compared to 2018, were in the areas of leadership, organisational confidence, health and safety, enablement and innovation. There is still work to do on collaboration and communication, and feedback and recognition – even so, there are positive trends in both these areas.
21. The SPC Staff Representative Committee (SRC) was active on both the Noumea and Suva campuses in 2020, playing an important role in staff advocacy and ensuring staff issues were brought to the attention of the SPC executive. I am pleased to report that the executive's relationship with SRC is active and transparent (SRC's report to CRGA is presented in Annex A).

Structural changes / Polynesia Regional Office

22. A number of changes to SPC's structure were announced in 2020:
 - i. In a key organisational reform, the Regional Rights Resource Team and Social Development Programme merged to form the Human Rights & Social Development (HRSD) Division. Human rights, gender equality, youth and social inclusion, and culture all now come under the mandate of HRSD, positioning SPC to achieve better outcomes and greater impact for members in these areas.
 - ii. The recruitment of two Deputy Director-General (DDG) roles as a result of the imminent departure of Dr Audrey Aumua to a new role in New Zealand, and the end of term for Cameron Diver (both in December), offered an opportunity to reshape the DDG roles. The current structure was based on a geographic split of responsibilities between the two DDGs, which has led to perceptions of a cultural divide between our Suva and Noumea campuses. The new DDG roles currently being recruited will have a functional split, with one responsible for Science and Capability, and the other for Operations and Integration. Both DDGs will have significant responsibilities across all SPC locations.
 - iii. At the same time as communicating this change to staff, in consultation with SLT, I announced the creation of a new team focused on Integration and Resource Mobilisation. This team will have the responsibility of driving a greater focus in SPC on country and integrated programming to meet members' needs, and pro-active resource mobilisation to address gaps in funding to support delivery to members. These areas of focus, and the need to work in an integrated way across SPC, have been repeatedly reflected in previous reviews and feedback from members, and it is the right time to move on these issues.
 - iv. Another key announcement was our intent to explore the potential for establishing a Polynesia Regional Office to complement our Micronesia and Melanesia Regional Offices. This idea has been discussed with Polynesian members, who have agreed to work with the Secretariat to develop a proposal to bring to Conference next year for a decision.

- v. The final structural change is a plan for shared services in relation to the communication and finance capabilities currently distributed in divisions. The goal is to build a cooperative culture across all communications and finance professionals in SPC, and to develop consistent, best-practice processes across divisions.
- vi. Staff are actively working towards implementation of these structural changes from 1 January 2021.

Permanent Observer status / Potential UK membership

- 23. Members will recall that at CRGA 48 and 49, an application from the European Union for Permanent Observer (PO) status was deferred, subject to further discussions between EU and the Secretariat. These discussions were held and a circular was sent to members (dated 2 September 2020) explaining the proposed pathway. Paper 7 invites members at this CRGA to make a decision on the issue. While no other requests for PO status have been received as yet, we would like to take this opportunity to update members on discussions with Germany (potential PO status) and the United Kingdom (membership).
- 24. With regards to Germany, the Secretariat has not yet received a formal response to its letter (dated 10 April 2019) seeking confirmation from Germany that it would be able to pay the PO financial contribution. Informal discussions have taken place to progress this matter during the intervening period, and further engagement is anticipated with both the German Embassy in Wellington and a key returning contact in GIZ² after CRGA 50.
- 25. With regards to the UK, the Secretariat has been in discussions on increased engagement between SPC and the UK since late 2019. In that context, the UK has expressed interest in re-joining SPC as a member, and ongoing discussions with the Secretariat have included issues of process, the assessed contribution, potential areas for project and programme support, and the strategic interest that membership would provide.
- 26. The UK remains a founding member state of SPC in the text of the Canberra Agreement. As such, should the UK confirm that it does wish to become a member of the Pacific Community once more, and on the condition that all other matters are successfully agreed on with the Secretariat, it would need to deposit a new instrument of accession with the Government of Australia, as depository of SPC's founding treaty. The Secretariat will keep members informed as discussions with the UK continue.

² Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH (German development agency).

Progress on the Strategic Plan and implementation of a Transition Plan

27. COVID-19 has disrupted the strategic planning process in terms of timing, consultation platforms and resources. CRGA approved a revised roadmap for the Pacific Community Strategic Plan out-of-session, and directed the Secretariat to focus its planning on response and recovery through a 12-month Transition Plan (Foundations for a resilient future: Response to recovery). The process is summarised in Annex A of CRGA 50 Paper 4.



28. The realities of COVID-19 prompted SPC to seek new ways of engaging with its members, staff and other partners on the development of the Strategic Plan. While members are focused on addressing the immediate impacts of the pandemic, CRGA's stewardship of the process has been maintained through online engagement with the CRGA Subcommittee, beginning with its virtual meeting in May, and online briefings on the Transition Plan. The Secretariat also began exploring the utility of a Pacific Pathfinder Toolkit to help planners apply futures thinking/foresight to strategy development, building on existing Pacific knowledge and approaches.
29. The extended delivery time has also allowed SPC staff to engage more deeply in the development of the Strategic Plan. As of 23 October 2020, 286 staff (48%) have taken part in at least one strategic planning activity or exercise. Given the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the Strategy, Performance and Learning team worked quickly with the University of Queensland Centre for Policy Futures to adapt its planned staff engagement to a series of five online webinars held between April and June 2020. The webinars built foresight and futures thinking capacity and provided a mechanism for staff from different technical specialisations and sectors to provide insights into the development of the Strategic Plan. The 152 staff members involved in the webinars were able to visually collaborate in groups using Conceptboard and virtual break-out rooms for discussion. Staff input from these webinars was key to SPC's contribution of drivers of change for the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. While this engagement has largely been focused inwards, staff commitment is critical to delivering an ambitious future-oriented Strategic Plan requiring organisational adaptation and transformation.

30. SPC's expertise in developing the methodology and tools to undertake these engagement processes has been also helpful to our CROP colleagues, with PIFS making active use of our tools and team when developing the Blue Pacific Strategy through the CROP 2050 Taskforce.

Engagement with Members

31. I was planning to visit many of our members soon after taking up my role as Director-General in January. However COVID intervened. It has not been possible for me to meet in person with members during this period, but I have had virtual meetings with a number of leaders and ministers in the region in order to hear their priorities and needs. When regional travel options return, I hope to be able to visit all our member countries and territories to hear directly from you and learn of your challenges first hand.
32. SPC has had to be innovative in engaging with members over the last nine months of travel restrictions. Our move to largely virtual modes of engagement has had some interesting and unexpected results. One unexpected positive has been the number of people accessing virtually delivered training. When training is face-to-face, only a small number of member representatives are able to participate due to travel time and cost, among other constraints. However, over the last nine months, SPC has seen growing participation from member countries and territories in a number of its virtual courses, which allow more people to benefit from the training on offer.



33. We have heard from some member representatives that up to 80% of their time was taken up by travelling to meetings in the region prior to COVID-19, so the ability to meet and engage virtually has many ongoing advantages. This means that even when travel options return, we may be able to work more efficiently by balancing face-to-face and virtual engagement.

34. SPC has been taking an active part in the regional process to define the 2050 strategy, and the information emanating from this development will feed into SPC's own priorities and country programming processes. Country programming is one of our primary tools for engaging with members and listening to their priorities. Over the past few months, country programmes with Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu have been refined. Work is now underway to develop a country programme with Fiji.
35. This has been a challenging year for Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) and for SPC. We have nevertheless managed to continue to deliver value and results for our members, as shown by the following summary of only some of the highlights of this year's work:

i. Public health support for members in the face of COVID-19



In the early stages of the pandemic, our Public Health Division worked with members and donor partners, Australia and New Zealand, to address needs in COVID-19 testing, intensive care, and other medical requirements. Additional funding enabled delivery of critical care training for Pacific nurses, laboratory upgrades for three PICTs and improved ICU facilities. Over 90 nurses across 17 PICTs received training in critical and intensive care in preparation for COVID-19, with many members now much better equipped to deal with cases that may occur.

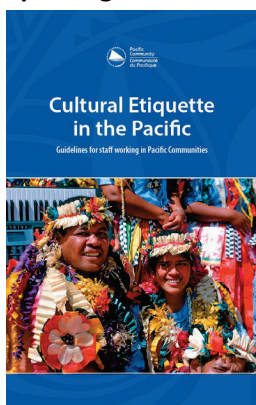
ii. Support for food security and livelihoods during COVID-19



From the outset of the lockdowns, our Land Resources Division (LRD) worked with development partners to pivot existing projects towards providing for immediate food security needs. In Fiji, SPC distributed 400 kg of 12 varieties of 9 vegetable types, which benefited over 10,000 households. SPC also mass propagated and distributed 200 plantlets each of resilient and nutritional sweet potato and breadfruit varieties. Vanuatu was provided with 146 kg of 16 varieties of 13 assorted vegetable types, which benefited 2000 households. LRD also

provided 275 plantlets of kumala and banana varieties to Tuvalu, and assorted vegetable seeds to Kiribati (20 kg) and Cook Islands (23 kg).

iii. **Updating *Cultural Etiquette in the Pacific* – a guideline for staff working in Pacific communities**



During their retreat at the beginning of the year, SLT identified the value of SPC staff being better educated about cultural etiquette in our member countries and territories. Our Social Development Programme took on the task of updating the content of *Cultural Etiquette in the Pacific* (first published in 2005) as a resource for our staff and the region. The book, which has been delivered in time for CRGA, is aimed at enhancing our understanding of the diversity of cultural traditions and social etiquette in Pacific societies, and increasing our sensitivity to Pacific ways of knowing and being. It will be a valuable resource not only for SPC staff but for everyone working in the Pacific.

iv. **Ridge to Reef reforestation in Fiji**



Our Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division hosts the Regional Programme Coordination Unit, which is tasked with providing technical, operational, reporting and monitoring support as requested by participating countries. Tree planting initiatives are important in mitigating the effects of climate change, increasing biodiversity, supporting ecosystem services and ensuring the protection of culturally significant species. The GEF³ Pacific Ridge to Reef (R2R) programme focuses on reforestation, land-use planning, training in community natural resource management, and review of forestry-related legislation and policy. In Fiji, the programme is being implemented in two water catchments in Vanua Levu (Labasa – nine communities, and Tunuloa – ten communities) and two catchments in Viti Levu (Ba – eight communities, and Waidina – twelve communities). In 2020, 114,105 trees were planted, covering 385.2 ha. The trees are predominately fruit trees and native species with some exotic species.

v. **Early launch of e-learning site for Year 13 students**



An online learning platform for Year 13 students enrolled in the South Pacific Form Seven Certificate (SPFSC) programme was launched in April, one month ahead of schedule. Our Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) expedited the initiative after the region-wide closure of schools in response to the pandemic. The SPFSC e-learning site is housed in Moodle, one of the world's most popular online learning platforms. The site includes the learning materials for all 14 subjects, as well

as syllabuses, study guides, and web links to additional digital resources. School leaders and Year 13 teachers were extremely thankful because the Moodle site meant students could continue to learn at home in the event of lockdowns.

³ Global Environment Facility.

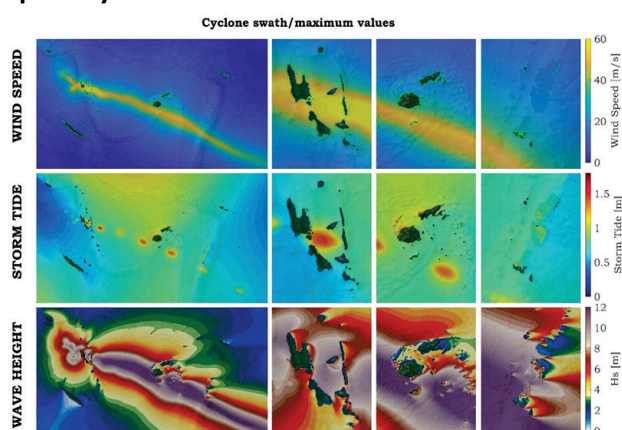
vi. **PILNA research trial a success**



EQAP's trial of new items for the 2021 cycle of the Pacific Islands Literacy and Numeracy Assessment (PILNA) was completed without encountering major problems or difficulties, despite the realities of COVID-19. This was a significant accomplishment given the magnitude of the trial, which included testing several design innovations. The trials were conducted in 38 schools in 13 of 15 participating PICTs. The success of this trial assessment, which was administered to a total of 4317 students, was the

result of months of preparation and online meetings. In addition to constant correspondence and planning, a full week of virtual training was organised to guide national coordinators and education officials from participating countries.

vii. **Tropical Cyclone Harold**



The pandemic was not the only crisis to hit the region this year. TC Harold struck just as the COVID crisis was accelerating. In support of the Government of Fiji, SPC developed a wave and storm tide model of TC Harold, which was validated with information from tide gauges and the CIFDP4 wave buoy off the Coral Coast. Based on sites selected from this model, an SPC/Fiji Meteorological Service survey team conducted impact assessments across 27 sites from

Komave village to Ba town. The data is being used to update national risk information to inform decision-making and evidence-based policy. At the request of the government, SPC deployed a staff member to Fiji's National Emergency Operations Centre for 36 days until after the end of the State of National Disaster (13 April to 11 May 2020). SPC also collated publicly available imagery of TC Harold for Fiji and provided input to PacSAFE modelling to estimate impacts on both communities and buildings.

viii. **Maritime boundaries data incorporated in FFA vessel monitoring system**

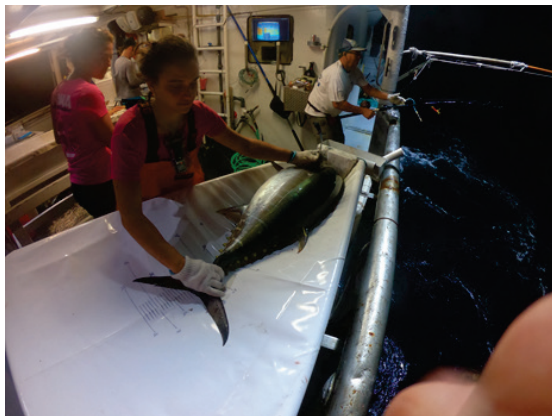


When the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) developed the region's vessel monitoring system (VMS), the only maritime boundary data available consisted of provisional lines that were approximations. In June 2020, this situation changed when, through a data sharing agreement, SPC and FFA updated the VMS boundary data with the coordinates agreed on by countries and

⁴ Coastal Inundation Forecasting Demonstration Project

deposited with UN DOALOS5. This is the first time that such an authoritative maritime boundaries dataset has been applied to monitoring, control and surveillance of Pacific fisheries. The action will strengthen enforcement of fisheries legislation as the VMS allows Pacific fisheries officers to track and monitor the position, speed and direction of registered fishing vessels in the region. National fisheries officers can now respond to cases of illegal fishing in their maritime zones with confidence, knowing that the boundaries displayed are internationally recognised. Fisheries are a source of wealth for the peoples of the Pacific and strengthened monitoring and management of fisheries are critical to the sustainable development of our region.

ix. **Successful Pacific tuna tagging cruise**



Our Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division (FAME) recently completed the 14th Central Pacific tagging cruise, following careful adaptation of normal procedures to ensure safety in the face of the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. FAME worked closely with our Public Health Division to develop appropriate measures. To this end, the cruise was redesigned to avoid port calls at PICTs, and the personnel roster concentrated on skilled local Hawaii consultants. For the crew, consultants and limited number of SPC staff, a careful plan was developed to ensure

quarantine periods and ‘social bubbles’ were maintained before the vessel’s departure from Honolulu. The cruise was highly successful, tagging 6400 fish – a record for the Central Pacific – during the time at sea. The tagging involved using conventional, archival and acoustic tags in the waters of the Kiribati EEZ, including the Phoenix Islands Protected Area, and the neighbouring high seas. This cruise will provide critical information for future stock assessments of skipjack, bigeye and yellowfin tuna.

x. **‘Let them go’: Fiji fishermen learn new grouper release methods**



With COVID-19 travel restrictions, FAME staff have had to use alternative means to meet member requests. For example, the Fiji Ministry of Fisheries requested advice, training and awareness tools to (1) inform Fiji fishing communities about ‘barotrauma’ (a condition where the swim bladder expands excessively when some fish are brought quickly to the surface from depth), and (2) demonstrate how to make and use simple fish-descending gear to increase the chances of survival for undersize, untargeted and unwanted fish

caught in deeper water. FAME staff worked with New Caledonian fishers and the Bureau des Pêches, Province-Sud, to trial and video safe methods of releasing and returning affected groupers to deep water, using materials available in any local fishing community in Fiji. The resulting video on grouper release and an associated pamphlet, ‘Let them go: Release undersized, untargeted or unwanted fish!’, have now been shared region-wide.

⁵ United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea

xi. PROTEGE: Providing water for schools and encouraging climate-smart agriculture



environmentally sustainable farming practices.

Our Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Programme's European-funded PROTEGE project has facilitated access to safe drinking water in Futuna, especially during the rainy season. All schools were equipped with atmospheric water fountains (an innovative technology well suited to equatorial climates) and reusable drinking bottles were distributed to all students to reduce plastic waste. PROTEGE is also supporting the development of a farmers' network among and between French overseas countries and territories (OCTs) to promote the exchange of good practices and sharing of experience. PROTEGE is funding several studies to develop scientific knowledge in agroecology, with the goal of fostering climate-resilient and

xii. Support for Vanuatu's response to COVID-19 and enhanced services for people with disability



In early 2020, the priorities of the Vanuatu SPC Country Programme pivoted to include a request for our Public Health Division to support the response to COVID-19. Working closely with SPC's Melanesia Regional Office, the division was able to mobilise substantial resources to support the construction of a Level 2 laboratory with RT-PCR capability. The new facility enables Vanuatu to test for COVID-19, dengue, leptospirosis and many other diseases that previously could

not be tested for locally. The Ministries of Health and Justice have also worked with SPC to support six new Medical Officer posts to register and provide regular treatment to all people with disability nationwide, especially in light of their vulnerability to COVID-19. This support demonstrates our commitment to a people-centred approach in all our work and to a core value of 'Ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable in our societies are at the forefront of our work' (SPC Strategic Plan 2016–2020).

xiii. Pacific recipe competition to promote healthy eating



In February 2020, we launched a recipe contest to promote healthy eating and encourage the use of local foods as one of the means of reducing the incidence of non-communicable diseases, which are responsible for 75% of deaths in the region. The competition was open to all member countries. Contestants were asked to submit recipes based on local products, and featuring low sugar, salt

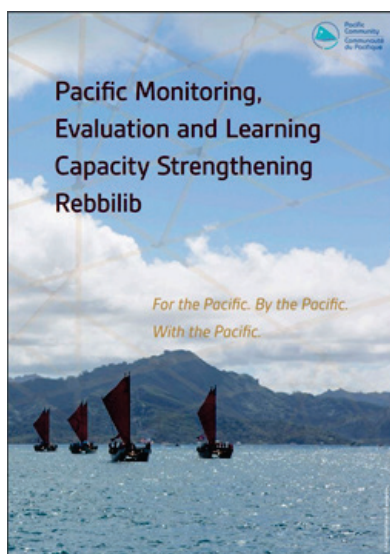
and fat and creative presentation highlighting Pacific culinary traditions. A total of 41 people from 10 countries submitted their recipes and the public voted via Facebook for the best 10, which

were then ranked by a panel of chefs and dieticians from the region. The winner was treated to a dinner for 10 people prepared by a chef.

xiv. **Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Capacity Strengthening Rebbilib** ([Link](#))

Our Strategy, Performance and Learning team led the development process for the Pacific Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (PacMEL) Capacity Strengthening Rebbilib. The resulting report is the culmination of 12 months of participatory research into current MEL capacity in the region and acts as a road map to guide related investment and action. Why a rebbilib? The rebbilib is a traditional stick map for ocean navigation, unique to the people of Marshall Islands. The use of the term rebbilib rather than road map has two purposes: (1) to enhance contextual relevance to the Blue Pacific region, and (2) to demonstrate the validity of using Pacific approaches to MEL.

Key to the development process was actively incorporating Pacific symbolism, culture and methodology throughout, which contributed to effective stakeholder participation and the richness of the findings and recommendations for further strengthening MEL in the region. The launch of the rebbilib included strong virtual engagement and involved SPC offices in Fiji, New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Federated States of Micronesia. Through the launch, the rebbilib was presented back to all the stakeholders across the region who contributed to its development. The launch was also open to the general public to encourage more stakeholders to join the next phase of strengthening MEL capacity in the region. Current stakeholders are committed to ensuring Pacific culture and context play a central role as this effort progresses, and all those consulted at national and regional levels will continue to provide advice and direction.



xv. **84th Extraordinary Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child** ([Link](#))



The Regional Rights Resource Team, now part of the Human Rights & Social Development Division, was instrumental in the holding of the 84th session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in Samoa in March 2020. CRC is one of ten UN committees, each of which is responsible for monitoring the implementation of one of the nine core international human rights treaties and an optional protocol. In Samoa, CRC engaged in constructive dialogue with Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Tuvalu on how they were

implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This was a historic occasion – the first time any of the human rights committees has held a regional session outside of UN headquarters in Geneva or New York. During the week-long session, there was unprecedented regional and international attention to children’s rights and human rights more generally in the region. The session demonstrated the importance and benefits for human rights in the Pacific of having CRC conduct its business ‘in the field’ in Samoa, closer to its constituents in the region. The outcomes of the 84th session were shared with the UN, which is currently reviewing how all 10 human rights committees could better operate in the future. In this way, SPC and the region are informing international discourse on the international human rights treaty system.

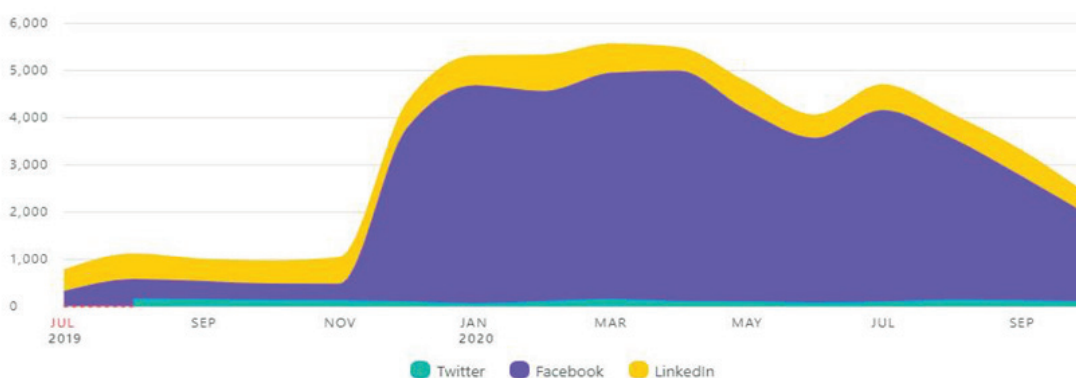
xvi. **Communication and visibility**

SPC Communications began the year at a time of rapid audience expansion, with expectations that we would be able to continue to increase our visibility and reach across the Pacific and globally. The COVID crisis forced us to reassess our priorities and shift our communication efforts to supporting COVID awareness, and providing a safe, trusted source of updates and information for the region. SPC’s visibility and engagement nevertheless continued to grow at a substantial rate. On most communication platforms, our audience grew by 20% per quarter. Overall, we have seen a 467% increase in our social media audience since the last Conference and over 189% in the first six months of 2020 alone. This demand was driven primarily by COVID-related stories and news.

Cross-Network Audience Growth

See how your audience grew during the reporting period.

Audience Gained, by Month



Audience Metrics

Total Audience ⓘ

Totals

% Change

81,062 ↗471%

Total Net Audience Growth ⓘ

49,882 ↗467%

xvii. **New methodology for household surveys**



In 2018/2019, the Statistics for Development Division undertook an experiment to test the most efficient methodology for conducting Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) in Pacific Small Island Developing States. HIES data is widely used, including for macroeconomic applications (rebasing Gross Domestic Product and Consumer Price Indices); microeconomic applications (estimating the prevalence of poverty and food insecurity); reporting against the Pacific SDG indicators (HIES provide data for 21% of the indicators); and a wide array of socioeconomic applications

The experiment, which was conducted in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, aimed to identify whether electronic tablets are an appropriate means of collecting data in the low-connectivity, low-electrification environment of the Pacific region; whether additional survey modules (such as 'labour market', 'food away from home', and 'meal partakers') are suitable for inclusion in the HIES questionnaire; and optimal methods for collecting food consumption data. The result was an unqualified success with widespread support for further implementation of the methodology in the region. In 2019/2020, Kiribati, Marshall Islands and Vanuatu used the new Pacific HIES methodology to conduct their HIES and Tonga's survey is scheduled to start in late 2020.

36. In summary, 2020 has been a year of unprecedented challenges for the region with the global pandemic emerging soon after I took up my role as Director-General in late January. SPC has managed to navigate these choppy, uncharted waters, and still make substantial progress with internal reforms, cultural change, systems improvement, financial sustainability and a focus on delivery during this difficult period. This progress has been achieved with the strong support of an actively engaged SLT, ongoing and flexible support from key donors, and enthusiastic and engaged staff members across SPC. I would like to thank them for all their dedication and hard work during the year. SPC's continued success is a reflection of the great work done by every one of SPC's 600-plus staff in 2020.

Annex A

SRC Report to CRGA 50 for the period from September 2019 to September 2020

1. The Staff Representative Committees (SRCs) of Noumea and Suva have prepared this report for inclusion in the DG's report to CRGA in November 2020. The SRC plays an important role in facilitating two-way dialogue with SPC Executive on behalf of staff in both locations. Benefits accruing to the organisation will be reflected through improved staff perception and job satisfaction from being an employee of SPC.
2. This report reflects the main issues communicated by staff to the SRCs within the past year and progress made against what was reported in 2019. These issues have been communicated to relevant SPC Executive members with the main point of contact being Craig Parker (Director Human Resources), Cameron Diver (DDG Noumea), Dr Audrey Aumua (DDG Suva) and Dr Stuart Minchin (DG).
3. In parting, the SRCs wished outgoing DG Dr Colin Tukuitonga well in his future activities and thanked him for his interest in staff issues over his term of office.
4. SRC looks forward to working with the SPC Executive on current issues. We acknowledge and reiterate the need to always find improvements and maintain effective communication and transparency as demonstrated by the current SPC Senior Leadership Team (SLT). This includes the support given to the SRCs by SPC Executive and HR, with the Director Human Resources and the HR Manager in Suva making themselves readily available for discussion with the SRCs.
5. The SRCs can only be as effective as the staff they represent and therefore acknowledge the high level of engagement by staff on issues in both Noumea and Suva. This includes the commitment and support of SRC members and relevant working groups.
6. Issues raised by staff fall largely into two categories: those that were addressed and those currently a work in progress.
7. Addressed:
 - i. **Ongoing contracts for local staff:** After the approval of ongoing contracts for local staff at CRGA 45 (2015), a mechanism for granting this benefit to eligible local staff members was implemented this year, initially for staff with at least 12 years of employment with the organisation. A committee is set up to give positive consideration to extending this status to staff having 3 to 12 years of service. This change in policy affected 50 total staff (24 in Noumea and 26 in Suva), and has very real implications for improving their quality of life in terms of securing housing and financing and removing uncertainty over contract renewals. It was also announced that arrangements would be put in place to make it easier for local staff to move from one position to another within the organisation and that training and mentoring provisions could help local staff develop a clearer career path within SPC. The current SRCs recognise the efforts made by local staff in patiently advocating for this change and acknowledge the efforts made by the current SPC Executive in bringing this to fruition.
 - ii. **HR policy rollout:** Revised SPC human resource policies came into effect on 1 July 2020. The content is hailed as a shift to more modern human resource practice, as well as introducing additional safeguards and protections. SRC looks forward to monitoring the application of these policies, in conjunction with HR, to ensure they are fair and consistent. In some cases, staff

expressed disappointment at restrictive rule interpretations, without wishing to take these matters up more formally.

- iii. **Climate neutrality:** Unlike previous years, restricted travel due to COVID-19 has seen associated carbon emissions substantially reduced from the levels of previous years. As one of the leading scientific organisations in a region that faces the greatest impact from climate change, it is imperative for us to serve as an example and reduce our organisational carbon footprint. The SRCs recognise the work done by our colleagues in CCES and Finance in setting up a climate neutrality fund that places SPC on a path towards carbon neutrality in the future.
- iv. **COVID-19:** The SRCs acknowledge the rapid and compassionate response of SPC Executive and ICT in migrating SPCs capabilities to remote workplaces during the respective confinements experienced at Noumea and Suva campuses. SPC demonstrated its organisational flexibility and ability to continue project implementation during this period of working from home. A work from home policy came into effect on 25 March 2020 to assist with the management of staff requests to work from home during this confinement period. Although the policy is temporary, the SRCs are encouraged to see Flexible Working Arrangements included in the revised staff policies and hope SPC Executive continues to encourage managers at all levels to accommodate this practice (within reason) for staff going forward.
- v. **2020 Engagement Survey:** SRCs on behalf of staff welcome the implementation of the engagement survey in September 2020 and look forward to its results and comparisons with previous surveys. Inconsistencies were noted in the French translation that could result in subtle differences in the interpretation of questions between the two language versions of the survey. We encourage future bilingual surveys to take advantage of the services provided by the Translation & Interpretation Team and look forward to working with all parties to avoid these inconsistencies in the future.

8. Work in progress:

- i. **Communication & Transparency:** SRCs acknowledge the commitment to improve communication and transparency over the past year. It is an area that requires continuous improvement and SRCs will continue to play their part in supporting this process. The availability on the Intranet of SLT meeting notes for sharing with staff is a significant shift from past practice and will help interested staff feel more involved in the life of their organisation.
- ii. The increase in staff remuneration and mid-point adjustment announced at the beginning of 2020 was a positive development for staff. A less than clear explanation on the change to mid points was confusing for some staff and turned what was good news for staff into a mixed response. The SRCs encourage SPC Executive to continue their efforts in this area and to be clear and upfront with staff on changes that will impact them. This is especially important when it relates to issues such as salary, benefits and position banding. Timely and effective communication to staff by SPC Executive minimises misinformation, confusion and corridor talk.
- iii. **SPC affiliation with the Administrative Tribunal of the International Labour Organisation (ILOAT):** The SRCs wish to acknowledge the collective efforts of previous SACs and SRCs in consistently urging the SPC Executive to identify a more impartial appeals/disputes resolution process than the Joint Appeals Board and its previous manifestations. In light of this, the SRCs continue to support efforts made by SPC to affiliate itself to the ILOAT. The SRCs view this to be an appropriate entity for an independent and impartial appeals mechanism for all SPC staff across all duty stations. The SRCs are committed to monitoring the implementation of the ILOAT

provisions, feeding back to the organization how it is being applied, and ensuring that it is a fair and equitable process.

- iv. **Occupational Health and Safety:** The appointment of a bilingual full-time Occupational Health & Safety Adviser is welcomed by SRCs and staff in both Noumea and Suva. It is pleasing to see the recent revision of the SPC OH&S Policy (effective 1 Jul 2020) and plans underway to implement a health and safety plan and establish health and safety committees in both locations. The health, safety, and wellbeing of SPC staff in carrying out their duties is paramount and an area SRCs will continue to monitor and engage in with SPC Executive.
- v. **Health Insurance:** HR advised SRCs that the current Allianz medical insurance cover was likely to be maintained for a further year. It was decided by the SPC Executive to postpone the tender for medical insurance to ensure continuity of services during the global pandemic. The SRCs acknowledge that going forward it may not be possible for staff to retain the option to purchase 100% coverage. However when the insurance contract is re-tendered and if staff retain the option to purchase 100% coverage, the SRCs encourage the new contract to be structured in a way that avoids the issue that occurred in previous years where there was limited notice given significant increases in premium rates for those wishing to maintain 100% coverage.
- vi. **Performance Development System (PDS):** SRCs recognise that the HR team continues to work with directors and managers to expedite the process and accord it the priority it deserves. However, SRCs feel there is room for improvement with the current PDS system, particularly as it relates to its function as a performance development system and a means for financially recognising effective performance. In some cases, the 2019 PDS cycle results were not provided to staff until April 2020. If the PDS is to be used as a tool to guide and shape staff development, this type of delay hampers changes and development of work plans. Regarding the 2020 PDS cycle, the mid-year review process was made optional with the focus instead placed on revising Key Results Areas (KRAs) to make them more specific and measurable. Well defined KRAs are critical building blocks to the PDS system as it allows for more accurate and equitable performance evaluations. Additionally, from an organisational standpoint this will make it easier for results reporting to the members. However, development of KRAs should occur at the beginning of the calendar year rather than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through when much of the work has already been completed. SRCs recognize that HR has acknowledged that timelines are an issue for the PDS, and the 2021 process will begin earlier to account for this. SRCs note that staff at all levels of the organisational hierarchy play an important role in ensuring that PDS timelines are maintained. Lastly, if the PDS system remains a mechanism for financially recognising effective performance, budgets permitting, the SRCs encourage that there be increased transparency on how moderation of ratings are conducted and how the ratings translate to remuneration. SRCs look forward to continued work with HR on the development of a fair and equitable PDS rating system.
- vii. **SRC constitution:** SRCs suggest the constitution needs to be reviewed for the purpose of introducing more flexibility regarding the office-bearer structure and election process. This task has commenced with the SPC Legal team and will be continued in a joint effort between the two SRCs.

SUVA specific notes

- 9. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Annual General Meeting for the SRC in Suva has been postponed to 30 September 2020. All current SRC members agreed to extend their membership on the committee by a few months.

10. The Human Resources Manager based in Suva is included in monthly SRC meetings to allow transfer of information, discussions on pending matters and new issues are brought to their attention in a timely manner. The move has also help foster a close working relationship between HR and the SRC.
11. During the COVID restrictions, SRC Suva worked with SPC management to review plans and policies pertaining to staff welfare including ensuring clear communication and dissemination of information relating to the pandemic.
12. SRC Suva has raised with HR in Suva and Noumea their concerns about the decision by SPC to change the employer contribution to staff FNPF accounts from 10% to 8%. By way of his notice to affected staff dated 15th April 2020, the Director-General advised affected staff of the above, which we discussed on several occasions with HR in both Suva and Noumea. The executive has provided the Suva SRC with a response that supports and explains the Director-General's decision based on the provisions of the SPC Provident Fund rules. It is the collective view of the affected local staff in Fiji that are members of the FNPF that the employer contribution to their accounts from SPC should be returned to 10% after the COVID-19 Budget 31st July 2021. SRC Suva is currently considering options for the review of the decision by SPC in this respect
13. The Suva SRC hold a general view that there is a disparity between the level of resources in buildings and equipment and related support between Noumea HQ and Suva Regional Office. Suva SRC has fielded many comments over recent times about the perception that life is different for staff in Suva compared to Noumea and that in some way they are disadvantaged. The Suva SRC continues to gather information that confirms these perceptions and provided real examples of the disparity and carry on the dialogue to find solutions that benefit staff.
14. SRC Suva welcomes the recent investment in OH&S resources to provide safer facilities for staff working at the different campuses in Suva.
15. In closing, SRC Suva and the staff that we represent, acknowledge the unwavering support, tutelage, and leadership of the Deputy Director-General Dr Audrey Aumua. We wish her well in her new role.

NOUMEA specific notes

16. **Election and term of office:** After the previous SRC Noumea committee overran its term of office, the current SRC Noumea was duly elected in September 2019 and convened a general meeting in June 2020, at which most members of the previous committee were re-elected and some staff kindly opted to join the group for the 2020-2021 period.
17. **Working Groups:** SRC Noumea has set up working groups on some of the above areas in order to work as effectively as possible with the relevant parts of SPC's administration and hopes that the groups will become joint working groups with staff from HR, finance, legal and other areas as appropriate.
18. **Bilingualism:** It is gratefully acknowledged that the bilingual dimension of SRC's work in Noumea is facilitated by the lack of FCR charges for the interpretation and translation services SRC has enjoyed over the year

- 19. Flexitime and working from home:** Working from home and flexitime issues were addressed from time to time. The SRC recognises that currently these cases are dealt with depending on the individual's circumstances so that they do not impact on a staff members performance or SPC's operations. The SRC also notes that it is felt that these situations are best dealt with between managers and the Human Resources team while being cognisant of established policies. However, given this case-by-case approach, the SRC encourages the SLT to continue communicating its support for work from home and flex time to the line managers so that all staff may benefit from these arrangements where appropriate.
- 20. Staff dispute resolution processes:** SRC Noumea recognizes the steps SPC has taken to seriously consider the New Caledonian's courts concerns, as expressed in previous official decisions, that under the previous Manual of Staff Rules staff did not have access to an impartial or fair mechanism of appeal, and the New Caledonian labour court 'pierced the veil' of immunity and asserted jurisdiction. SRC Noumea views acceding to the ILOAT as a positive development for all staff. However, there remain concerns as to the implications it may have for local staff. For local staff there is concern that the ILOAT is a distant and difficult to grasp entity that may not be familiar enough with local circumstances in New Caledonia to play an appropriate role. Additionally, local staff may be more comfortable with the established precedent of appealing to local courts, and it remains to be seen how this interacts with SPCs membership to the ILOAT.
- 21. Other support to SPC processes:** SRC Noumea continued to play a role in supporting staff and facilitating SPC processes in some sensitive staff matters and maintained its awareness of the need for complete confidentiality around these processes.