

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

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**Project Pre-proposal:
Establishing Aquatic Animal Biosecurity for
Responsible Aquaculture and Fisheries Development in the Pacific
Region**

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Background and justification

1. Biosecurity in aquaculture and fisheries has been a longstanding concern of SPC forums. Whilst it is recognised that the introduction, genetic improvement and mass production of targeted species is integral for development of the sector there are common concerns. For example:
 - a) There are deep worries about the impacts of irresponsible introductions. Particularly the invasive potential of exotic species;
 - b) Aquatic animal pathogens, particularly viruses, can have serious economic and environmental consequences; and
 - c) Maintaining the national health status is a prerequisite to responsible trade practices with neighbouring countries.
2. Technical and policy directives have consistently emphasized the need for biosecurity strategies and institutional development. These include the *SPC Aquaculture Action Plan 2002*, the *SPC Coastal Fisheries Management Strategy 2003*, the agreement of the *World Summit for Sustainable Development 2004* to implement the ecosystem approach to fisheries and the *Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy 2002* approved by Pacific Island Forum leaders.
3. There is a clear lack of technical capacity, capability and infrastructure in many countries to implement biosecurity regimes dedicated for aquatic organisms. The key challenge and the way forward is to establish cross-sectoral linkages between fisheries, veterinarian, quarantine and environment agencies.
4. Fortunately there is a potential network of international partners with technical expertise. This includes the World Animal Health Organisation (OIE) and the Network of Aquaculture Centres for Asia-Pacific (NACA) regional aquatic animal health working group. There are overlapping interests with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) where synergies with SPC are developing. Also within the region, metropolitan countries such as Australia have specialised agencies, i.e. Biosecurity Australia - Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAFF).
5. Recent global attention to agricultural livestock diseases such as avian bird flu has demonstrated the urgent need for biosecurity in primary production sectors. Aquaculture and fisheries has yet to suffer such dire consequence. This proposal is a timely opportunity for proactive measures within the sector and for collaboration between aquatic and terrestrial sectors.

SPC aquatic biosecurity pre-proposal

6. In 2004 the SPC organised workshops within selected countries in the region to assess the capacity and needs of biosecurity. Following from these consultations, in 2005 the SPC with the assistance of an aquatic animal health consultant drafted a pre-proposal for a regional program¹.
7. The pre-proposal calls for a lead centre to assist SPC countries and territories develop national policy; provide technical guidance, advice and assistance; and to develop national capacity through training, improved information access and increased regional and international awareness and linkages. Specific outputs include the:
 - a) Establishment of a regional aquatic biosecurity unit. It is provisionally proposed that the unit be housed in the SPC complex in Noumea, which is the location of the fisheries and aquaculture programs;
 - b) Assistance to national governments in establishing national aquatic biosecurity coordination units and a focal point within the existing institutional framework of each country framework and/or strengthening of competent authorities in aquatic animal health if it already exist;
 - c) An agreed-upon cross-sectoral (fisheries, quarantine, agriculture, veterinarian, environment, natural resources) regional policy for aquatic animal biosecurity;
 - d) Assistance to national governments in establishing national aquatic biosecurity coordination units and a focal point within the existing institutional framework, including identification and establishment of hubs of expertise and capacity relating to aquatic animal biosecurity;
 - e) Regionally accepted guidelines for developing harmonized National Aquatic Animal Health Strategies for the Pacific Island countries of the SPC;
 - f) Institutional strengthening of responsible government agencies through short-term training of key staff in areas such as: basic disease recognition, disease reporting, import risk analysis, contingency planning, disease information systems, etc;
 - g) Establishment of an agreed template for import risk assessment addressing both invasive species and exotic diseases;
 - h) Completion of a model or benchmark ecological and pathogen risk analysis to assist countries in assessing the risks associated with the proposed importation of exotic aquatic animals;
 - i) Assistance to countries with the design and implementation of biosecurity (e.g. quarantine) protocols for aquatic organisms that have been targeted for importation;
 - j) Review of legislation and enforcement needs;
 - k) Development of increased access to information on aquatic animal health management and increased linkages and communication between responsible authorities in the Region.

¹*Project Pre-proposal: Establishing Aquatic Animal Biosecurity for Responsible Aquaculture and Fisheries Development in the Pacific Region.* (Draft document). SPC Aquaculture Section. Noumea.

8. The proposed work program would initially target selected countries to develop appropriate models that can be applied to the region. The project duration is two years, although it is likely to be a long-term need for such a program and more permanent funding arrangements may need to be explored. The target is for full operation of an effective and self-sustaining unit, with full regional coverage by 2010.

Purpose and planned outputs of this session

9. The deliberations of this session may provide guidelines on biosecurity needs and refinement of the proposed biosecurity project objectives.
10. The SPC has not identified donor funding nor made allocation within its existing funds for the proposed project. Endorsement by the Heads of Fisheries representatives will provide impetus to the SPC organisation to take this concept forward and strengthen the case for donor agencies to embrace it.

Recommendation

11. Representatives to Heads of Fisheries are requested to support in principle the efforts of SPC to establish a regional aquatic biosecurity program.