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COUNTRY STATEMENT

TOKELAU

Tokelau Country Statement

Tokelau, a New Zealand dependency since 1924, is made up of three low-lying atolls. These atolls (Figure 1), Fakaofu, Nukunonu, and Atafu, lie respectively 267, 276, and 318 nautical miles to the north of Apia, Western Samoa. Other neighbouring island groups include Tuvalu to the west, the Phoenix Islands of Kiribati to the north, and the Cook Islands to the east. The Tokelau atolls are all of the closed type; there are no passes through the reef between the lagoon and the ocean. Small blasted channels and even smaller natural depressions permit small craft to travel over the reef in relatively calm conditions. There are no landing strips for airplanes nor safe anchorages for ships in Tokelau and only rarely do vessels attempt to anchor outside the reef.

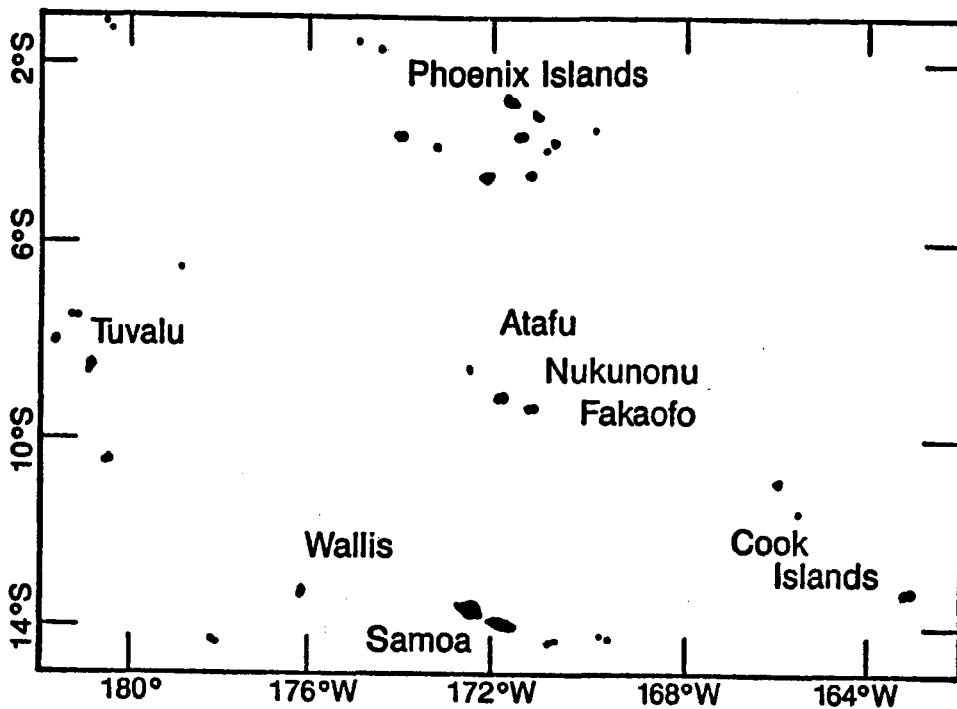


Figure 1. Tokelau and nearby island groups

The people of Tokelau have always been highly dependent on the marine environment for food. With coconut and pandanus the only local food plants at the time of first European contact, it is easily understood why Tokelauans have historically been good fishermen.

Presently there are no Tokelauans with professional qualifications in marine sciences. Only a limited number of studies have been undertaken on the fishery resources of Tokelau. A list of known studies and is appended.

The inshore fishery resources of the Tokelau atolls are of paramount importance to the 1600 residents. A study conducted in 1986 showed that 55% of all animal protein consumed originated from lagoon and shallow reef areas.

Historically there have been few, if any, traditional controls such as closed seasons or gear restrictions on the taking of marine animals. The relatively small population, dietary preferences, absence of means of exporting fish, and seasonal occurrence of the most desired species tended to regulate the fisheries. In the early 1970s concern over the apparent decline in turtles led to a ban on the taking of eggs. Regulations concerning giant clams were introduced about 10 years later as a response to the the exportation of large quantities of Tridacna maxima and T. squamosa to Western Samoa. Implementation of management controls is straightforward; the Council of Elders has absolute control over such matters.

There are numerous stock assessment and management issues of present interest to Tokelau. Studies oriented towards obtaining information for more effective management of giant clams are seen as a priority. Also important is the issue of transition from traditional methods to gill nets and spearfishing for harvesting reef fish. The reduced diversity of fishing methods used by younger Tokelauans causes some concern. With improved transportation, fish exports to Western Samoa have increased. It is thought that the commercialization of inshore resources should be discouraged while simultaneously encouraging the export of pelagic species.

Recent fisheries development projects have included an FAD programme, efforts to document traditional fisheries, introduction of trochus, assessment of storm related reef damage, surveying deep bottom fish, training of fisheries officers at the University of the South Pacific, compilation of all available historical information on the fisheries of Tokelau, and the establishment of a fishing gear store.

Appendix
Documents Relating to the Marine Resources of Tokelau

Anon (1985). Skipjack tuna pole and line fishing in southern waters continues to be very poor. [indicates 20 Japanese pole/line vessels fishing near Tokelau], Katsuo-Maguro Tsushin No. 4951, November 6, 1985, [translated from Japanese], 2 pages, (FAO/SP).

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Anon (1987). High hopes from a drop in the ocean. [Tokelau trochus transplant], London Financial Times, December 16, 1987, (FAO/SP).

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Gillett, R. (1986). The transplantation of trochus from Fiji to Tokelau. Report 86-01, UNDP/OPE Integrated Atoll Development, 27 pages plus appendix, (OTA, FAO/SP).

Gillett, R. (1988). A listing of various projects which might be beneficial to the fisheries/marine sector in Tokelau. FAO/UNDP, 3 pages, (FAO/SP).

Gillett, R. (1988). Fisheries in Tokelau - a compilation of various documents and reports. [18 reports on Tokelau fisheries], FAO/UNDP Regional Fishery Support Programme, Suva, 205 pages, (FAO/SP).

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Gillett, R. and F. Toloa (1987). The importance of small scale fishing tuna fishing: a Tokelau case study. 14 pages. In: D. Doulman (1987). Tuna issues and perspectives in the Pacific Islands. East West Center, Honolulu, (OTA, FAO/SP).

Gillett, R. and S. Taufao (1985). The incidence of tuna schools suitable for purse seining in the central and western Pacific from Skipjack Programme records. [Tokelau includes in the tables], Fisheries Newsletter No. 33, South Pacific Commission, Noumea, 4 pages, (SPC Lib, FAO/SP).

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recommendations on fisheries], 9 pages plus appendix, (FAO/SP).

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