

Countries encourage SPC to continue delivering quality fisheries assistance at the seventh Heads of Fisheries meeting

The seventh Heads of Fisheries (HOF) meeting began with various reports from SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division. In coastal fisheries, the call was for "more of the same" in areas such as FAD deployment, fishing skills and small boat safety. Delegates learned that SPC's Coastal Fisheries Programme was in the process of hiring new staff with skills in economics and post harvest and export development work. The main area of interest was the assessment of deepwater snapper resources, and meeting participants endorsed a proposal to seek extra funds to address this. The seventh SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting (HOF) was held in March at SPC headquarters in Noumea. It followed a one-day session of steering committee meetings for the three European Union-funded fisheries projects in which SPC is now involved.

The HOF meetings developed out of the Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries, which was first held in 1969 as an annual meeting of fisheries officers from SPC member countries and territories. In 1999, the name changed to the Heads of Fisheries meeting. While much has changed in Pacific fisheries since the late 1960s, HOF is still one of the few occasions in which senior fisheries staff from Pacific Island countries and territories can meet to discuss just fisheries. Meeting topics cover coastal fisheries and aquaculture, as well as the science behind the region's tuna management initiatives.

At the seventh meeting of HOF, concern was expressed regarding the introduction of new species and strains — an issue that has been controversial for many years. Meeting participants agreed that decisions on such introductions are the responsibility of member countries, but urged that careful consideration be given to both the benefits and risks of an introduction before a decision is made. Participants supported a regional approach to aquatic animal health and biosecurity, and encouraged further work on developing appropriate, locally made feeds for aquaculture.

Meeting participants expressed appreciation for SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme and its work in areas such as observer training and stock assessment workshops. Two new products were showcased: 1) a first release of the Tuna Management Simulator (TUMAS) programme, which allows anyone with a computer to see what different management controls will do to the region's tuna stocks; and 2) new secure national websites that provide the data needed for reporting to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Meeting participants supported more work on new issues such as port sampling for small-scale tuna fisheries, tuna ecosystem modelling information requirements, and tuna tagging to help research the impacts of climate change on tuna distribution.

Since the last HOF meeting, SPC's capacity in fisheries has increased significantly due to the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission becoming a part of SPC. Meeting participants were briefed on the work of the Islands and Oceans Programme, which provides many opportunities for countries — and for FAME and SOPAC — to work together on fisheries issues.



SPC's 7th HOF meeting was chaired by Leban Gisawa from Papua New Guinea's National Fisheries Authority.

In particular, the programme has the responsibility of helping many of SPC's member countries with maritime boundaries. Fisheries heads were concerned to learn that a number of their exclusive economic zones are not well defined, and that much more work is needed to put proper legal boundaries in place.

The seventh HOF had a special one-day session on fisheries and climate change. For the past two years, SPC has taken a lead role on a project that brings together a team of international experts to assess how climate change is likely to affect fisheries across the region. While the final results of this study are not due until October, a number of these experts came to the meeting to talk about their findings in six main areas:

1. The way in which climate and the ocean are expected to change under different scenarios of greenhouse gas emissions;
2. The effects of these expected changes on the habitats that support fisheries and aquaculture in the region (i.e. the open ocean, coral reefs, mangroves and sea-grass beds, and rivers and estuaries);

3. The projected effects on the distribution and abundance of fish and invertebrates that support oceanic fisheries, coastal fisheries, freshwater fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific community;
4. The implications of changes in fish stocks due to climate change for economic development, government revenue, food security and livelihoods throughout the region;
5. The management measures and policies needed to take advantage of the opportunities, and reduce the threats expected to occur, as a result of climate change; and
6. The remaining uncertainty, knowledge gaps, and the research required to fill them.

Participants learned that impacts on coastal fisheries are expected to be severe, with potential production reduced by as much as 50% — a possibility by 2100.

Impacts on mariculture are also expected to be negative, although conditions for freshwater aquaculture could improve. The distribution of tuna stocks is expected to shift more to the eastern Pacific as oceanographic conditions change. Speakers emphasised, however, that there is an immediate need to improve the management of fish stocks and their habitats. Good management now will help ensure that these resources can better stand the impacts of climate change in the longer term.

The seventh HOF meeting was chaired by Leban Gisawa of Papua New Guinea's National Fisheries Authority, who kept the meeting firmly on track and on time. In his closing remarks Leban thanked SPC for organising and smoothly running the meeting. The next HOF meeting will be held in early March 2013, and there will be a one-day informal meeting in the lead up to the Forum Fisheries Committee sessions in May 2012.

A record of the outcomes of the seventh HOF meeting,

as well as all meeting papers, can be downloaded from SPC's website at:

<http://www.spc.int/fame/en/component/content/article/82-seventh-spc-heads-of-fisheries-meeting>

Some of the 90+ participants at SPC's seventh Heads of Fisheries Meeting.

