

Outcomes of the 10th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

The 10th Heads of Fisheries (HoF) Meeting took place at SPC Headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia, from 14 to 17 March 2017. It was chaired by Luisa Naseri-Sale, Senior Policy Advisor at the Department of Economic Development, Natural Resources and Environment in Tokelau.



Fishing for dinner in the Solomon Islands. As noted by HoF10 participants, the importance of coastal fisheries resources to Pacific Island people is often underestimated (image: ©Francisco Blaha).

HoF is a regional meeting of the heads of SPC member country and territory fishery agencies, or their appointed deputies, covering the entire range of interests for which they have responsibility and on which the SPC Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) provides advice and assistance. Other participants include representatives from other Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific agencies, non-governmental organisations, research institutions and development partners. The HoF meeting plays a unique role in providing strategic guidance to FAME's director's office, Coastal Fisheries Programme (CFP) and Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP).

The following outcomes¹ constitute some the main points of consensus among delegates that the meeting felt necessary to document, in order to guide the management of the FAME work programme, draw the attention of other regional agencies and development partners, and signal agreement on issues that require attention by members themselves.

During the opening session, members noted the challenges and opportunities in considering the FAME review and progress against HoF 9 outcomes, and stressed the need to elevate the coastal fisheries profile of its various members by increasing awareness among PICT governments and funding agencies of the importance of coastal

fisheries resources to Pacific Island people. Members also reaffirmed concerns over the recent recurring of “blue boat” poaching incidents occurring in the Pacific,² and inadequate coastal fisheries regulations and monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) and enforcement in many coastal sectors.

Coastal fisheries

HoF recognised the importance of coastal fisheries to members, and supported enhancing the profile of CFP's work. Members recognised and encouraged CFP's ongoing focus on cross-cutting themes such as capacity building, gender, youth, human rights and climate change adaptation. They also recognised the immediate need to maintain the food security and livelihoods of coastal communities through the development of aquaculture and other sustainable marine-based alternatives.

The meeting also provided heads of fisheries with the opportunity to highlight their own needs in the area of coastal fisheries, including:

- requesting assistance in reviewing legislation to ensure improved coastal fisheries governance and MCS&E, particularly at the local and national levels;

¹ The complete list of HoF 10 outcomes, as well as all documents presented during the meeting, are available at: <http://www.spc.int/fame/en/meetings/239>

² See: http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/FishNews/151/FishNews151_21_Blah.pdf

- concerns with increasing incidents of coral beaching, and the broader effects of climate change (and other cross-cutting issues) in the region, and called for ongoing scientific advice and monitoring to assist with this, including re-surveying the climate change monitoring sites established in 2011–2012;
- thanking CFP for its “safety grab bag” initiative, and calling for donor assistance to expand this programme, and requesting training in the use of the equipment;
- requesting assistance with the development of policies and management plans for the aquaculture sector and in cage culture trials; and
- calling for CFP to embrace new developments and technologies to better address member concerns, specifically: 1) low-cost fish aggregation device development, 2) data collection and e-recording for small-scale fisheries, and 3) coastal MCS&E.

Oceanic fisheries

HoF participants reaffirmed their support for OFP’s work in oceanic fisheries, including pelagic species stock assessments, data management, and fisheries and ecosystem monitoring and analysis, and OFP’s role at the regional, subregional and national levels. They also reaffirmed OFP’s role as the premier scientific advisory body for oceanic fisheries in the region.

When listing their own priorities in relation to OFP’s work, HoF participants:

- supported the ongoing work of OFP in electronic data collection including electronic monitoring (EM) and electronic reporting (ER) and called for continued development of relevant tools, especially for mobile technologies, and support for on-site implementation and training in these areas;
- acknowledged the importance of the work done by observers and called for OFP to work with members to increase the quality and quantity of longline observer coverage to meet the 5% agreed coverage;
- supported the Stock Assessment and Modelling Section’s move to undertaking economic analyses and modelling of tuna fisheries;
- acknowledged the transition from national tuna status reports to regularly updated national webpages, and called for further information on the national consequences of oceanographic influences and climate change on tuna fisheries;
- supported OFP’s recent and on-going tagging work and requested that where feasible, tagging studies also be conducted on non-tuna species (e.g. sharks);

- called for ongoing research into the interactions between the industrial and artisanal sectors; and
- called for increased emphasis on ecosystem science.

Regional strategies

HoF members noted the process to develop draft indicators for reporting of progress to achieve the outcomes of the New Song for coastal fisheries, and the need to streamline and harmonise these with other international, regional and national reporting requirements that have fisheries components, such as the Regional Roadmap for Fisheries, and the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape. They recommended that HoF feedback regarding fisheries indicators and data sources be fed directly into the discussions simultaneously taking place at the Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting towards the UN Ocean Conference held in Suva, Fiji Islands.

The New Song: Progress to date, future plans, and challenges to implementation

Heads of Fisheries noted progress on the New Song and the 2015 and 2016 Coastal Fisheries Report Cards. To coordinate implementation of the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders’ decision on coastal fisheries they endorsed, in principle, FAME’s suggestion of establishing a regional coastal fisheries working group. In addition, SPC was encouraged to seek funding to support further work on community engagement activities, and to establish mechanisms to support skill sharing among communities and participation in coastal fisheries management.

As a strategy to engage the attention of Forum leaders, HoF members encouraged SPC to work with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) to share bi-annually as host of the annual officials fisheries meeting so that HoF recommendations can be more directly transmitted to the fisheries ministerial fora.

Sea cucumber fisheries

Heads of Fisheries endorsed the work being undertaken on sea cucumber fisheries by CFP’s Coastal Fisheries Science and Management Section towards Component 2 of the Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program: Sustainable management of coastal fisheries.

The session dedicated to sea cucumber fisheries allowed participants to:

- support recent undertakings on sea cucumber governance and value-chain analysis in Papua New Guinea by the University of Technology Sydney and partners, and recognised the applicability of the results to other Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs);

• *SPC activities* •

- highlight the importance of carefully considering how to best translate the fast cash inflow brought about by sea cucumber fisheries into long-term development opportunities for coastal communities;
- express appreciation for the recent analyses of Pacific Island sea cucumber export data undertaken by World-Fish, SPC and the Australian Institute of Marine Science, and noted with interest the correlation between PICT fishery size and land area;
- note the lack of biological and economic data in most PICTs to inform the management of sea cucumber fisheries, and called for SPC's ongoing assistance with sea cucumber assessment and management, including in-water assessments, development of management plans, MCS and economic analysis;
- underscore the need for proactive regional initiatives and collaboration in addressing these issues, particularly in light of the boom-and-bust nature of the fishery, recent increases in the prevalence of "blue boat" sightings and interceptions across the region, domestic illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and export activities, and high socioeconomic costs associated with diving accidents;
- recognise the importance of MCS&E in coastal fisheries, and in particular sea cucumber fisheries, and the need to raise this in upcoming MCS meetings; and
- highlight the need to better understand the ecosystem role of sea cucumbers in mitigating against urban sources of pollution, for example sewage associated with coastal development.

Other expressions of concern and support

HoF members:

- noted and supported the progress made by SPC's Statistics for Development Division in the development of Pacific Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Fisheries Statistics (P-SPAFS), and the increased recognition of the importance of collection of fisheries-related statistics;
- supported the move by FAME to attempt to proceed with regional harmonisation of collection of small-scale domestic fisheries data, specifically its artisanal tuna and coastal creel survey programmes, including the maintenance of minimum data standards, but called on SPC to undertake a greater examination of the positive and negative aspects involved in the initial stages of the harmonisation process;

- expressed concern that some historical data are no longer available to them and the importance of these data for future management of coastal fisheries. Therefore, they authorised SPC to look for this historical data on their behalf and supported the use of CFP for data holdings and as a repository for all forms of coastal fisheries and aquaculture data as a back-up to national systems, and supported CFP in seeking funding to undertake this activity in a full and thorough manner to recover as much historical data as possible and convert this into a useable format for PICTs in the future;
- expressed strong support for the proposal of SPC to host an expanded regional marine specimen bank, including coastal and oceanic specimens. They recommended that such a facility be used to address urgent scientific information needs around the life history of coastal and nearshore species and the region's ecosystems; and
- reaffirmed interest and commitment to a fisheries economic (coastal and oceanic) analysis for management and policy decisions, acknowledging that these decisions have wider management, livelihood and food security implications. Members also reaffirmed that fisheries economics is a priority area of work, and tasked FAME in collaboration with other regional agencies as appropriate, to seek additional funding to expand future work in and across priority activities.

The last session of the main HoF meeting was reserved for presentations made by "other organisations", including, in alphabetical order: Conservation International, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FFA, the International Maritime Institute of New Zealand, the Korean Maritime Institute, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, and World Wildlife Fund.

Friday, 17 March was used to introduce new projects that had either begun in the previous six months, or likely to start in 2017. This allowed members to provide input to the work plans for these project. Several concept notes were also discussed for possible future projects so members could provide their input and support for those projects that interested them.

For more information, visit the meeting webpage at: <http://www.spc.int/fame/en/meetings/239>