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Fisheries Strategic Programme Plans 2003-5

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Introduction

1. In 2002, all SPC *work programmes* were required to develop Strategic Plans to a common format in order to lay a firm foundation for the management of integrated programme funding and reporting under the SPC Corporate Plan. The strategic plans for (mainly core-funded) SPC *support services* have been postponed for completion in 2003. For some programmes, this planning exercise could be integrated with, or informed by, recent programme reviews and meetings of sectoral Heads, to arrive at a final plan through a formal consultative process. Other programmes had to develop strategic plans based on amalgamating existing workplans and projects, and relying on the best available information and informal consultation, with the aim of rectifying and fine-tuning these through subsequent consultation with member countries and other stakeholders. But all had to be drafted by November 2002 when the SPC Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA) met to consider and approve the integrated work programme.

2. It was recognised that this strategic planning exercise could not take place on a “blank slate”, or start from scratch, but would have to be based largely on the existing set of projects funded by a very mixed set of donors, running to different timeframes, and each itself having been the subject of its own planning process. The main aim of the exercise was to provide an explicit common context for these various projects and make sure that their directions would all come to be aligned with the overall objective of the programme and the organisation. One of the effects of this, as well as making it easier to manage the overall direction of the programme, would be to enable donors to better view the results of their assistance in the context of the whole, and also to make sure that the aggregate work programme conformed to a single SPC sectoral priority-setting mechanism involving members (with Heads of sector meetings like HoF playing a primary role), rather than be unduly influenced by occasionally disparate sets of priorities resulting from the different needs-analyses by individual donors. The strategic plans would thus provide explicit guidelines to what projects SPC should implement, and what project “opportunities” it should turn down, or avoid proposing.

3. However, the main aim of this across-the-board strategic programme planning exercise was to provide a practical framework under which SPC “member donor countries” (particularly Australia, France and New Zealand) could harmonise their “voluntary” or “extrabudgetary” (XB) funding. Instead of reporting separately on each project to each individual donor, SPC will provide a common report to all participating donors on each programme, with progress measured against the benchmarks of the strategic plan itself. SPC gains by having simplified reporting, and more flexibility to apply funds to priorities no matter where they are (as long as they are within the approved programme plans), as well as predictability of funding over a three-year timeframe instead of the 1-year assurance under previous XB funding deals, whilst donors gain by having increased visibility and “measurability” of the whole programme, as well as having better central “quality control” procedures bundled into the deal. Individual programmes and sections lose some of their financial independence, and the ability of programmes to carry funds over to subsequent financial years and build up reserves against future needs is subject to centralised oversight and approval, but as long as SPC continues to have efficient and responsible executive management the whole process has considerable benefits to all. The timeframe of all the strategic programme plans (2003-5) was designed to be a good compromise with major donor financial planning cycles.

4. Separate reports still have to be made to non-aligned (or, in former SPC parlance extra-extra-budgetary, or “XXB”) donors, such as the European Union, but the overall programme strategic plan still includes and harmonises the activities of these other donors, and SPC will continue to try and persuade others of the benefits of signing up as a contributor to the overall programme plan rather than designing standalone projects. However, donors who are not members of SPC do not have quite the same oversight and control of the direction of Strategic Programme Plans.

5. The Strategic Plans themselves do not form detailed workplans, but are higher-order expressions of programme direction over an approximately 3-year timeframe. More detail is provided by subsidiary annual workplans, which are drawn up at the start of each year by programme staff according to the objectives of the strategic plan, with realistic progress and achievement indicators built in. A progress report against the workplan is provided after 6 months (and the CFP and OFP 6-month reports against 2003 workplans are provided here as IP8 and IP9), and a final report is provided after the close of the programme financial year on December 31st. This may sound complicated, but is simply an extension of the existing mechanism that has been used for SPC reporting to AusAID for three years, and now condenses several donor and governing council reports into one.

6. CRGA appreciated the timing problems faced by some programmes in getting preliminary formal consultation with stakeholders over the final form of these drafts, and thus approved the draft strategic plans (albeit with some modifications), as “living documents”, that would be fine-tuned from year to year, particularly after consultation with Heads of Fisheries, or subsectoral meetings, to ensure that new steering instructions could be fed into plans at any stage of the cycle.

7. This Heads of Fisheries Meeting thus provides an opportunity to comment on, and agree any recommendations for changes to, both the OFP and CFP strategic programme plans. Plans will be open to revalidation by CRGA each year, and this will be an additional opportunity for direct member country guidance in the overall direction of programmes.

Coastal Fisheries Programme

8. Although the last Heads of Fisheries Meeting had been in 2001, the Coastal Fisheries Programme did however have the advantage of recent subsectoral consultations involving member countries in three work areas: aquaculture, the live reef fish trade, and the first PROCFISH/C Advisory Committee, as well as the planning processes and previous project reviews that went into the design of constituent projects, and of course contact between staff and member countries and territories whilst carrying out activities.

9. The draft strategic plan itself was produced quickly by the Director in September 2002, as a “montage of snapshots” of the current mix of projects and programmes that make up the CFP. It took its objectives from the existing objectives of these separate sections, projects, and programmes and expressed them in a similar format, and with each existing activity and section set in a coherent whole-programme context that supported the overall objective of the programme within the Corporate Plan itself.

10. After some fine-tuning by section heads the draft plan was submitted to CRGA for consideration in November 2002, and was approved with some slight changes.

11. Additional changes have since been suggested by various reviews, particularly the recent CFP review itself, which suggested a re-statement of the fundamental goal of the Coastal Fisheries Programme to emphasise the link with SPC member country and territory fisheries administrations, which the secretariat is very happy to support. The drawing-up of the 2003 workplan (IP8) itself also made it clear that the wording of some of the sectional objectives needs to be fine-tuned.

12. The Coastal Fisheries Strategic Programme Plan is provided here as IP4, with suggestions for revision indicated, and HoF3 may wish to comment on these, or indeed on any other aspect of the plan, or the direction of the Programme itself, after taking into account the presentation of the Coastal Fisheries Programme review.

Oceanic Fisheries Programme

13. The OFP had the advantage of a recent whole-programme review (IP3), as well as having had a previous Strategic Research Plan (approved by CRGA in 1993) as an integrative foundation, and an annual Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish, and some member country input from the Forum Fisheries Committee, to guide its strategic plan.

14. The OFP Strategic Programme Plan followed a similar history to the CFP plan, with a draft produced by the Director in September 2002, subsequent fine-tuning by programme section heads and the programme manager, and approval by CRGA in November 2002 as a “living document”, whose direction would be informed and modified as a result of subsequent reviews and consultations with members, particularly HoF.

15. Some changes have already been made as a result of in-depth consideration of the OFP Strategic Plan against the realities of the 2003 Work Plan (IP9), and the Plan itself is provided as IP2. Again, HoF3 may wish to comment on these changes, or indeed on any other aspect of the plan, or the direction of the Programme itself, after taking into account the presentation of the Oceanic Fisheries Programme review.

Conclusion

16. HoF3 is invited to discuss the Strategic Programme Plans of the Oceanic and Coastal Fisheries Programmes and comment as necessary on their direction, or implementation, taking into account the programme reviews.

17. Issues agreed by the meeting will be taken up either by the Marine Resources Division directly, or by the SPC Executive, depending on whether they have implications only within the fisheries programmes, or have implications for other programmes, or all of SPC.