

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY - FIFTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 14-18 March 1994)

SPC COASTAL FISHERIES PROGRAMME

INFORMATION SECTION ACTIVITIES AUGUST 1992 - MARCH 1994

General

1. The Information Section is newly established within the CFP structure and groups together the Fisheries Information Project (FIP), funded by the Government of France and, until March 1993, the SPC/OFCF Technical Cooperation Project (TCP), funded by the Japanese Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation.

2. The FIP coordinates the provision of information, both routinely and on request, to assist fisheries scientists, development officers, extension agents, planners, managers and others involved in developing and managing fisheries at national, regional and international levels. Many such individuals work in remote locations with poor communications and inadequate access to advice and information on technical fisheries-related topics. The SPC has established this project with the goal of improving its capacity to process and disseminate information. Information services will continue to be an important function of the SPC Fisheries Programmes. The project at present comprises the single position of Fisheries Information Adviser (FIA). Additional funds have been located to allow the employment of a second information officer and a fisheries associate (position to be shared with the Training Section) in 1994. These two positions have been approved by the 33rd South Pacific Conference.

3. The TCP acts as a channel for the input of Japanese information and expertise into the work of the SPC Fisheries Programme. The overall goal of the project is to provide support both to the development of fisheries in the Pacific Islands region, and to the further development of fisheries relations between SPC member countries and Japan, through a programme of activities which are principally information-related. The project, which is fully funded by the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation (OFCF) of Japan, covers the single position of Fisheries Development Associate. The agreement for this project expired in March 1993 and at present there is no provision for its renewal.

National-level activities

Marine resources bibliographies

4. Marine resources bibliographies of the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Guam were published during the year. The respective Governments requested assistance in compiling bibliographies of material relating to fisheries and marine resources of their particular countries. During a search for appropriate documents, special attention was paid to research and experimental reports written in Japanese before World War II, and reports on marine resources and the environment.

5. The bibliography on FSM contains 1,283 references, that on Marshall Islands 786 references, and the Guam bibliography 1,479 references. The reports will be useful to people who are involved in fisheries development activities in these countries and in the region as a whole.

Information requests

6. Responding to information requests is a routine activity of all sections of the SPC Fisheries Programme, and is coordinated by the FIP. Under normal circumstances, a request is discussed among SPC Fisheries staff members with technical knowledge of the subject area, and either a listing of useful literature/ information sources, or specific technical advice, or both, are prepared. This may be supplemented using bibliographic searches conducted through the SPC library on internal or external databases. In some cases, where information obtained through these sources is inadequate to address the needs of the request, further assistance may be sought from other PIMRIS nodes or from elsewhere.

7. The frequency of information requests from regional fisheries workers has been increasing over the past four years. This trend seems to be a response to the increased emphasis placed on fisheries information by SPC and other PIMRIS participating agencies, and a resulting increased awareness on the part of regional fishery workers about the sorts of services that are available. The trend is expected to continue in the coming year.

Regional-level activities

Special Interest Groups

8. A major activity, since 1990, has been the establishment of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) on fishery related topics of interest to regional fishery workers. The SIGs were developed as a result of the SPC Workshop on Pacific Inshore Fishery Resources, held in March 1988, where participants expressed concern about the absence of mechanisms to promote contact and information exchange among regional fishery workers. In establishing the SIGs, the most important areas of interest in the region were determined by canvassing regional fishery workers using a questionnaire. More than 450 responses to the questionnaire were received by the end of 1993, 75% from the region, and returns are continuing.

9. Responses to the questionnaire surveys have been used to identify the most common areas of interest to fishery workers in the region, and those that should therefore be targeted first through the formation of SIGs. In addition several SPC fisheries meetings and workshops have also recommended the establishment of SIGs. Based on this guidance, 6 SIGs have now been established, on *Beche-de-mer*, *Pearl Oysters*, *Ciguatera*, *Trochus*, *Traditional Marine Resource Management and Knowledge*, and *Fisheries Education and Training*. Further SIGs will be established in 1994 (including one on fish aggregation devices), as financial and manpower resources permit.

10. As part of the support offered to each SIG, SPC undertakes to circulate literature, technical materials and correspondence relevant to the interests of group members on an approximately six-monthly basis. This is mainly done in the form of an information bulletin, compiled with the assistance of an external technical specialist (selected on their regional experience combined with expertise on the subject in question) and relying heavily on contributions from members of the SIG.

11. Using technical coordinators in this way ensures that the standard of the information circulated is maintained at a high level and is relevant to the needs of the region. Eight bulletins have been produced in 1993 (both in English and French).

SPC Fisheries Newsletter

12. Production of the SPC Fisheries Newsletter is maintained on a quarterly basis, in both English and French. The Newsletter provides timely information on SPC Fisheries Programme activities and on regional developments, as well as providing technical information on aspects of fisheries. The Newsletter is typically about 36 pages long and is widely distributed within the region (600 addresses on the mailing list).

SPC fishery ephemera database

13. In 1991, a database was established which, when complete, will contain a keyword-indexed listing of all the fisheries ephemera ("grey literature") produced by the SPC Fisheries Programme since its inception in 1957. This includes all articles and useful information published in the Fisheries Newsletter, all the working, information and background papers presented during RTMFs and other SPC fisheries meetings, and all articles in the various Special Interest Group Information Bulletins since their creation. This work will be done in collaboration with library staff.

14. During 1993, research and data entry continued to allow the expansion of the database which, when up to date, will be made available to regional users.

Pacific Island Marine Resources Information System (PIMRIS)

15. The FIP is one of the mechanisms (along with the SPC Library) whereby SPC participates in the Pacific Island Marine Resources Information System (PIMRIS), a joint activity in which SPC collaborates with the Forum Fisheries Agency, the University of the South Pacific and the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC). The agencies participating in PIMRIS provide a variety of services to member countries, including the provision of bibliographies and literature searches, in-country assistance in organising information collections, and question-and-answer services, as well as collaborating on the compilation of a computerised bibliographic database, called MOANA, on Pacific marine resources. The FIP participates in these activities to the extent required, and the FIO also represents SPC on the PIMRIS Steering Committee, which has now met six times, including the meeting of 8-9 November 1993.

Information on Japanese fishery issues

16. A wide range of Japanese fisheries organisations, research institutions, and fishing and marine gear companies were contacted to provide information on aid and technical cooperation, and educational/ training material. Some of this material has been translated and condensed for use in the SPC Fisheries Newsletter and SIG Information Bulletins.

17. A number of other contributions have also been made to these publications, both original materials and translated Japanese texts, which cover a wide range of topics from reports of work programme activities to articles on fishery statistics, turtle farming, beche-de-mer propagation, seafood nutrients, fish aggregation devices, Japanese research activities in Micronesia in the 1930s, and book reviews.

18. Specific information on the Japanese Government's aid system and the activities of OFCF in the South Pacific was also provided to SPC member countries on request, to promote a better understanding of Japanese assistance to the region. In addition, technical assistance to SPC member countries in connection with those elements of their national fisheries development plans that involve Japanese assistance were provided on request.

Evaluation

19. The gathering, repackaging and dissemination of information is one of the functions that SPC as a whole is ideally equipped to carry out on behalf of its member countries, and is of continually growing importance within the CFP. Promoting the flow of information to technical workers in the region is central to the operation of all sections of the CFP. It is therefore disappointing that the Secretariat's efforts to seek additional funding with which to strengthen and expand the work of the Information Section have so far not been successful. A number of targets for the Section have still not entirely been met, including the establishment of 12 SIGs, and the production of a number of other publications.

20. The level of future work will continue to be constrained unless additional extra-budgetary funding can be located to support these activities. Additional manpower resources have been requested through the establishment of an additional position (to be shared with the Training Section) as recommended by RTMF 24, and approved by the 33rd South Pacific Conference. The establishment of this new position will improve the capacity of the project to respond to the expressed needs of SPC member countries in the provision of fisheries information, especially the maintenance of existing SIGs and the establishment of new ones.
