

A REGIONAL ROADMAP FOR SUSTAINABLE PACIFIC FISHERIES



Photo: Malo Hosken

Introduction

In proposing the Framework for Pacific Regionalism, Sir Mekere Morauta, stated that, *we see a region that is at a crossroads and one that needs regionalism more than ever before.* Nowhere is this more true than in fisheries, the region's largest shared natural resource and a sector in which regional cooperation has already provided real results – but can do much more.

In 2010, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders were presented with the outcomes of a forward-looking study on the Future of Fisheries, which identified very broad focal areas to achieve a best-case scenario for the region over the following 25 years. Five years on, it is clear that our region is instead following a pathway of missed opportunities.

Bigeye tuna is overfished, and the region's longline fisheries – although targeting the highest value tuna species – are barely economic. Despite controls on fishing effort, purse seine catches continue to increase, driving down the value of the catch. Fishing on the high seas is virtually uncontrolled. Although tuna fisheries are seen as an important opportunity for economic development, we are still in the situation of allowing two-thirds of our tuna to be harvested by foreign fishing boats; and nearly 90% is taken out of the region for processing. Larger and more developed countries are taking our fish to create their profits, exports and jobs.

Inshore fisheries resources have supported the survival of coastal communities since our islands were first settled. They are enormously important for food security and livelihoods, but are under threat from growing populations and, in the longer term, from the impacts of climate change. Finfish resources in many areas are now overfished to meet local demand, while high value export species like bêche-de-mer have been driven almost to extinction. Only a concerted effort to improve the management of coastal fisheries and provide alternative livelihoods and protein sources can prevent a decline in fish supplies and further degradation of the coastal environment. Traditional 'top-down' management is not working and there is a need to empower coastal communities to manage and use their fisheries resources sustainably. Although aquaculture has potential, it currently makes only a tiny contribution to fisheries production in FFA member countries. This paper therefore focuses on tuna and coastal fisheries.

This brief paper outlines seven clear goals for oceanic and coastal fisheries for the next ten years, as well as indicators that can be used to measure progress. To achieve these goals will require commitment by leaders to 11 strategies that will allow our region to take control of the future of our fisheries. As a Regional Roadmap, the strategies outlined below will be facilitated through regional agencies (primarily the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community) working together. However, it is important to note that many of the issues require high-level political direction and whole-of-government implementation at the national level.

Tuna fisheries

Goals and indicators:

1. Sustainability

A sustainable resource is a prerequisite to sustainable development. Within 3 years, there will be agreed Target Reference Points for the four key tuna species. Within 10 years, the status of each species will be clearly moving towards these targets. In particular, the overfishing of bigeye tuna will have been removed and the stock will be rebuilding. Impacts of fishing on by-catch such as sharks, turtles and seabirds will have been significantly reduced. Management measures will not be undermined by Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU).

2. Value

The region's tuna catch in 2024 will be worth double what it is in 2014. This will be achieved by increasing value rather than volume, by eliminating oversupply and targeting higher value products and markets. In line with increased value and profitability, there will be scope to increase access fees for countries that wish to continue licensing foreign vessels.

3. Employment

18,000 new jobs will be created in the tuna industry within 10 years. While many of these will be in tuna processing in Melanesia, opportunities for nationals of all FFA members will be created for vessel crew, observers and fisheries management staff. Standards to ensure that employment is safe and worthwhile will be harmonised.

4. Food security

The supply of tuna for domestic consumption in the region will increase by 40,000 tonnes per year by 2024, to provide nutritious food and reduce pressure on inshore resources. Depending on national circumstance, small-scale catches, supplies from processors in the region, and by-catch from industrial vessels will all contribute to this increase.

Strategies:

1. Effective zone-based management

The long-held PIC commitment to zone-based management provides the key to taking control of the major fisheries. FFA members commit to vigorously assert a system of national rights, within a cooperative framework of binding limits that will be managed under formal harvest strategies, including through equitable and responsible reduction where necessary. Within 10 years, catch-based (quota) systems will replace effort controls.

2. Continue to reduce IUU fishing

IUU fishing robs the Pacific of revenue as well as economic and social development opportunities. The region will continue to invest in cooperative monitoring, control and surveillance programmes that maximise the ability of countries and their surveillance partners to effectively detect, deter and eliminate IUU fishing. This will include enhanced investment in satellite and electronic surveillance, at-sea boardings and

inspections, cooperation to increase aerial surveillance, and enhanced port controls. In particular, Pacific Island countries will cooperate through the Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement to achieve multilateral monitoring control and surveillance outcomes.

3. Progressively restrict fishing on the high seas by foreign fleets

Expansion of fishing effort in the high seas is of no benefit to Pacific Island countries. Imposition of controls through licensing conditions and work within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission and other international processes will level the playing field. NGOs active in major market states will be encouraged to promote fish sourced from well managed national zones as a higher standard deserving of market and price recognition.

4. Prioritise the supply of raw materials to processors in the region

Development of domestic tuna processing has always struggled against low-cost economies in Asia; but those operations are not viable without massive supplies of tuna from our region. The region will move to mandatory offloading of part of the catch of access vessels and increased transhipment fees (in a harmonised way).

5. Establish high standards for employment in the fishing and processing industry

Development of a tuna industry should not compromise the health, safety and well-being of Pacific Islanders. Uniform minimum standards and a renewed emphasis on training will help to avoid countries being played off against each other.

6. Establish regional processing hubs in partnership between countries

The diversity of opportunities for processing and the need for economies of scale will be addressed by developing 'processing hubs' in two or three countries that can receive the fish from other FFA waters and provide benefits through employment and ownership.



Coastal fisheries

Goals and indicators:

1. Empowerment

Within 10 years, all FICs will have put in place policies and legislation that provide for the involvement of coastal communities in the management of their fisheries resources. Supported by national controls on export commodities, communities will drive local management regimes with clear user rights.

2. Resilience

Within 10 years, all FICs will be implementing strategies to manage the various threats to coastal ecosystems. Only by conserving fisheries habitats, controlling pollution and addressing damage from outside the fishing sector can we develop resilience to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

3. Livelihoods

Within 10 years, all FICs will have adopted policies to develop alternative livelihoods for coastal communities that are impacted by declining fisheries resources. In most cases, overfishing occurs because coastal communities have no alternative. Aquaculture, water-based tourism and small-scale fishing for tuna provide options, but many solutions will lie outside the fisheries sector.

Strategies:

1. Provide relevant information to inform management and policy

The decisions of governments and community managers will be based on good information; science will be translated into simple and informative material to guide community management; and communities will be able to combine their traditional knowledge with scientific understanding.

2. Re-focus fisheries agencies to support coastal fisheries management

Many fisheries agencies are under-resourced, and focus mainly on tuna and outdated fisheries development activities. There is a need to re-direct staff and resources into supporting community based management, and enforcing national regulations and restrictions where appropriate. Greater collaboration between national agencies and exchange of staff will be supported.

3. Ensure effective collaboration and coordination of stakeholders

There are many stakeholders with an interest in the management of coastal areas apart from Fisheries Departments. There is a need to coordinate the work of different government departments, NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and donors – and to engage better with organisations that have good community outreach, such as faith-based organisations.

4. Develop and enforce strong and up-to-date legislation, policy and plans

The new approach of empowering communities to manage their resources needs to be backed by strong and appropriate legislation, policies and plans. Strengthened enforcement will be needed, both by community authorised officers, fisheries and law enforcement officers and customs.

5. Ensure equitable access to benefits and involvement in decision making

Involving women, youth and disadvantaged groups in decision making and access to the benefits of marine resource use is not only fair, it is necessary for success. Women and youth are closely involved in harvesting and selling marine resources, but are less likely to respect management measures on which they are not consulted.



Implementation

Delivering on this Roadmap towards a better future for our fisheries requires commitment at the highest political level, and a willingness to drive change in national laws and institutions, including through greater investment to reflect the value of our fisheries resources.

The Roadmap sets clear goals and targets against which progress will be measured. An annual ‘fishery report card’ will be provided to the annual meeting of the Ministerial Forum Fisheries Committee. The report card will measure the relative success of each strategy in terms of the changes to the indicators that are set out for each goal.

There are elements of this Roadmap that can be progressed by regional fisheries ministers in their own right. However, many others require the highest degree of political support. In particular:

- The strategies on sustainability of stocks, fisheries management and monitoring, control and surveillance require dedicated cooperation amongst Pacific Island countries in ways that differ from the historic approach of distant water fishing nations. Leaders will play a key role in directing and defending these efforts in the pursuit of sustainable stocks that are managed in ways that create development opportunities.

- Industry development and employment strategies require whole-of-government approaches that can only be achieved through high-level support. For example, fisheries development often touches on wider issues such as investment and taxation law, labour mobility and cross-border transactions. These are processes that must be cooperative both within and between governments.

- Many of the strategies require additional investment in fisheries agencies at the national level. The success of individual members that have already progressed some of the strategies discussed in this Roadmap highlight the positive nature of this investment. In particular, necessary reforms to the management of coastal fisheries will require enhanced investment at the national level and through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

Fisheries Ministers will report to Forum Leaders to provide information on any key areas of success, and more importantly areas where progress is not likely to achieve the goals without further intervention from Leaders.



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