

**Secretariat of the Pacific Community**

**4th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting**

*(30 August – 3 September 2004, Noumea, New Caledonia)*

**Background Paper 5**

Original: English

**SPC Marine Resources Division – the next 10 years**

**Marine Resources Division  
Secretariat of the Pacific Community  
Noumea, New Caledonia**

[www.spc.int/mrd](http://www.spc.int/mrd)



# SPC Marine Resources Division – the next 10 years

*(An internal, navel-gazing discussion paper prepared for the SPC Executive Retreat, March 2004)*

## 1. Changes in the institutional context

The “Marine Resources” sector in the SPC context is a slight misnomer. “Marine Resources” is to do with usable aspects of the ocean, but SPC only concentrates on two areas within the “usable ocean” field of activity:- seafarers and fisheries<sup>1</sup>, and even the fisheries aspect is shared with another agency, FFA. Other agencies deal with other aspects (e.g. SOPAC in non-living marine resources and the “non-living” coastal and marine environment, SPREP on overall marine environment management and endangered marine species protection, USP on marine issues education, and the Forum Secretariat (to some extent) on trade in marine products and certain legal aspects under the international law of the sea (such as the negotiation of compensation protocols to cover marine transport of hazardous materials).

The mandates of these various organizations have evolved continuously over the years, both in response to member country needs (usually as expressed through requests for services either directly as individual countries, or in a consensus fashion at regional meetings), or in response to the changing functionality of each agency, with most of the recent change occurring in SPREP (which has significantly expanded its marine focus over the past 5 years) and SOPAC (which has taken on a number of functions that might previously have been considered the domain of SPREP – e.g. development of environmental vulnerability indicators – or FFA – e.g. maritime boundary definition). SPC itself has taken over the Forum Secretariat’s former Maritime sectoral programme, whilst certain fisheries responsibilities were lifted from SPC’s shoulders when the Forum Fisheries Agency was set up in 1979, and certain aspects are likely to be lifted in turn from FFA’s shoulders when the new regional tuna commission begins full operation.

These evolutions had manifold causes, including a response to reviews, to new developments in international law, the differential availability of project funding from different donors as a result of perceived differences in efficiency or conformity with donors perceptions of Pacific Island development priorities, or new problems and issues arising.

The Marine Sector working group (MSWG) of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) provides the potential for mandate shifts and responses to be coordinated and stabilized to a certain extent. However, the next major development in the marine sector – the setting up of additional international “legislative machinery” to manage Western and Central Pacific stocks of Highly Migratory Species (mainly tuna) in accordance with new international agreements concerning the implementation of certain aspects of the law of the sea, has occurred almost entirely outside the aegis of CROP, and there is still considerable

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<sup>1</sup> As a consequence, MRD is sometimes known as the “fish and ships” division of SPC

uncertainty about the role that CROP agencies, particularly FFA and SPC's OFP, will play in relation to the new Commission that will be set up (or indeed whether the new commission will become a CROP agency itself).

Another future stabilizing factor will possibly be the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy. This extremely ambitious concept is still teetering on the brink of viability – with many fearing that it is unlikely to be useful in practice – that it may just be a grandiose vehicle for huge regional gabfests that achieve little in practice, or that may become a vehicle for enabling certain agencies to increase their influence – and it may or may not play a significant role in the future of the Pacific Islands ocean sector. But even if this is currently unclear, SPC needs to pay considerable attention to it.

Certain aspects of the ocean sector are not significantly addressed at the present by any regional agency. This may be for four reasons:

- (a) because they are already addressed at the international level;
- (b) because they are already addressed at the national or local level;
- (c) because they are not problematic at present;
- (d) because there is a genuine gap that nobody at the regional level has noticed.

One major problem of current regional processes is that they don't identify these various issues, particularly the fourth category – and this kind of identification, classification and prioritization is precisely what the original proponents hoped would emerge from the regional ocean policy process. It is a long way from doing that at present, or at least from doing it objectively, and although it is on track to do more through mechanisms such as the Forum review of regional cooperation, there are as yet no solutions that can be lifted “off the shelf” by the SPC Marine Resources Division to help plan its optimum trajectory into the future.

This paper hopes to partly remedy that lack of a rigorous outside perspective by indulging in some internal guesswork.

## **2. Changes in the marine resources sector**

For this discussion of the future, we cannot just use the SPC definition of the “marine resources” sector as being just fisheries (and a subset of fisheries at that) plus maritime training and legislation, but (at the risk of sounding pompous) we must think about the wider future of mankind's relationship with the Pacific Ocean itself. This is where the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy and its developments can even now be of some use – the policy already provides a definition of the whole range of ocean usage, and the manner in which that usage should begin to be developed and managed, that our member countries have already agreed to, through various international instruments.

However, whilst the policy provides the general framework – particularly on the need to ensure sustainability and balance in the way things *should* go – it does not provide much detail about the way things are actually going, or the details of how to achieve its goals. To provide that level of detail in a regional framework would be counter-productive anyway, since the policy needs to cope with unforeseen developments, and be able to accommodate different local circumstances. However, in order to develop strategic regional responses, we

need to try and predict the future to a certain extent, and to guess some of the likely details without losing the capability to respond should things not proceed as expected.

In 1997, at the SPC 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference, a vision of the possible future of the Pacific Ocean living resource use over the next 50 years was put forward by SPC (see <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/Reports/Misc/canberra.htm>). This was not necessarily a *preferred* vision, but was based on an extrapolation of current trends, and developments in other parts of the world. By analogy with the progression of mankind's utilization of land it was expected that, in the long term, fishing would give way to aquaculture in many areas, in the same way that hunting has given way to farming on land.

The need to shift emphasis from fisheries development to fisheries management and conservation (or to what, in other circles, might be called "*sustainable* development"), given the finite and variable natural resource base, had already taken place in most Pacific Island countries by the mid-1990s. But not many had envisaged what it might take *beyond* fisheries management to increase marine protein nutritional sources to feed increasing populations. Fisheries management (even when it is applied properly) can only go so far, and cannot increase the carrying capacity of natural ecosystems, whilst aquaculture provides the possibility of greatly increased production of usable protein.

However, the question remains – does the human race WANT to follow the same path at sea as we did on land? Do we want to see the majority of the oceans turned into simplified, intensively managed and cropped "farmland" ecosystems, with a few wildlife reserves?

Another vision for the future of the world's oceans was put forward by Daniel Pauly, at the UN Informal Consultation on Oceans and Law of the Sea in New York in June 2003 (SPC response included in <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/Reports/Misc/panel2pif.pdf>). His view was that the ocean needs to be *zoned*, with different areas being set aside for different purposes, including fishing, preservation, farming and trade routes, with a large area set aside for preservation and refuges. Quite how such boundaries might function in a fluid medium, where "spillover effects" are expected to be the norm, remains to be seen, but a conference was convened on this topic of Atlantic ocean zoning, in Canada, in May 2004<sup>2</sup>.

Although such decadal changes were envisaged only speculatively at the 1997 SPC Conference, there is already an influential international lobby calling for 20-30% of the world's oceans to be set aside as no-take reserves, and banning certain types of fishing over the whole area. In fact, the whole world seems to have become concerned about ocean issues in the past decade, and fishing in particular – a concern that has originated in North America and Europe, and which seems to have been precipitated by the mess that certain countries have made of managing some of their fisheries, particularly the collapse of cod fisheries. Westerners are possibly even beginning to approach Pacific Islanders in their concern for the sea – however, without ordinary people having the same close contact or knowledge about the sea, and thus being uncritically open to the views put forward by a few "movers and shakers".

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<sup>2</sup> Although the grapevine has been notably silent on any outputs from this meeting – see <http://www.oceanzoning.ca/> for details. There is also an online presentation on the issue in the USA at [http://mainelaw.maine.edu/mli/Ocean%20zoning\\_files/frame.htm#slide0001.htm](http://mainelaw.maine.edu/mli/Ocean%20zoning_files/frame.htm#slide0001.htm)

The influence of this movement on SPC Marine Resources work has already been great. Instead of just assisting Pacific Island countries with actual issues and local concerns, we now have to assist them with perceived issues originating outside their borders, and which are already starting to strongly influence the provision of external assistance. Instead of getting accurate information just to the decision-makers in the sector concerned, we now have to package information to inform the public and broader government decision-making processes about what is really happening on, and in, the sea. Otherwise, their only source of information comes from high-volume extra-regional sources, and the often-erroneous transfer of high-profile problems from overseas.

One recent example from 2-3 years ago was the global assumption that, because a lot of albatross were taking baits and being caught by longline fisheries in the Southern Ocean, that all longliners, including Pacific Island tuna longline fisheries, must be catching a lot of seabirds. It has taken a lot of effort, research, and information-production by several institutions for it to become accepted that Pacific Island longline fisheries do not in fact kill seabirds. And this effort required resources that could have been better spent on real problems. However, this kind of single-minded lobbying will not go away, and one issue for SPC's fisheries science and information programmes therefore is not only to produce accurate information in a usable and timely form for Pacific Island fishery managers, but also to produce *public* information, and to promote the organisation's reputation for integrity, and producing the most reliable available information. We must continue to be seen to be impartial – to alert the region to problems as well as to defend the region from misconceptions.

Given the rapidly-increasing need to manage the impact of human ocean use, and the continuing importance of the ocean for sustenance, income, and transport, there will obviously be a strong continued need for information about the state of the ocean, and its exploitation, and for systems to package and deliver that information in appropriate forms. It is unlikely that all SPC island member countries will be able to afford to develop self-sufficiency in such specialized biological, ecological and social scientific skills in the medium term. In terms of nation-building, it is likely to be better for small countries to invest their human and financial resources in more immediate human issues like health, governance and education, and to continue to pool resources at the regional level for more specialized, or less frequently-required services.

However, to make this paradigm work well, SPC needs to be very responsive to appropriate requests from member countries for information and advice. Certain SPC programmes almost need to be considered by certain national ministries to be shared, remotely-located, branches of their own government. This however will require a change in the way the SPC budget is formed. Currently the vast majority of the work programme is funded by donors, and consists of special projects with a strategic capacity-building focus, and little scope for rapid response to requests<sup>3</sup>. If a balance is to be struck, and SPC is to be considered by countries as a

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<sup>3</sup> This is not necessarily a bad thing. There has been a conscious effort by donors to get away from the old "firefighting" system of responding only to short-term problems as they arise, and trying to build systems that prevent problems arising in the first place. However, the balance seems to have swung a little too far, and made it difficult to provide a rapid regional response.

“government department that just happens to be located in another island”, then country funding, or other “user-pays” arrangement, needs to begin to match donor funding, and enable the organization to provide short-term tactical as well as the longer-term strategic responses funded by most donors.

This may seem like wishful thinking, but there are already two regional agencies, FFA and USP, which have already moved some way in this direction, where a significant portion of their work is funded by “users” (student fees in the case of USP, various vessel registration and licencing fees in the case of FFA), and where donor funding is becoming a little less crucial for providing basic services. And a new agency – the Western and Central Pacific Highly Migratory Fish Stocks Commission, will be entirely funded by “user-pays” arrangements (member government + industry levies). The prospects for a “user-pays” arrangement for funding SPC Marine Resources Divisional services is not as good as some of the more direct-service agencies like FFA, particularly when the beneficiaries or “users” are subsistence fishers or threatened fisheries ecosystems. However, the Oceanic Fisheries Programme at least has the prospect of providing scientific services to commercial and industrial fisheries through the new Commission, and part of the work of the Regional Maritime Programme is to the benefit of shipping companies, whilst some Coastal Fisheries Programme services are beginning to involve more direct resource input from the private sector.

An alternative mechanism for providing a greater proportion of direct member country funding to support SPC programme work, particularly tactical rapid-response services, has already been proposed. This would involve charging a greatly increased “programme management levy” of 20-25% on all SPC work-programme budgets, using that to fund SPC corporate services, and then replacing the amount thus taken away from programmes with funding from member country assessed contributions taken away from corporate services. There would be no change in the amount of funding to either corporate services or work-programmes, but corporate services would become mainly donor-funded<sup>4</sup>, and work-programmes would have an increased proportion of relatively “untied” core funding.

However, whilst this may sound simple in theory, in practice it is likely to prove difficult to implement, not only in trying to persuade donors to accept such a large administration levy, but also in trying to overturn a robust centralized system for an untried decentralized system, which could actually be counter-productive. It could, for example, lead to programmes simply employing extra core-funded staff for strategic project work, and using up their floating pool of “untied” funding instead of using it to finance rapid response work.

### **3. Changes in SPC**

Given that brief and sketchy general background, we may briefly look at the future of each individual component of the Division in turn.

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<sup>4</sup> And administrative funding would thus always be in direct proportion to the size of the work programme

### **3.1 Director's office**

There is an argument for doing away with the Director's office and even for doing away with the "Divisional" level of the organization. After all, the organisation is managed entirely under the Corporate Plan and its component Strategic Programme Plans – there is no place set aside for a Divisional Plan – and the Marine Resources Division is not even a "natural" Division, but rather an uneasy chimaera of Noumea-based fisheries and Suva-based maritime programmes. It might conversely be argued that the Divisional level provides "added value" – Divisional heads<sup>5</sup> both provide a bigger-picture overview than any single programme (particularly important when SPC engages with CROP, and the international level), and provide a single point of Divisional representation on the Executive Committee when it would be unwieldy if every single programme were represented. Divisional representation evens out the disparities that would be caused by having equal representation for programmes of very different size).

But because this paper was written by a Divisional head, no judgement will be made in either direction, and a more impartial viewpoint is needed. Whatever happens, the current duties of the Director of Marine Resources, which include the job of managing the large Coastal Fisheries Programme as well as the "big-picture" and representational duties of the Director's post itself, are too voluminous for one person to do them all justice, and some change is needed if the Division is to function most efficiently.

### **3.2 Oceanic Fisheries Programme**

The OFP can be considered one of the "flagship" programmes of SPC, and the acknowledged global excellence of its work brings considerable credit upon the whole organization, and indeed the whole region. Its advice is sought out at all levels, from the international, through the regional and national levels, and increasingly at the local and private sector level. The number of articles in the national and regional press recently about the status of tuna stocks, and which quote the OFP, are one indicator of this.

The future role of the OFP has been thought about it great depth over the last few years, and has been the subject of several specific reviews, both within the SPC context, and under the heading of "how shall scientific services be provided to support decision-making in the new tuna commission". The actual future of the OFP will depend to a large extent on the decisions taken in that Commission, which is expected to have its first meeting in December 2004.

It is however becoming clear that, despite considerable early speculation about whether the Commission itself should take over the OFP role entirely, the OFP is now strongly preferred as the "scientific advice provider" to the new commission during the interim startup period<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>5</sup> SPC "Divisional heads" have been usually considered to be the two Deputy Directors-General, in charge of Land and Social Resources respectively (plus additional responsibilities for Suva and Noumea offices) and the two Directors in charge of Marine Resources and Corporate Services. Now that Land Resources might be considered to have two Divisional heads with the addition of a Director of Land Resources, and now that the Planning Unit has a leader with the same title as a Divisional head, some readjustment of SPC's traditional post definitions may be needed.

<sup>6</sup> As it always was by island member countries themselves, and it was only the developed countries that introduced any element of speculation;

and that there is a likelihood that this service will also need to continue once the Commission is in full operation after several years. It has been made clear by SPC members on several occasions that any “incremental services”, over and above the services normally provided to the region by the OFP, will have to be fully-funded by the Commission, and that member country services will not be deleteriously impacted thereby. However, given that OFP work is almost entirely donor-funded, “normal service” to member countries is hard to define, and the funding situation is eventually likely to resolve itself through a series of gradual accommodations and negotiations with donors and users (fishing industry and government). It is however strongly expected that the work of the OFP both in the service of the island region, and the broader WCPT commission, will be enhanced as a result.

What is also clear is that although the OFP is the ideal candidate to provide scientific services to the Commission<sup>7</sup>, the Commission is not likely to be able to conversely provide the services that OFP provides to its island members. Although the developed country members of the commission – Japan, Australia, USA etc – have their own national fisheries science institutions and can provide the science to back up their own national positions when negotiating within the Commission, Pacific Island countries will either have to rely on SPC or develop their own individual fisheries assessment institutions, and this will not happen overnight. Thus in both future roles – the need to provide the basic scientific services to underpin the joint decisions of the Commission, and the need to provide special scientific services to enable island member countries to make their own informed decisions, the OFP has a highly-justified and predictable role for at least the medium-term.

The OFP does however need to actively bear in mind the desirability of helping develop as much national capacity as possible in fisheries science, monitoring and assessment, since a regional programme cannot hope to continue servicing each and every national requirement, particularly as the need for science-based advice increases with each new national tuna fishery management plan and industry consultative process that is initiated.

There will, however, be a continued need for a regionally-coordinated assessment of shared regional stocks of fish, and the balance point here will lie between the OFP and with the scientific subcommittee of the new commission at the regional level.

### ***3.3 Coastal Fisheries Programme***

The Coastal Fisheries Programme bundles together the entire range, and more, of functions that the OFP and the Forum Fisheries Agency together provide towards the management of oceanic tuna fisheries, but targets them on coastal fisheries and aquaculture. Although it is very difficult to compare SPC programmes with each other, because of their varying scope and modes of operation, the OFP might be compared with the SPC Plant Protection Service, and the CFP with the rest of the Land Resources Division.

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<sup>7</sup> It already carries out the tuna assessments that will be the main basis for Commission decision-making, and already holds, on behalf of member countries, the various databases that make up the history of the fishery, and various other observations, on which future assessments will be based.



Coastal Fisheries has always been a fluid programme, with various components that increase or decrease in relative importance, or evolve, or are even terminated, as the sector itself changes.

Fisheries, and how they are both perceived and managed, are going through a period of enormous change as natural frontiers start to run out, and the pioneering, hunter-gatherer spirit changes to a more settled, “agricultural” mode of existence. The change from “willy nilly development” to “sustainable development” has already been mentioned, and despite previous member country consensus that “development” was the CFP’s highest priority, the CFP itself has internally evolved to promote “sustainable development”. At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Heads of Fisheries meeting in 2003, it was generally acknowledged for the first time, following the CFP review, that support for the better management of coastal fisheries was now the highest priority of the CFP.

A broad view is taken of the actual definition of “management” though. There is a perception in some circles, particularly western NGO circles, that “fisheries management has failed”, period. This is like saying that *democracy* has failed<sup>8</sup>. There are many different kinds of fishery management systems. Some particular fisheries management regimes have proven less than robust, either because of poor information, or because of political reluctance to accept the implications of information, or simply because the mechanisms themselves do not involve an appropriate balance of stakeholders. But whilst there have been some catastrophic collapses, other fisheries are doing well, and these do not often hit the headlines. Fisheries management must include a large component of useful information and feedback (both about fish, their environment, and the people that fish), a major dose of good governance, and promote ways of making the most of the natural resources that *are* harvested whilst ensuring minimum costs are passed on to the environment. And all of this must be planned and local and national systems and human resources developed to maintain it. Fisheries management is much more than just telling fishermen where, when and what they can fish.

Fortunately most Pacific Islands have a head-start over the rest of the world in getting robust local systems in place, and there is a definite chance that this region can succeed where some developing country fishery management systems seem to be failing, perhaps because these others are trying to implement developed-country systems without developed-country resources. Whereas Pacific traditions of local marine space ownership are already much more in line with the way that fisheries management is now starting to evolve in the rest of the world.

The time may soon be ripe, as envisaged several years ago, for the most recently established component of the CFP, the Aquaculture Section, to be split off as a separate programme, or even to join another programme, and for the remainder of the CFP to concentrate on “wild” fisheries management in the broader sense of the word. On the other hand, it can be argued that “culture” will inevitably overtake “capture” in economic importance – even in the Pacific where it currently lags far behind Asia – and aquaculture needs to be considered as a component of the whole spectrum of management of aquatic production systems.

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<sup>8</sup> Although some may suggest that, in fact, it has.

The Coastal Fisheries Management Section of the CFP, despite its name, does not yet provide the full range of functionalities needed for a coastal fisheries management support service. This section evolved from the Canada-funded Women in Fisheries Postharvest project, into the Community Fisheries Section, and the recent change in name to Fisheries Management Section was partly to distinguish it from the community-specific environmental management (including fisheries) activities of SPREP and NGOs. SPC's role is primarily to support governments, in this case with community fisheries co-management linkages.

The role of the section remains based on promoting community and gender-equitable involvement in coastal fisheries decision-making – in helping governments develop mechanisms that are strong on governance and co-management, and which strengthen traditional systems rather than replace them – but is only part of a broader coastal fisheries management focus which will require better resource, ecological and social science (through the Reef Fisheries Observatory), integrated targeting of resulting information (through the Fisheries Information Section), better promotion of non-wasteful (both financially and ecologically) fishing methods (through the Fisheries Development Section) and better development of local human capacity to cope with the changes needed (through the Fisheries Training Section).

Throughout all this management-focussing, it will be necessary for the Coastal Fisheries Programme to maintain a clear distinction from the work of FFA and OFP in tuna fisheries management and science, and yet to maintain strong linkages and commonalities so that conflicting advice is not provided to member government fisheries departments, who are the primary focal points for all of these regional fisheries activities, whether oceanic or coastal. Fortunately, at the moment there is no significant overlap between tuna fisheries and coastal fisheries management. Although they both overlap institutionally in national fisheries departments in most countries<sup>9</sup>, the mechanisms, and in most cases the fisheries themselves are very different.

The most pressing decision in the future is going to concern the role of the Fisheries Development Section of the CFP, and whether it should change. Although the role of an advisory unit that promotes appropriate and sustainable development under a fisheries management focus is obvious, the fact that the section is currently almost entirely focused on tuna fishery development, albeit small-scale and “appropriate”, means that any greater management focus may bring the section into significant overlap with the potential work-area of the Forum Fisheries Agency in tuna fisheries management. Again, this is not currently a major issue. Both agencies work together in the tuna fishery development area, and as we are fond of explaining, with SPC working from the small-scale side, FFA working from the industrial side, and meeting in the middle. But this distinction will be harder to make when it comes to the *management* aspects of tuna fisheries development, where FFA (with the new tuna commission also beginning to play a role) is clearly the lead regional agency.

Moving back to aquaculture – whatever the institutional home and linkages of the Aquaculture Section, the section itself is developing as hoped and predicted. Aquaculture

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<sup>9</sup> There are however exceptions, with some SPC member countries having separate government institutional arrangements for managing tuna fisheries and coastal fisheries...

itself can be said to be finally “here to stay” in the Pacific – and certain aquaculture systems have reached commercial “critical mass” in several countries. The time for willy nilly promotion in a seemingly never-ending attempt to get culture systems established is coming to an end, and the private sector is likely to drive any further development in most places. The main task now, as with fisheries, is management – in this case the need for governments to point future aquaculture development down the paths that are likely to lead to fewest problems in the future, to provide them with an enabling environment that encourages best practices, and to start taking more rigorous account of the issues surrounding, for example, the inter-island transport of live aquatic animals.

### **3.4 Regional Maritime Programme**

This paper will not dwell on the future of the RMP, since the SPC response to the RMP review will be presented at the Executive Meeting immediately preceding the retreat.

Suffice to say that, as with fisheries and aquaculture production, the use of the ocean for transport of goods is not likely to reduce in importance over the next decade. The main question is how far national capacity is likely to develop in addressing issues which are currently handled at the regional level, and how much efficiency the region will gain by continuing to maintain certain services at the regional level, either because they are too specialized for small countries to maintain within their own economies, or because they are truly international in scope.

Also, the transboundary aspects of the maritime field are well served by a comparatively efficient international organization – the IMO. The RMP, from its initial base at the Forum Secretariat, and now SPC, has made significant measurable progress over the years. Pacific Island countries have been driven by the need to come up to ever-increasing international standards, and the RMP has been a seminal force in assisting them to do so. The task of actually keeping them at this level is still a significant one, and there are also many new challenges, some of them driven by new circumstances, but most of them conveyed through ever-increasing regulatory requirements and standards if Pacific Island ships and seafarers are to continue to take part in international commerce. The single issue of helping the regional maritime sector address the hugely increased security fears of big-country ports would alone make a significant work-programme, but there are many more. Can these issues now be addressed at the national level? Is international assistance sufficient, or will regional support be needed? Experience strongly suggests that many Pacific Island maritime authorities will not make the international grade without at least some regional coordination and support.

And is there, as we are beginning to see in oceanic fisheries, the possibility of getting financial support from industry to provide certain regional-level support functions? In fisheries it has been a major effort to get even the beginnings of a user-pays regional arrangement in place – the direct income from tuna fishery access treaties is desperately needed by developing countries, and very little has been turned around to support the general work of FFA, let alone SPC fisheries work (apart from that component of national income that goes into the assessed contribution). More recently, the regional register and the VMS register have brought income into FFA, but this essentially only covers the cost of administering these registries and not the broader tuna fisheries management functions of the

agency which still come largely from aid. But under the new tuna commission we are seeing the possibility of actually getting some user-based financial support for scientific information generation. Are there prospects of user-pays funding for other regional services such as the maritime programme, or will this need to await SPC island member countries graduating into fully “developed” countries?

#### **4. Afterthought**

The RMP provides one major example to other SPC programmes, by clearly illustrating the increasing effect that outside forces and the development of international standards are having on the region, particularly in its communication and commerce with the rest of the world. As well as standards for shipping, we are looking at standards for the prevention of human disease transmission, animal health and plant protection, standards for the quality of food exports, even expected standards of governance can be tied to aid, whilst under the ambit of other agencies, particularly the Forum Secretariat, the region faces international standards for offshore banking, aviation, and all of the multitude of standards set by the World Trade Organisation. How far does CROP need to be geared towards helping the region address these international standards, and how much needs to be left to countries, or the international standard-setting authorities themselves? Indeed, how much can the region itself *influence*, or have a say in the setting of international standards? What sort of international voice and lobbying power can Pacific Island countries develop by acting as a unit, to try and prevent being unfairly disadvantaged by decisions taken by big countries in international fora where they currently have little voice?

For the SPC fisheries programmes, this is not such a major issue as it is for the sectors covered by other SPC programmes, indeed fisheries is a field where this region actually sets a few standards itself, particularly in fisheries management. This however may not last for much longer as the attention of the rest of the world begins to turn more and more to the ocean, and the big guns start firing. To come back to the starting point of this paper, the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy process may prove to be crucial in helping the region to maintain a say in the international agenda.

*(Note: this paper is the personal view of one person, provided purely for the purpose of stimulating discussion within the SPC Executive, and does not point a definite way forward for SPC or the region, and does not necessarily reflect the consensus views either of SPC staff or SPC member country representatives.)*

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