

Scaling up Tonga special management areas through community-to-community exchange

A special management area (SMA) is a locally managed marine protected area. In the Kingdom of Tonga, The Fisheries Management Act (2002) enables communities to set up SMAs to control fishing activities and create resource management rights for areas adjacent to their village. These communities take the leading role in managing their coastal fisheries resources with assistance from the Fisheries Division. To enhance Tonga's SMA programme, which is designed to implement SMAs throughout the country, the Ministry of Fisheries organised a three-day national workshop in Neiafu, Vavau with the support of partner organisations.^{1,2}



Hon Semisi Taelangi Fakahau, Minister of Agriculture, Forestry, Food and Fisheries (front row, fourth from left), with representatives from the Government of Tonga. He was honored by communities and partner organisations for his presence and active involvement during the three-day meeting. (image: Céline Muron, SPC)

A workshop to share knowledge and experiences

The workshop took place in Neiafu, Vava'u, from 30 April to 2 May 2019, and brought together around 150 participants from existing SMA communities, interested communities, and relevant stakeholders from government, non-governmental organisations, and funding partners.

One of the key objectives of the workshop was to provide local communities with a chance to share lessons learned

in implementing an SMA and broader fisheries management measures.

Establishing SMAs

Fishing in the Kingdom of Tonga has historically been open access, with all Tongans having equal access to coastal fishery resources. Open access fishing encourages the harvesting of as much as possible, as fast as possible and, therefore, often leads to a lack of fishers' involvement in marine resources and habitat management (Petelo et al. 1995). In Tonga, it

¹ The national SMA workshop, organised by Tonga's Ministry of Fisheries, was supported by the following partner organisations: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Sea; Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation (MORDI); the Pacific Community under the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership programme; the Vava'u Environmental Protection Association; and the WAITT Institute.

² The PEUMP (Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership) programme is funded by the European Union and the Government of Sweden. For more information: <https://fame1.spc.int/fr/projets/peump>

has triggered increasing concerns over the depletion of local fisheries resources, degraded marine habitats, and an absence of adequate actions to address climate change consequences. In the mid-1990s, it was considered that coastal communities in Tonga should be granted legal powers to manage fisheries in their nearby coastal areas. As a result, in 2002, Tonga's Fisheries Management Act was amended to allow local communities to manage their nearby marine areas through the establishment of SMAs, and thus the Ministry of Fisheries launched the SMA programme. Four years after the amendment of the Fisheries Act, the first SMA was established at 'O'ua in the Ha'apai group. To date, 40 SMAs have been established throughout Tonga.

community about the issue. If the establishment of an SMA is granted, the Ministry of Fisheries will assist the community in developing a management plan.

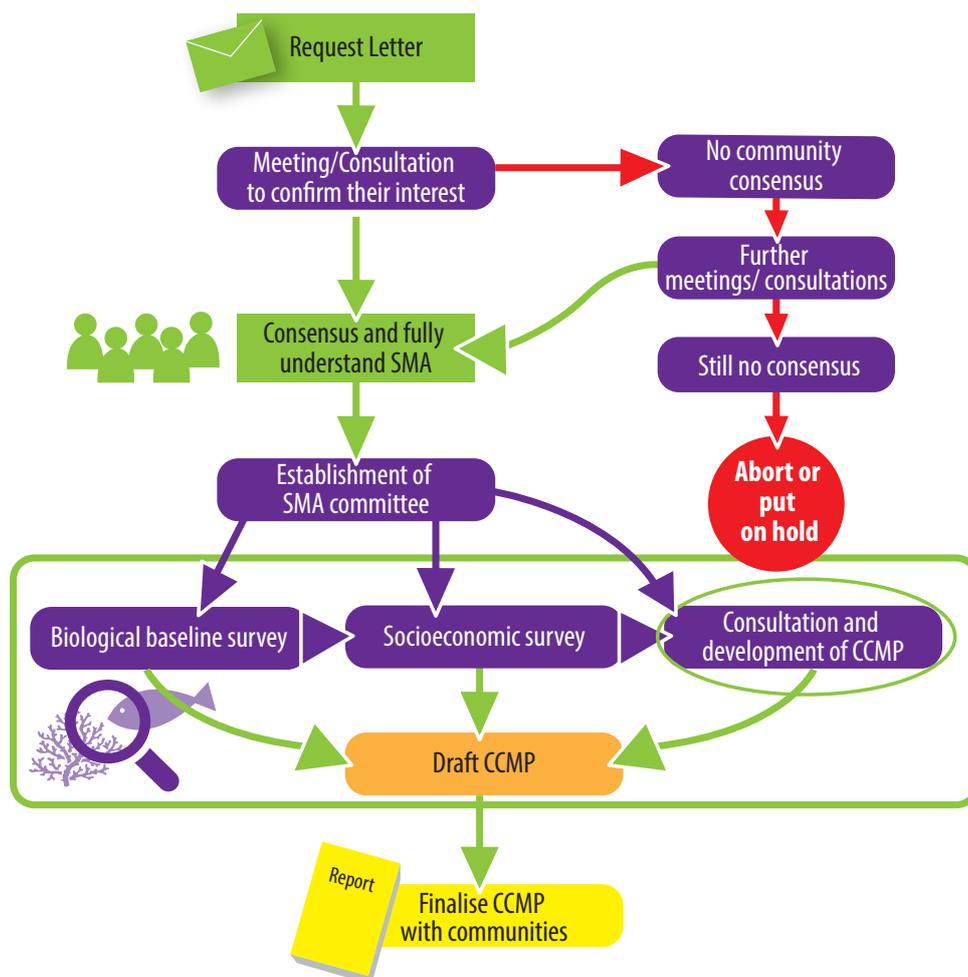
Why are SMAs unique?

As with other community-based management tools in the Pacific Islands region, SMAs aim mainly at restricting access to fishing grounds for varying periods, setting up catch sizes and quotas, and regulating fishing methods. What makes SMAs unique in the region is that they are only open to registered community members; and, if there is a reserve area within an SMA, then the reserve is closed to everybody, including registered community members. SMA committees can seize equipment and report breaches to the government, which will, in turn, prosecute.

SMA process

Communities interested in establishing an SMA need to submit a formal request to the Ministry of Fisheries, which then assesses whether there is a large consensus within the

Table 1 describes the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved in SMAs governance.



Process followed to set up an SMA and develop a coastal community management plan (CCMP).

Table 1. Governance of a special management area as a community-based management tool.³

Lead stakeholder	Role of government	Management committee (name/composition/role)	Legal framework
Communities	<p>Assessment of community interest</p> <p>Technical support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate management planning process - Assess resources (baseline surveys and monitoring) - Provide regulatory and legal advice <p>Seek funding for community</p>	<p>Name: Coastal community management committee (CCMC)</p> <p>Composition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chairperson (elected by the community) - Town officer- District officer - 2 representatives among fishers - 2 representatives among women - 2 representatives among youth - 1 representative from the Ministry of Fisheries <p>Role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a participatory management plan - Assist with its implementation - Maintain registers of fishers and vessels allowed to fish in SMA - Enforcement 	<p>SMA's are established by the 2002 Fisheries Act.</p> <p>Local rules are legalized (similar process to the one used for Samoan by-laws) since the 2009 Fisheries Coastal Communities Regulations.</p>

General fishing conditions for SMA's

In Tonga, the following conditions apply to fishing in an SMA:

- Only fishers and fishing vessels listed in the fishers register and fishing vessel register of an SMA are authorised to fish in that SMA. Any other person or vessel owner not listed on either register may apply for a fishing permit from the SMA Coastal Community Management Committee.
- No person shall harvest any marine organism for the aquarium industry – this includes hard corals, soft corals, small invertebrates and aquarium fish.

The following priority needs were highlighted during the workshop:

- Awareness of the process of establishing an SMA.
- Establishing alternative livelihoods to support an SMA, including both fisheries and non-fisheries (e.g. agriculture) alternatives.
- Effective enforcement strategy that allows cases of breaching of SMA rules to be well accepted in court. There are needs for capacity building for an enforcement committee on the proper approach to handling poachers and collecting sufficient evidence.

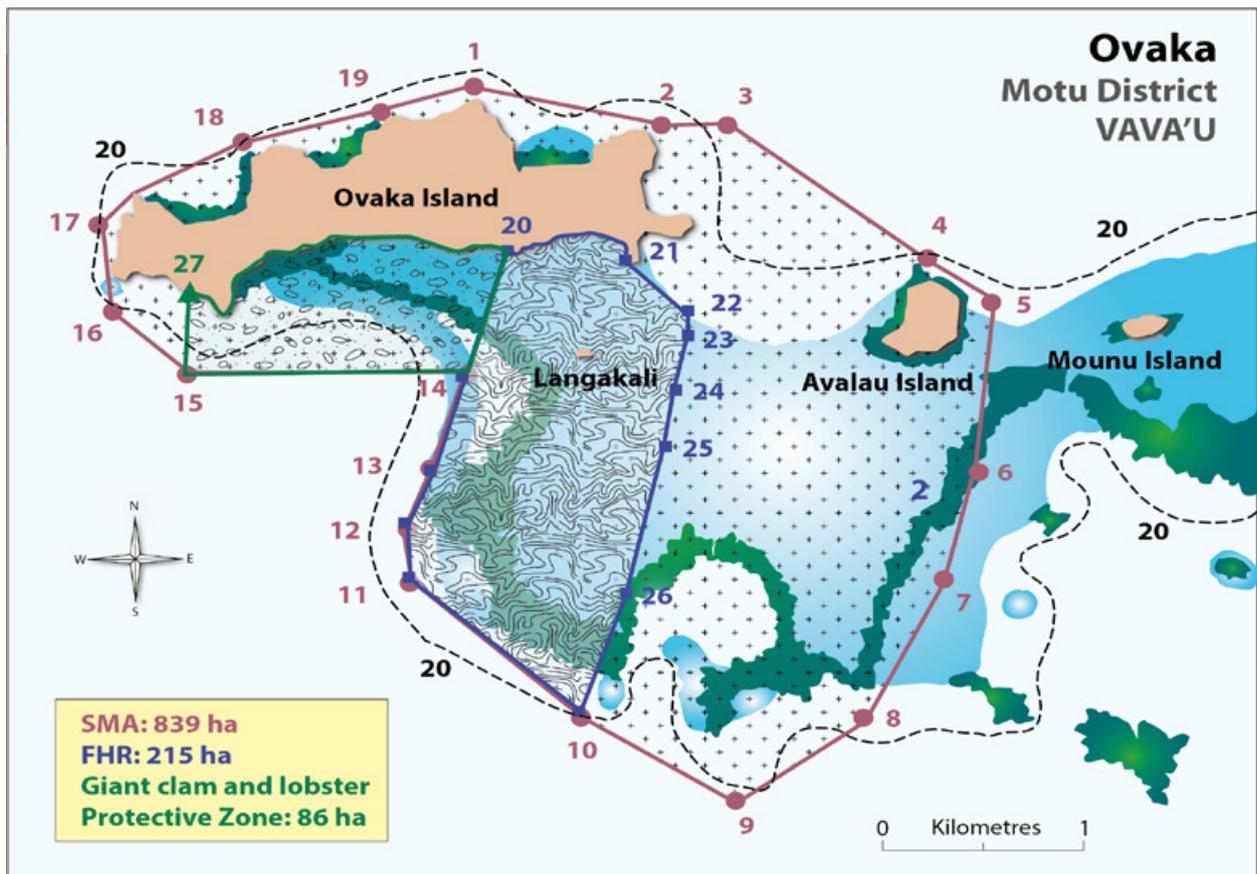
- Clear line of communication between the enforcement committee and relevant enforcement agencies; this should also clearly define the roles of community, Ministry of Fisheries, police and magistrates when it comes to monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement.
- Familiarisation of enforcement agencies with SMA regulations; this will assist in building strong cases in court.
- Enforcement equipment to assist with enforcement committees, such as binoculars, cameras, boats.

The Fiji Locally Managed Marine Network

Thanks to the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (PEUMP) programme, the three-day workshop also provided an opportunity for a Fiji community representative to share his experiences, lessons learned and good practices on broader community-based fisheries management issues implemented in his country.

As explained by Kiniviliane Buruavatu from the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area Network (FLMMA), the network brings together public and private partners and associations to support local communities in managing their natural resources and developing sustainable subsistence. Since the network was set up in the 1990s, over 400 villages have been involved, accounting for 71% of Fiji's coastal villages, and 79% of coastal fisheries are actively managed.

³ Source: https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/CCES/INTEGRE/Regional/Rapport_atelier_regional_peches_cotieres_DEF.pdf



Ovaka SMA map. The fish habitat reserve (FHR) is a permanent no-take area. In the protective zone (green), it is forbidden to collect giant clams and lobsters.

Buruavatu shared his experience in working with communities in his district in Fiji.

Community resource monitoring

Local communities were trained in how to monitor their marine resources. With the help of partner organisations, data were collected, analysed and presented to local communities. Among the challenges faced in this approach include: a turnover of youths or members trained in the villages, and monitoring data equipment getting misplaced or damaged. A refresher training after six to eight months is costly but necessary to keep engagement and maintain interest.

Community empowerment

Community empowerment through participatory approaches, awareness building and community training has been the main activity in engaging communities in resource management. When engaging communities, it is important to consider the existing governance structures (in the village or district). Carrying out a scoping exercise is a good way for the organisation working in the area to gauge not only the natural resources component, but also broader aspects such as livelihoods and governance.

Community monitoring, compliance and enforcement

Communities have been empowered to monitor and enforce management rules related to coastal fisheries through fish wardens. One of the lessons learned is that it is hard for community members to police one another.

Reference and further reading

- Gillett M.N. 2010. Success of special management areas in Tonga. SPC Fisheries Newsletter 130:27–30.
- Petelo A., Matoto S. and Gillett R. 1995. The case for community-based fisheries management in Tonga. Background paper #61.SPC/FFA workshop on the management of Pacific Island inshore fisheries in the South Pacific. Noumea, New Caledonia, 26 June–7 July 1995.

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Nenisi Kava, Coastal Community Management Committee member, Tufuvai SMA

‘I have learned a lot from this field trip. I have listened to the chief of Ovaka SMA. Now, when it is high tide, the Ovaka community sees more mullets than it has in years.’



Lisiate Teulilo, Town Officer, Tofoa

‘I have learned more information on how to establish SMAs as well as the benefits the communities will have from them. This is the future for our country. Having this type of meeting allows us reaching out to the communities from the youngsters to the elders.’

For more information

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A field trip to their SMA was organised by Ovaka community members. (image: Céline Muron, SPC)

