



Women in fisheries profiles

Loise Erikha Erekalu: A young guardian for fisheries compliance in Solomon Islands

Mark Nicholson¹ and Loise Erekalu²

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Loise Erikha Erekalu, hailing from Sulagwalu Village, North Malaita, Malaita Province in Solomon Islands, is a Senior Fisheries Compliance Officer under the Offshore Division at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. Employed since 2016, Loise is dedicated to ensuring the effective management and sustainable use of marine resources. In addition to her professional role, she actively engages in volleyball with friends and colleagues, and oversees the youth ministry at her church.

Loise's role is extensively operational and encompasses a wide range of responsibilities. She verifies and validates catch log sheets and landing documents to support the process of the European Union illegal unreported and unregulated (IUU) catch certification documentation. She provides support to the National Observer Programme and Port Sampling Programme, and assists the Competent Authority in certifying fishing documents. Loise is also responsible for implementing the compliance annual work plan and strategy, ensuring high-quality, error-free data production, and supervising fish offloading at Honiara Port. Additionally, she leads case management for both inshore and offshore cases, handling infringements and investigations.

Her interest in fisheries was sparked during her studies, particularly when doing a unit on fish stock health in the Pacific. Concerns about overfishing, climate change, and marine pollution motivated her to pursue a career in fisheries compliance, with the aim of protecting the livelihoods of her community and the region. Her academic background in marine science provided her with a theoretical foundation, which she now applies practically in her day-to-day responsibilities, bridging the gap between theory and practice in fisheries management.

Working in fisheries compliance presents a unique set of challenges and rewards. Loise often finds herself working in hazardous conditions and remote locations, with limited resources and funding, and coordinating enforcement actions across multiple jurisdictions. Combatting corruption and governance issues also presents a significant obstacle. Despite these challenges, the rewards are substantial. Loise takes pride in protecting marine resources for future generations and enforcing fisheries regulations to promote sustainable practices. Her work provides her with a deep sense of professional fulfilment as she makes tangible contributions to environmental conservation and public safety.

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One of the more memorable initiatives Loise has been involved in was addressing the European Union's "Yellow Card", which was issued to Solomon Islands in 2014. Seeking to reconcile this problem, a laborious process ensued. Loise was recruited alongside 15 other officers to reinforce the Ministry of Fisheries' compliance capabilities. Their collective efforts led to the lifting of the Yellow Card in 2017, underscoring the importance of effective monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCS&E) in the fisheries sector. This rectification was a significant achievement for Solomon Islands, acknowledging its efforts in combating IUU fishing.

Loise's motivation to specialise in MCS&E stems from her passion for marine conservation, her commitment to combating IUU activities, and her desire to protect the livelihoods of coastal communities. Her work is driven by a deep sense of duty to enforce regulations and prevent activities that could harm marine environments and local economies. Despite the challenges, she remains motivated by reflecting on the broader goals of her work and seeking opportunities for professional development. Key moments, such as advice from her late father, and inspiration from mentors like Mark Nicolson and Allan Aba, have reinforced her commitment to this field.

Obtaining a Certificate IV in Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Compliance has been instrumental in Loise's career, providing her with essential skills and knowledge in fisheries compliance. Key takeaways include understanding her legal powers, identifying offences and penalties, and mastering the process of market inspections. These skills have directly impacted her effectiveness in her role, enabling her to conduct thorough inspections, lead operations, and manage incidents proficiently. She applies these lessons daily, ensuring that she maintains meticulous records, leads with confidence, and enforces fisheries regulations accurately.

Loise emphasises the importance of knowing one's powers, maintaining contemporaneous and detailed notebooks, and being well-versed in fisheries laws and regulations. She encourages her 2023 cohort to focus on time management, teamwork and continuous learning. Reflecting on her time with the 2023 cohort, Loise underscores the importance of time management, knowing why you are in your role, and being equipped with the right knowledge and application of MCS&E processes. She advises the present cohort to stay engaged, be open-minded, and seek out opportunities for professional development.

Looking ahead, Loise believes that advancements in technology, such as satellite monitoring, drones, big data analytics, and artificial intelligence, will revolutionise MCS&E efforts. These tools will enable more efficient and cost-effective monitoring of fishing activities, improved detection of illegal vessels, and enhanced data analysis for evidence-based decision-making. She also foresees greater collaboration among governments, organisations, and the private sector in addressing IUU fishing and strengthening MCS&E capacity. Strengthening legal frameworks and governance structures will be crucial for combating IUU fishing effectively, ensuring that fisheries management remains robust and adaptive to emerging challenges.

Loise has a message to her contemporaries, especially her 2023 Certificate IV cohort: *"Hope all is well with each of you. You are indeed some of the most experienced professionals I have met, each passionate about marine resources. Although we come from different islands, we are united by one ocean. Keep enforcing the regulations but always know your powers. I hope our paths cross again in the future."*

Loise Erikha Ereka's journey in fisheries compliance is marked by her dedication, resilience, and passion for marine conservation. Her early contributions to the field, from addressing IUU fishing to leading compliance initiatives, highlight the importance of effective fisheries management for the sustainability of marine resources and the livelihoods dependent on them. Her story serves as an inspiration to her colleagues and future cohorts, emphasising the value of continuous learning, professional development, and unwavering commitment to protecting our oceans.

