

Fisheries and aquaculture stakeholders from French Pacific overseas countries and territories work together

About 30 participants, including representatives of institutions in New Caledonia, French Polynesia and Wallis and Futuna; the Pacific Community (SPC) Regional Project for Sustainable Ecosystem Management (PROTEGE) team; and thematic-area specialists gathered in Wallis and Futuna from 18 to 22 November 2019 for the first PROTEGE Regional Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Workshop. One of PROTEGE's goals is to manage reef and lagoon resources – both locally and regionally – in a more sustainable and integrated manner suited to both island economies and climate change. PROTEGE is an integrated project aimed at reducing human and natural systems' vulnerability to climate change by building adaptation capacity and resilience. It is funded by the 11th European Development Fund for four overseas countries and territories: French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and Pitcairn.

A single crew going in the same direction to a common destination...

For participants of this first Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Workshop, committing to a regional cooperation approach was like everyone taking the same boat. It also meant focusing on personal exchanges between professionals and with local stakeholders on Wallis and Futuna to better understand the wider context of the situation and better grasp the realities in the field.

A powerful symbol of those aspirations was Uvea's last traditional ocean-going canoe, which took workshop participants to the small offshore island of Nukulaelae.

Participants were able to talk with the village chief and island inhabitants about forming an alliance for jointly managing the environment and resources. Such opportunities allowed a discussion about innovative initiatives to unite communities with regard to management issues, without concealing the difficulties of the task, and presenting other possible solutions.

A socially and environmentally responsible workshop

PROTEGE is particularly careful to ensure that project activities are committed to social and environmental responsibility. Organisers and participants took care to respect the islanders' customs and habits. The lavelua, or king, of Uvea and traditional leaders welcomed the delegation on their arrival with a kava ceremony. During the ceremony, traditional leaders learned about the workshop's objectives and shared islanders' needs and questions about climate change, and the status of their marine resources. Customary authorities, the French administration, elected officials, fishers and environmental associations also took active part in several work sessions.

All lunches were prepared by local women's groups from Uvea's various districts. These meals were prepared solely with local products and served on natural or renewable materials such as leaves or gourdes. On site, participants limited the number of printed copies and cut down on travel time through ride-sharing.

Spotlight on workshop objectives and outcomes

Initial efforts between the OCTs helped identify four expected outcomes for the project's Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture theme:

- Aquaculture techniques that are sustainably integrated into natural settings and suited to island economies are trialled and implemented at pilot scales and then transferred to the rest of the Pacific.
- Participatory management and integrated planning of exploited fisheries resources are continued and strengthened.
- Fisheries and aquaculture products are developed as part of a sustainable development approach.
- Cooperation among OCTs, OCTs and ACP countries is strengthened and made sustainable through operational, coordination and support mechanisms.

A regional launch and strengthening workshop was planned so that the operational implementation of activities was carried out to accomplish these four outcomes starting in late 2019.



Boat trip for workshop participants on the last traditional ocea-going canoe in Uvea. A powerful symbol of cooperation, sharing and tradition. (image: Matthieu Juncker, SPC)

The workshop's goal was to meet three objectives:

- ◆ sharing information and obtaining feedback on previous, current and planned activities in each territory;
- ◆ strengthening regional cooperation with, as a prerequisite, the territories' being familiar with each other's activities and specific issues; and
- ◆ making tangible progress in implementing the regional components of PROTEGE's activities.

All topics from the Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture theme were addressed, and the crucial role played by climate change in coastal fisheries and aquaculture in the medium term were highlighted. Other topics that were raised included joint management of marine resources, which was discussed with government representatives, along with information about the status of exploited fisheries stocks, setting up coastal fisheries observatories, low-tech aquaculture techniques, and mitigating the impacts of aquaculture and seafood processing.

Even though OCTs had their own separate issues and problems, they consistently highlighted the advantage of having a regional approach to coastal fisheries and aquaculture, something that was still largely lacking in the region. PROTEGE offers an opportunity for OCTs to form partner-

ships with each other, other Pacific Island countries, and existing programmes and organisations such as the Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership, and the Locally Managed Marine Areas network.

Although the workshop's objectives were met, this event merely marks the beginning of a collaborative effort spanning several geographical levels and including grassroots organisations through to regional government administrations. This work will be implemented in 2020.

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