

## Enhancing aquatic biosecurity in French Polynesia: A step on the pathway to sustainable development

*French Polynesia's Biosecurity Office was formed in June 2017 when the Food Quality and Veterinary Division (QAAV) was separated from the Rural Development Department and merged with Plant Protection. This completely independent authority is now continuing QAAV's efforts to minimise the risks of an introduction, spread and establishment of pests, pathogens and invasive exotic species into French Polynesia.*

Since then, much has been achieved in the field of aquatic biosecurity, with due regard for the territory's high level of aquatic biodiversity, the need to avoid the introduction of invasive aquatic species and pathogens, and the importance of protecting the fisheries and aquaculture sectors, whose importance to the territory is growing.

The Pacific Community began working with French Polynesia's biosecurity authority in 2017, leading to the first French Polynesia Workshop on Aquatic Biosecurity in Papeete in September of that year.

Various government departments attended the workshop, including the Biosecurity Department, Marine and Mining Resources Department, as well as private-sector aquaculture operators, senior researchers in aquatic animal health and aquaculture, and local representatives.

The workshop's main objective was to assess French Polynesia's current aquatic biosecurity situation in terms of human and financial resources, disease management and diagnosis capacity. The meeting also identified key weaknesses where swift action and/or improvements are needed to optimise aquatic biosecurity protocols in the territory.

Opening this workshop on biosecurity in French Polynesia, the Minister for Primary Resource Development, Tearii Alpha, said: "At a time when population pressure is steadily driving global fish consumption upwards, just as resources are shrinking, aquaculture has become vital."

Initiated by SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division (SPC-FAME), and represented by Ruth Garcia, in collaboration with the Biosecurity and Marine and Mining Resources departments, the workshop has led to the adaptation and implementation of the "Sustainable Pacific Aquaculture Development for Food Security and Economic Growth" programme in French Polynesia.

Following the workshop, and in order to meet the objectives set, an aquatic biosecurity steering committee was created, headed by the Biosecurity Department and composed of the Biosecurity, Marine and Mining Resources and Environment departments, private-sector aquaculture operators, and researchers. The goal is to foster discussions and develop the tools needed to implement a national aquatic biosecurity plan.

The committee has already met three times since October 2017, with some excellent results in three core performance areas:

1. Developing biosecurity best practices at the farm level
2. Assessing and updating existing legislation
3. Combining efforts and resources to diagnose the main diseases affecting aquatic animals.

As this programme continues, SPC-FAME will support French Polynesian authorities by providing key data to inform decisions on the management and development of their aquatic resources, and helping them build the tools and capacities required to implement those decisions. For aquatic biosecurity, this involves three aspects: aquatic animal health management, trade in live aquatic organisms, and food safety.

The implementation of an aquatic biosecurity strategy will impact a range of issues such as export health status and certification, animal and plant quarantine protocols, and requirements for importing aquatic animals and related products.

When it comes to aquatic biosecurity, the priorities for French Polynesia are protecting the health and biodiversity of aquatic ecosystems, facilitating the introduction of new aquatic production systems, making food resources and export activities sustainable, strengthening capacities to engage in fair trade, and protecting and capitalising on the territory's pristine environment.

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