

First workshop on harvest strategies for improved fisheries management

Staff members of the Oceanic Fisheries Programme of the Pacific Community (SPC) – Robert Scott, Graham Pilling and Finlay Scott, accompanied by Chris Reid from the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) – recently gave a two-day national workshop on the 'harvest strategy approach' to fisheries management in Tarawa, Kiribati.

Fisheries managers are required to make decisions that juggle multiple, sometimes conflicting, objectives such as maintaining stock sustainability while also improving economic performance. The harvest strategy approach attempts to improve fisheries management by ensuring that year to year, management of the fishery supports the achievement of long-term fishery objectives. In 2014, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) agreed to establish a harvest strategy for key fisheries and stocks in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO).¹

An important component of the harvest strategy approach is stakeholder engagement, which involves talking to WCPFC members to explain the process of developing a harvest strategy as well as gathering relevant information from them that will guide the process. Because the harvest strategy will influence fisheries management at a national level, it is essential that stakeholders have the freedom to discuss country-specific interests. To help with this, dedicated in-country workshops are planned in order to explain and discuss the harvest strategy approach in detail and how it relates to the specific interests of the country.

The first of these dedicated national workshops was given in Tarawa, Kiribati on 24 and 25 July 2018, and organised with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (MFMRD). The workshop was as informal as possible and questions and free discussions were actively encouraged. The group responded to this and kept up high levels of energy and concentration throughout the two days.

Day one of the workshop was open to all government departments. This meant that people that would not otherwise be present at international fisheries meetings could be involved. This was important because successful fisheries management crosses many different sectors. As well as MFMRD, participants were from the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agricultural Development and the Ministry of Information, Communication, Transport and Tourism Development. MFMRD gave an interesting talk on Kiribati fisheries to set the context, and the main concepts of the harvest strategy approach were introduced. The discussion focused on the higher level, broad-scale objectives for the future development of commercial fishing

operations within Kiribati. Group exercises to identify and prioritise key objectives for Kiribati fisheries prompted lively discussions. The intention was not to set objectives for Kiribati, but to help understand how national objectives might feed into a harvest strategy approach undertaken at the broader WCPFC level.

Day two of the workshop was an MFMRD-focused question-and-answer session that covered the harvest strategy approach in more detail. The day was deliberately less structured than the first and led to very productive discussions about the different elements of a harvest strategy and how they relate to Kiribati fisheries. There were additional discussions on the anticipated timeframe of the process and what issues remain to be addressed. The interactive nature of discussions meant that participants could engage with SPC and FFA staff members without having to adhere to a formal structure or endure a long series of presentations.

The organisers greatly enjoyed running the workshop and learned a lot from the participants, and would like to thank them for their continued energy throughout the two days and for provoking some stimulating discussions. The aim is to continue these workshops in as many WCPFC member countries as time and budget allows.

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¹ See article by Robert Scott, p. 4 of this issue.