

## Outcomes of the second SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries

*The Second Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF-2)<sup>1</sup> was held at the Pacific Community (SPC) headquarters in Noumea from 12 to 14 November 2018. With funding from the Australian Government, European Union and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, over 58 participants<sup>2</sup> from national fisheries agencies of SPC member countries and territories, non-governmental and civil society organisations, partners of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific and other institutions, discussed and addressed some of the main issues affecting coastal fisheries in support of better resource management, equitable access to resources, and the safety of fishers.*

The Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF) – which focuses on science, management and capacity building – was revived in order to: 1) fill the need for a regional technical meeting on coastal fisheries; and 2) bring together coastal fisheries scientists, managers and technical experts to discuss important technical, management and scientific gaps and challenges. It supports the implementation of the ‘New Song for Coastal Fisheries – Pathways to Change’<sup>3</sup> and the ‘Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries,’<sup>4</sup> as well as assisting with providing much-needed information for reporting to Leaders under the annual ‘Coastal Fisheries Report Card.’<sup>5</sup>

The format of RTMCF was designed to maximise input through group discussions and plenary sessions. SPC views the RTMCF as essential for longer-term planning, and is of considerable assistance to other agencies, regional non-governmental and civil society organisations, and donors interested in national and regional coastal fisheries issues and sustainable development.

Funding permitting, SPC intends to continue to hold the RTMCF annually so that its Action Plan can feed into the SPC Heads of Fisheries Meetings. To ensure the RTMCF meets members’ needs and expectations, SPC conducted a participant feedback survey at the end of the meeting. The main feedback indicated that delegates rated highly (4.39 out of 5) on the relevance of the meeting to their work.<sup>6</sup>



Participants to the second SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries, SPC headquarters, Noumea New Caledonia, 12–14 November 2018.

<sup>1</sup> RTMCF-2 documents and presentations are available from: <http://www.spc.int/fame/en/meetings/241>

<sup>2</sup> 28 as representatives from 18 member countries, and 30 as partners from development or non-governmental and civil society organisations.

<sup>3</sup> <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b8hvs>

<sup>4</sup> <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/xnc9f>

<sup>5</sup> [http://coastfish.spc.int/index.php?option=com\\_content&Itemid=30&cid=467](http://coastfish.spc.int/index.php?option=com_content&Itemid=30&cid=467)

<sup>6</sup> <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/y6kse>

## RTMCF-2 Action Plan

The following constitutes the agreed Action Plan from RTMCF-2 for SPC, member countries and territories, and collaborating stakeholders.<sup>7</sup>

The agenda for RTMCF-2 was developed in consultation with countries, administrations and non-state actors through the Coastal Fisheries Working Group (CFWG) process. Key issues identified to be addressed at RTMCF-2 include: 1) progress on the RTMCF-1 Action Plan<sup>8</sup>; 2) gender and human rights-based approaches in coastal fisheries and aquaculture; 3) safety at sea; 4) managing sea cucumber fisheries; and 5) identification of issues and priorities for the next RTMCF meeting.

### Progress on addressing the RTMCF-1 Action Plan

- **The meeting recognised** the progress made in coastal fisheries governance at the regional, national and local level since the 2015 publication of 'A New Song for Coastal Fisheries – Pathways to Change: The Noumea Strategy',<sup>3</sup> which emphasises:
- stronger and more coordinated new regional arrangements, such as the establishment of the annual RTMCF event itself, which now provides for coastal fisheries issues to be discussed at all levels – from officials to ministerial and Pacific Island Forum Leaders;
- an increase in adoption at the country level of stronger institutional arrangements in coastal fisheries; for example, institutional restructures and policy and legislation reviews by governments and administrations; and
- increased engagement in coastal fisheries management at the community and local level.

**The meeting advocated** that, notwithstanding this progress, effort should be made to address some significant limitations and gaps in data that constrain the region's ability to report progress against several of the output areas of the Report Card in coastal fisheries, which is made annually to ministers and Pacific Island Forum Leaders under the new regional coastal fisheries governance arrangements.

**The meeting noted with appreciation** the comments by Vanuatu about the efficacy of Vatu-ika fish aggregation devices (FADs), and their offer to share with other Pacific Island countries and territories their knowledge and experience in the deployment of Vatu-ika FADs in coastal waters.

**The meeting acknowledged** the perspectives provided by civil society organisation representatives, who highlighted a need to:

- establish formal statutory mechanisms for fisher and fishing community participation, dialogue and input into the formulation of coastal fisheries priorities, policy and legislation;
- develop strategies, approaches and tools to mainstream gender and social inclusion into coastal fisheries planning, management and governance;
- ensure transparency and accountability of government agencies and decision-making processes; and
- increase government budgets for coastal fisheries, with special emphasis on community-based resource management.

**The meeting noted** that more Pacific Island countries are conducting market surveys in addition to collecting catch and effort landing data for coastal fisheries management, and **recommended that** a number of issues be addressed, such as:

- the separation of enforcement and research (survey) roles of fisheries officers;
- bias in market data vs actual landings;
- absence of central locations where fish are sold;
- inconvenience to vendors of data collection;
- the need for standardised statistical methods to collect data;
- appropriate tools that can feed into a central system for the standardised collection and storage of data; and
- increased capacity and training in collection, storage and analysis of fisheries data.

**The meeting recommended** the acquisition and use of length data for target species in coastal fisheries management, while mindful that data for other parameters are also needed for coastal fisheries management (such as size at maturity).

**The meeting also recommended** the sharing of data with other countries, subject to data use agreements, and data aggregation to protect the privacy of survey respondents and locations of vulnerable fishing resources.

<sup>7</sup> Collaborating stakeholders in coastal fisheries include development partners, research and educational institutions, civil society and non-state actors.

<sup>8</sup> <http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/oize9>

**The meeting expressed interest** in a coastal fisheries law, policies and regulations database for reasons of information and comparison purposes between jurisdictions. However, the **meeting requested** more information about the practicalities of utilising such a database, and **recommended** that it be user-friendly and include a legal analysis of the application context of the documents and regulations.

**The meeting noted** with interest the results of social research presented by civil society organisations, which highlighted challenging perceptions about coastal fisheries management processes in selected countries, and the information they reveal about the need to further strengthen meaningful consultation and dialogue at the community level.

## Gender and human rights-based approaches

**The meeting recognised** that a people-centred approach to coastal fisheries:

- derives from SPC's commitment to the defence of human rights and promotion of gender equality and social inclusion, to ensure that the needs of the most vulnerable are at the forefront of SPC's work;
- has two main components: a rights-based component, and a gender equality and social inclusion component;
- offers a conceptual framework to promote and encourage the pursuit of initiatives to ensure the attainment of equitable outcomes through the progressive realisation of rights, which then resonates with the key guiding principles reflected in the current governance framework for coastal fisheries under the New Song; and
- will leverage the achievement of developmental goals framed under the New Song, such as the improvement of food security and livelihood rural development.

**The meeting highlighted** the need for:

- consistency across the use of terminologies when applying a people-centred approach in coastal fisheries;
- ongoing education and awareness at all levels on gender and human rights dimensions relating to coastal fisheries work; and
- research and gender-disaggregated data analysis to inform policy and programmatic interventions.

**The meeting strongly encouraged** SPC and member countries to work with development partners to secure additional support for applying a people-centred approach to coastal fisheries.

## Saving lives: Safety at sea

**The meeting took note** of the reported success stories about lives saved at sea, which are directly attributable to relatively inexpensive regional initiatives in sea safety such as the Safety Grab Bags promoted by SPC that include a personal locator beacon.

**The meeting recommended** expanded and longer-term sea safety initiatives, with better coordination that spans other marine sectors and agencies (such as island councils) in addition to fisheries authorities. Elements of future regional safety-at-sea work should include the creation of a Small-boat Safety Officer position, further procurement and distribution of Safety Grab Bags, provision of small boat safety training using a Train-the-Trainer approach, knowledge products in a range of languages, development of sea accident data collection systems at the national level to monitor incidents, and the transfer of useful technologies and initiatives from other regions such as the Caribbean.

The meeting **proposed** that sea safety capacity development be an integral part of post-cyclone recovery efforts for coastal fishing communities in impacted areas.

## Managing sea cucumber fisheries

**The meeting reaffirmed** the high importance of sea cucumber fisheries to the region, **emphasised** the need to reverse the decline in sea cucumber stocks, and **noted** the lack of examples at the national level demonstrating successful management of sea cucumber resources.

**The meeting recommended** an assessment of approaches and management options to maximise the economic benefits and social values for SPC members of sea cucumber fisheries (e.g. auctions, one-desk selling).

**The meeting acknowledged** its support for SPC's work to provide members with advice and capacity building in legislation and monitoring, control and surveillance for managing sea cucumber fisheries, and **recommended** that this work be ongoing.

**The meeting noted** that political interference in the governance of sea cucumber fisheries represents a major hurdle to effective management of this very important fishery.

**The meeting proposed** that SPC raise the issue of governance, transparency and accountability with Pacific Islands Forum Leaders.

**The meeting urged** that the best possible science-based information and advice be provided to decision-makers who make visible the implications of their management decisions upon the sustainability of sea cucumber resources.

SPC, its members, and other stakeholders are **encouraged** to fully utilise the opportunities afforded by the newly evolving regional institutional arrangements for coastal fisheries, in which fisheries ministers and Pacific Islands Forum Leaders now annually consider coastal fisheries issues including sea cucumbers.

The meeting further **advocated** that science-based information about environmental impacts of sea cucumber depletion be reviewed and disseminated to increase awareness and modify behaviour of fishers and communities engaged in sea cucumber fisheries.

**The meeting recognised** the importance of social inclusion for the effective management of sea cucumber fisheries, and **urged** continued efforts to ensure meaningful participation in policy or management processes by disadvantaged or marginalised groups, including women and youth.

**The meeting considered** the rights vs responsibilities of fishers and exporters to gain access to sea cucumber fisheries resources, and **advocated** that access be limited to those in compliance with management measures. To this end, it is **recommended** that criteria be developed for access, and that intelligence be shared between governments and administrations about the track records of those operating across multiple jurisdictions.

**The meeting advocated** that alternative livelihoods (e.g. FADs, aquaculture, terrestrial economic activities) be considered to offset any impacts on the food security and livelihood opportunities of people and communities caused by the introduction of sea cucumber fisheries management measures.

**The meeting noted** the call by Vanuatu for a review of survey methods in sea cucumber fisheries, and a review of sea cucumber survey data and training activities, in order to address scientific needs (e.g. stock status such as biomass estimates, stock assessment methods) to underpin management.

The meeting **encouraged** representatives from national fisheries agencies to liaise with the national agency or council responsible to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species to formulate a national position about the proposed listing of sea cucumber species.

## Other issues, and priorities for the next RTMCF meeting

### *Aquaculture and aquatic biosecurity*

**The meeting recognised** the increasing importance of the role and contribution that sustainable aquaculture is making in the region, either toward national fish production or as an alternative livelihood to fishing activity, and **encouraged** SPC to continue to provide capacity building and advice to members in aquaculture and aquatic biosecurity.

### *Future RTMCF meetings*

**SPC members agreed** that future RTMCF meetings will be chaired by members, rather than by SPC, on an annual rotating basis.

**The meeting agreed** that future meetings will be more than three days in duration, subject to the agenda and the possibility of back-to-back meetings, and supported that the meeting format will consider multiple topics in coastal fisheries. Each session will be at least one day long, with more time allocated for group discussions. Participants will be given advance notice of topics and any relevant materials to be considered. SPC will determine the most cost-effective venue to hold future RTMCF meetings.

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### **For more information:**

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