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**DRAFT LIVE REEF FISH PACIFIC REGIONAL STRATEGY:
A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH**

By the Secretariat of the Pacific Community
and the Nature Conservancy
Asia-Pacific Coastal & Marine Program

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Paper prepared by the Secretariat
and
The Nature Conservancy Asia-Pacific Coastal & Marine Program

Background

There is an increasing awareness within the Pacific Community region of the potential for negative impacts as a result of uncontrolled or inappropriately managed live reef fish (LRF) export operations. These impacts have been documented for a number of our Southeast Asian neighbor countries, and are beginning to be encountered within this region.

There are currently two different types of fishery exporting live marine organisms from the Pacific Community region. The recent expansion of the live *food-fish* fishery into this region is being driven by the increasing demand for live reef fish—especially in Hong Kong, Taiwan and southern China—and the diminishing supply of target fish from Southeast Asian waters due to over-exploitation and habitat degradation. The longer-standing demand for *aquarium fish* (and related items, such as live coral and “live rock”) comes mostly from the United States of America, Europe and Japan.

Despite the management problems associated with the LRF trade, there is the potential for “adding value” to the region’s reef fish resources *if* the resource is sustainably exploited and exported in good condition to the respective markets. However, for these fisheries to be sustainably developed, it will require careful and separate management and strict enforcement to alleviate any likely negative impacts. Several countries in this region have experience of rapidly-expanding export commodity fisheries and the problems that can result from the fact that these commercial initiatives usually develop far more quickly than governments can acquire the knowledge and experience necessary to guide exploitation of new resources into sustainable channels.

It appears that in many of the Pacific countries where LRF operators are becoming established, or attempting to become established, there is a lack of information at both the decision-making levels and also at the community levels concerning the potential impacts of these fisheries. Given the lack of need in the past, and the largely community-based nature of the management of subsistence fisheries, rarely are there government management strategies in place to effectively licence and manage these specific export fisheries. In addition, most countries do not have the necessary resources, financial or otherwise, to raise awareness and to strictly enforce any regulations of policies in these fisheries.

At the current time there are a number of regional and international organizations and agencies working on LRF related issues in both Asia and the Pacific. Although there are already some collaborative efforts, most focus on the situation in Asia, and have yet to focus on the Pacific islands region. Within this region it is obvious that no one agency or

organization has the capacity to adequately address all the issues arising from the LRF trade, and so collaboration between concerned agencies/organizations will be essential for success. This document sets out a draft strategy to address the LRF trade related issues within the Pacific islands region through a collaborative approach.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Marine Resources Division is offering to act as the focal point for this strategy. SPC is a regional organisation directed by, and responsible to, its member Governments, and specialises in practical, hands-on assistance, advice and training for the benefit of Pacific Islanders. The Marine Resources Division works through governments, addressing the needs of fisheries departments, communities and the private sector alike, and already maintains an LRF special interest group network and newsletter, albeit with minimal resources. SPC would maintain the linkages between Pacific Islands and other organisations working within the strategy, help Pacific Islands to share experiences, and generally keep track of developments in the region, as well as using the strategy to help mobilise funding to implement work within its own specialist area of reef fishery resource assessment, sustainable development advice and training.

Purpose

To provide the necessary scientific, policy, and management advice and assistance to Pacific Island governments and communities. To increase awareness of the live reef fish trade (food and aquarium) and associated impacts within key sectors in Pacific island countries. And to develop effective partnerships between organizations and agencies that have related interests and responsibilities to ensure a coordinated approach and to minimize duplication of effort.

Rationale

The overall strategy involves five broad and overlapping components: assessment and information, awareness raising, management and policy assistance, research, and training/technical assistance. It is envisaged that each partner agency/organization would focus on the specific areas, within these broader components, where they have the necessary core competencies, and would work and coordinate with other organizations and agencies that have complementary competencies and mandates.

The aim is to be proactive wherever possible, but also to continue to respond to requests from countries and states already dealing with or just being approached by LRF operators. One underlying assumption with this strategy is that *if* effectively managed and controlled, the LRF trade can be a viable and sustainable fishery for the Pacific region.

Assessment & Information: This component would involve collecting and disseminating information on current LRF trade activities within the region (supporting and complimenting the SPC special interest newsletter); establishing a regional register of LRF operators (companies and vessels); providing information on the market—prices, demand, preferences, etc.; and in conjunction with country agencies (government and non-government), be able to conduct rapid assessments of LRF activities to determine the full extent and nature of the fishery in the area or country.

Awareness: This component would initially focus on two key sectors:

- policy and decision makers at the regional, country and provincial/state levels (e.g. politicians; department heads; national and provincial/state fisheries officers; Foreign Investment Boards; private sectors; etc.); and
- communities/community groups within selected Pacific island countries (e.g. where partners currently have in-country programs, and where the LRF trade is or may become established).

Appropriate materials would be developed for these sectors, and be prepared in such a way as to be usable/transferable to other countries within the Pacific region. Materials for the policy/decision makers would differ in content, style and format from those prepared for local communities.

Management: Awareness raising without providing the necessary strategic, policy and technical assistance is futile. Therefore, another component of the initiative will involve developing the necessary capacity to provide the follow-up assistance at the regional level. It is proposed to establish an appropriate fisheries management position in the SPC Marine Resources Division, as well as providing other effective assistance by accessing expertise from the different partner organizations and agencies. The types of management and policy related assistance will vary depending on the needs and circumstances within the target countries (identified during the assessments), and would be developed and implemented in collaboration with country partners.

Research: There are a number of information gaps concerning issues associated with the LRF trade. These include, but are not limited to: biological and ecological information on the target species; the ecological impacts of cyanide on coral reefs (short-, medium- and long-term impacts); the full extent of the trade; details of the marketing and economic aspects of the trade; details of the social and cultural impacts of the trade; etc. There is a need to develop an overview of the information gaps and set priorities on which research is most urgent, and to ensure facilitation and coordination of the work.

Training and technical assistance: In addition to providing specific assistance with policy and management, there is also a need for practical training. For example, establishing surveillance, enforcement and monitoring programs; cyanide detection in samples; extension/awareness training; and retraining of fishers to use methods that minimize habitat damage.

Partnerships

Whilst the SPC would act as the regional focal point for this LRF strategy, working closely with The Nature Conservancy, the strategy would also tie into broader Asia-Pacific initiatives as well as extension to the specialist services of other regional organisations as appropriate. The International Marinelife Alliance-Philippines (IMA), and the World Resources Institute (WRI) are currently discussing a collaborative approach to the problem both in Asia and the Pacific and would be major partners in terms of experience-sharing. The other regional organisations in the Pacific would also be part of the network and would be invited to collaborate in projects and to take the strategy into account when developing and harmonising their future work-programmes. The listed areas of involvement of these organizations is not

complete, and will evolve and develop with time, but the list is indicative of the types of LRF related activities they are, or might be, involved with.

➤ Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Marine Resources Division (SPC)	Coordination and facilitation between countries and with other partners; information; fisheries management; research; tracking developments.
➤ The Nature Conservancy, Asia-Pacific Coastal/Marine Program (TNC)	Awareness; strategy and management assistance; in-country delivery (at current field sites); facilitation and coordination
➤ *South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)	Uptake of LRF awareness and information into broader environmental programmes
➤ International Marinelife Alliance, Philippines (IMA)	Assessment; cyanide detection; retraining of fishermen; awareness
➤ *South Pacific Forum Secretariat (FS)	Economic policy development (Pacific) and private sector/government policy links
➤ World Resources Institute (WRI)	Policy development (Asia-Pacific)
➤ *University of the South Pacific (USP)	Education, awareness and research
➤ *International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM)	Applied methodological research: assessment, sustainable aquaculture
➤ *South Pacific Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC)	Reef and lagoon mapping and essential habitat definition

*The organisations indicated by an asterisk have not yet had a chance to take part in discussing this recent draft. The intention at this stage is to seek the views of SPC member countries before taking the strategy to the next step of canvassing all potential international collaborators. This part of the strategy will remain flexible.

Any activities in specific countries would be developed and conducted in partnership with relevant government agencies and local non-government and community-based organizations.

Timeframe

The timeframe for this initiative in its present form is envisioned to be three years before needing review and reassessment, however, it is unrealistic to expect partner organizations to cease involvement with this issue after that time— all the above organizations have long-term commitments to the region as well as addressing the LRF trade. At the very least they will continue to be involved in some capacity at the country/site level and also at the international/regional policy level. The responsibility for on-going coordination and assistance is likely to lie with the SPC provided the initiative has functioned well during this time.

Sources of Funds

A number of promising funding options are currently being examined. The concept of a collaborative approach to addressing the LRF issues within the region will be far more attractive to potential donors than the current individual agency/organization approach with its potential for real and perceived duplication and overlap. It is suggested that both a joint proposal be prepared for the core components of the project, and a coordinated package of proposals be submitted to one or more donors, each standing alone in administrative terms, but linked conceptually, and involving a well-defined set of collaborative activities.

Delivery

It is proposed that this strategy be carried out by each partner, using their staff and/or consultants, and focusing on agreed components of the strategy, either individually or in collaboration with other agencies/organizations. SPC would take the lead coordination role once the Coastal Fishery Programme Resource Assessment and Management Section staffing is back up to strength, and delivery would start once funding had been acquired to implement specific activities.

Apart from its general regional inter-agency and inter-country information linkage role, SPC will work primarily with member country fisheries departments to deliver services, primarily in fish and fishing community assessment, training and management advice, but will also be available to the community and private sector as appropriate.

Awareness programmes will be delivered primarily by The Nature Conservancy. In-country delivery will also make use of local partner NGOs and CBOs, where appropriate and available. Country/site awareness campaigns will need to be tailored to the specific circumstances of the location.

Recommendations

The meeting is invited to discuss the concept, and to consider whether or not to endorse this "Live Reef Fish Pacific Regional Strategy" as an aid to coordinating and developing future regional work on the issue. This strategy is not a project proposal in itself, but is rather an "umbrella" framework under which smaller, more directed project proposals can be fitted without fear of duplication or of missing out high priority issues.

If the strategy is so endorsed, the SPC would for its part develop a proposal for the acquisition of funds to support the establishment of a small professional unit within the Reef Resource Assessment and Management Section of the Marine Resources Division, to maintain contacts with member countries on the issue, to further develop information networks, to provide advice and assistance in the assessment and management of existing or proposed LRF fisheries, and to generally maintain linkages within the overall strategy. This proposal would be developed in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy who would coordinate the implementation of the awareness aspects of the strategy.

If there is delay in acquiring funding to implement activities, SPC will continue to implement its regional linkage and information-sharing role under the strategy but would have to rely on infrequent ad-hoc opportunities to implement in-country aspects.