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Outcomes and Agreed Action Plan from the 3rd SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries

The Third Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries is supported
by the Australian Government and implemented by SPC



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1. The Third SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF3) took place at SPC Headquarters in Noumea on 5-8 November 2019. The following constitutes the Outcomes and Agreed Action Plan from the meeting for SPC, member countries and territories, and collaborating partners.
2. The purpose of RTMCF3 is to discuss and address some of the main technical issues affecting coastal fisheries and aquaculture in support of better science-based resource management and equitable access to resources. It links back to the direction set out in *A New Song for Coastal Fisheries – Pathways to Change: The Noumea Strategy* and the *Future of Fisheries: Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries*.
3. The agenda and themes for RTMCF3 were developed in consultation with SPC members and partners, with the specific priority topics having been selected through an online survey of SPC members:
 - Science: New technologies, e-data processes and systems
 - Aquaculture: Implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Aquatic Biosecurity
 - Community-based fisheries: Scaling-up community-based fisheries management
4. The RTMCF3 is the first phase of the new governance framework, information flow and decision-making process for Pacific coastal fisheries and aquaculture, introduced by the 11th Heads of Fisheries (HoF) Meeting (March 2019), endorsed by the Special Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (June 2019) and the 49th Meeting of the Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA, June 2019). The new governance framework is outlined in Information Paper #1.
5. SPC member countries and territories made short presentations covering: the top two highest priorities for both coastal fisheries and aquaculture technical needs; actions taken since RTMCF2; and two to three technical issues or challenges with both coastal fisheries and aquaculture. The most common themes and issues that emerged across two or more members have been summarised in Annex 1.

Update on RTMCF1 and RTMCF2 Action Plans & Informative Initiatives

Coastal fisheries report card and indicators

6. The session highlighted key improvements in the preparation of the Coastal Fisheries Report Cards of 2018 and 2019 as outlined in Information Paper #2. Some gaps, however, still need to be addressed in order to continue to improve the Report Card. SPC members have confirmed their interest in developing national level Coastal Fisheries Report Cards. SPC proposed to prepare a template for national Report Cards. As directed by the Heads of Fisheries, members were requested to confirm nomination of a national focal point with authority to share data with SPC for the report card indicators requiring data from fisheries agencies.

7. The meeting agreed on the template approach to progress and support national level Coastal Fisheries Report Cards as a system for measuring progress of coastal fisheries management. Participants highlighted the need to obtain members' feedback on the template and that national priorities must be taken into account when developing the template. Members will request additional technical support for national level Coastal Fisheries Report Cards, if required. For the regional Coastal Fisheries Report Card, SPC will continue to work to improve data quality and data coverage, and revisit the best approach for aggregating indicators at the regional level.
 - **Action 1** SPC and members agreed to confirm Coastal Fisheries Report Card focal points to ensure all Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) are covered;
 - **Action 2** SPC will circulate a draft national Coastal Fisheries Report Card template to members for their feedback via the Coastal Fisheries Report Card focal points and RTMCF3 member representatives;
 - a. SPC will present a finalised national Coastal Fisheries Report Card template to HoF12 in March 2020 for their input and endorsement.

Updates on RTMCF1 and RTMCF2 Action Plans

8. SPC presented on the progress made on implementing the previous RTMCF Action Plans, which is detailed in Information Paper #3. The presentation focused in particular on recent advances on coastal fisheries and aquaculture data collection and management, including ongoing initiatives on data storage, data dissemination and sharing and overall data governance (Pacific Data Hub). Efforts to simplify data collection are underway in certain PICTs. Further discussions are needed for the establishment of a regional process to develop minimum standards and protocols for data collection.
 - **Action 3** Members request SPC to establish a regional process to develop minimum requirements, standards and protocols for data collection.
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to identify the establishment of this regional process to develop minimum requirements, standards and protocols for data collection as a priority and ensure that adequate funding is made available for its establishment and implementation.
9. SPC presented the EU-funded Regional Project for Sustainable Ecosystem Management (PROTEGE). The project is aimed at strengthening regional cooperation for European Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) in four areas: sustainable livestock activities, Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM), sustainable fishery and aquaculture products, and cooperation platforms.
 - **Action 4** Participants welcomed the possibility of organising technical exchanges between OCTs and other PICTs under PROTEGE and PEUMP. SPC PROTEGE and FAME to examine opportunities to initiate exchanges.
10. Several presentations were given on informative, new or innovative technical initiatives and technologies for coastal fisheries and aquaculture in support of management (all presentations are available on [SPC website](#)). These included:

- The launching of REEFLEX, an online law and policy database to compare coastal fisheries and aquaculture regulations;
 - The implications of Samoa's new trochus fishery for other PICTs;
 - Updates on CITES and sea cucumbers;
 - Aquanetix, the application of online software for farm data collection in Vanuatu;
 - 4FJ and Set Size campaigns in Fiji;
 - The development of animated videos and short training movies for awareness raising; and
 - The efforts towards sustainability of the demersal line fishery in Tonga.
- **Action 5** SPC and members agreed to identify effective ways to include additional subnational legislation and management plans in the REEFLEX database, in collaboration with national legal officers.
- **Action 6** RTMCF recommends that members, where possible, share successful initiatives through presentations at the next RTMCF for the benefit of all other members and that SPC continue to provide similar opportunities during future RTMCFs.

Science – New technologies, e-data processes and systems

11. This session focused on fisheries data, which are essential to underpin the sustainable management of coastal fisheries and aquaculture. The meeting recognised that coastal fisheries generally does not have the same profile among Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) as a contributor toward national GDP, despite its vital importance for food security in communities across the Pacific. Consequently, coastal fisheries data collection is poorly resourced, and there is less management capacity in coastal fisheries than in the oceanic fisheries sector. The region lacks long-term quality data sets in coastal fisheries. Further simplifying existing processes, as set out in RTMCF1 and RTMCF2, will assist in obtaining improved quality data for stock assessments leading to improved fisheries management. The challenge is to ensure that coastal fisheries data collection is standardised and distilled down to the most basic level, whilst also maintaining data quality for informed fisheries management. Information Paper #4 outlines the evolution of fisheries data collection processes and procedures: responding to country needs.
- **Action 7** Building on previous RTMCF Action Plans, SPC was requested to continue working with countries and territories to establish e-data collection systems that can accommodate the various fisheries data types and surveys, including use of e-data systems to improve efficiency and robustness of data collection and dissemination and migrating existing coastal fisheries data into the new e-data systems.
- a. RTMCF requests HoF to continue to support the development by SPC of standardised, centralised databases, tools and approaches for fisheries data as a priority, recognising the need for increased support to SPC to undertake this work in a timely manner.
 - b. RTMCF requests HoF to strongly endorse and designate as a priority, a regional approach to standardised minimum data requirements (e.g. size, weight and reproductive data), developed in response to actions set out in previous RTMCF Action

Plans, which support coastal fisheries management so that monitoring programs can be sustainable and comparable.

- **Action 8** Members request SPC to develop training programmes on the uses of new e-data tools and provide clear training in their use and application. A clear communication strategy on data simplification and its long-term implications for fisheries management is needed.
- **Action 9** Members identified the need for countries to address chronic understaffing of science and fisheries staff to conduct fishery and socio-economic surveys.
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to discuss and agree on a plan to address the capacity limitations, which is limiting effective coastal fisheries data collection, analysis and use in management.
 - b. RTMCF requests HoF to discuss the need for clear and delineated roles for fisheries staff (e.g. the need to separate compliance from science roles).
 - c. RTMCF recognises the problems related to short-term funding arrangements and requests HoF to consider ways to build longevity in funding programmes, through government and donors, for coastal fisheries science and management.
- **Action 10** SPC agreed to work with countries to develop an awareness raising campaign that informs local communities of the context and importance for fisheries monitoring tools (e.g. awareness before surveys).
- **Action 11** SPC agreed to work with countries to increase community involvement in collecting data; Members request SPC to use existing e-data apps for community based reporting and develop associated training for communities to implement community monitoring.
- **Action 12** Members request SPC to develop a policy brief outlining the importance of fisheries data and the contribution of coastal fisheries to GDP, health and well-being for local communities.
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to review, endorse and submit a policy brief outlining the importance of fisheries data and the contribution of coastal fisheries to GDP, health and well-being for local communities, to Ministers for their consideration.
- **Action 13** SPC and members note the need for management strategies to require data input to fisheries management (e.g., make mandatory the reporting of exports of coastal resources from licenced exporters and/or suppliers) and build this into existing e-data tools.

- a. RTMCF requests HoF to ensure that data collection is made mandatory for commercial operators under national legislation and management plans.

Aquaculture – Implementation of the regional action plan on aquatic biosecurity

12. Aquatic biosecurity is the key to improved fish production. It aims at maintaining healthy aquatic organisms, reducing the risks posed by pathogens and invasive species, and meeting food safety standards in seafood products. Attention to aquatic biosecurity improves animal production, safeguards human health, and assists countries and territories to meet their international obligations in terms of trade and access to markets (e.g. New Caledonia is approved for export of uncooked prawns to Australia).
13. Achieving these goals requires political commitment by governments and administrations to the core values of biosecurity. Several different statutory arrangements are in place among PICTs, in terms of the allocation of powers and responsibilities between agencies. Administrative silos, fragmented legislation, and unclear responsibilities can hinder progress in aquatic biosecurity. A draft Regional Action Plan on Aquatic Biosecurity was presented by SPC for consideration and endorsement by RTMCF. Implementation, Monitoring and Control strategies for this plan were developed by RTMCF participants as a set of recommendations. Information Paper #5 outlines the Regional Action Plan on Aquatic Biosecurity – issues and challenges.
 - **Action 14** Members endorse the draft Regional Action Plan on Aquatic Biosecurity.
 - a. RTMCF recommends that HoF endorse the draft Regional Action Plan on Aquatic Biosecurity.
 - **Action 15** Members request SPC to provide technical assistance, resources and capacity-building in aquatic biosecurity planning, implementation and development of protocols.
 - **Action 16** RTMCF encourages PICT governments and administrations to share national Aquatic Biosecurity strategies, legislation, policies and plans, and provide resources in order to capture the benefits of effective biosecurity at the national level.
 - **Action 17** RTMCF requests that technical assistance and capacity building in aquatic biosecurity in the Pacific region shall include actions in support of improved food safety, such as in ciguatera outbreaks, seafood poisoning, and zoonoses from seafood-borne pathogens.

Community-based fisheries – Scaling-up community-based fisheries management

14. CBFM is being implemented in PICTs in line with the *New Song for Coastal Fisheries*, but faces several barriers to scaling up. Currently, it is estimated that 90% of coastal communities in the Pacific Islands region do not have CBFM regimes, despite many PICT governments and administrations having policies in support of CBFM regimes. CBFM regimes are important for food security and livelihoods especially in the context of the increasing human populations across

the Pacific Islands region. These populations are dispersed over fragmented geographies. There are many partner agencies and organisations in the Pacific Islands region supporting CBFM regimes. Information Paper #6 outlines the challenges of scaling-up CBFM in the region.

15. PICTs have made great strides in establishing CBFM in a number of local communities, including the adoption of an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. While these initiatives continue to progress, there is still room for improvement. This session involved sharing experiences, what has and has not worked, success stories and lessons learnt with sustainably implementing and scaling-up of CBFM to ensure a wider impact of the CBFM approaches.
 - **Action 18** Members agree on the need to address existing gaps in legislation in order to support CBFM and enforcement of community management plans;
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to recognise the importance of CBFM and to encourage the adoption of adequate legislation and policies to up-scale CBFM in each country or territory, with the participation of provincial and local governments.
 - **Action 19** Members call for SPC to support further south-south exchange programmes on community-based management, assist with the development of appropriate awareness materials/media including a training toolbox, and facilitate various stakeholders to develop appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes.
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to endorse the development of national programmes to address the need for alternative livelihoods for communities when implementing management strategies that leads to restriction of their catches.
 - **Action 20** RTMCF requests members to clearly identify roles of different stakeholders involved in the establishment of CBFM programmes and ensure allocation of funding to support those programmes.
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to support the clear identification of roles of different stakeholders involved in the establishment of CBFM programmes and ensure allocation of funding to support those programmes.
 - **Action 21** Members call for donor partners to ensure funding flexibility in the implementation of CBFM programmes in order to allow programmes to adapt to stakeholder needs.
 - **Action 22** RTMCF requests members, SPC and partners to prioritise a collaborative, coordinated, gender-sensitive and holistic multi-stakeholder approach to CBFM.
 - **Action 23** RTMCF requests members and partners to prioritise the implementation of CBFM, addressing the need for increased resources for existing CBFM programmes, as well as new CBFM programmes.
 - a. RTMCF requests HoF to support members and partners to prioritise the implementation of CBFM, addressing the need for increased resources for existing CBFM programmes, as well as new CBFM programmes.

- **Action 24** Members request SPC to undertake a review of CBFM experiences in the Pacific region and identify lessons learnt.

Priority, new and emerging coastal fisheries and aquaculture issues and opportunities

16. A presentation by Southern Cross University canvassed a new regional project on “a new era for sea cucumber fisheries”, to be proposed to ACIAR for funding. In close partnership with SPC and other organisations, the project would comprise a regional symposium/workshop to assemble recent lessons learnt from sea cucumber fisheries; individual support to PICTs on technical capacity in management, awareness tools and MCS&E; and monitoring of fisheries performance and a new and modified management regime. The meeting supports the proposal concept to be developed jointly with selected PICTs.
 - **Action 25** The meeting requests SPC to provide an update report to HoF on sea cucumber fisheries management and monitoring.
17. The meeting participants split into small discussion groups to identify priority, new and/or emerging issues and opportunities in coastal fisheries and aquaculture in the region. Points arising from each group were collated and categorised in plenary to identify overall priority areas. Priority issues identified for coastal fisheries related to: livelihoods (fish and non-fish based); increasing political will; coastal fisheries legislation and management; and external environment pressures (climate change, coral bleaching and micro-plastics). Priority issues identified for aquaculture related to: exploring new species; post-harvest value adding; feed and technology/equipment development; improving the enabling environment (legislation and capacity); and sea ranching. Points arising are included as Annex 2. This information will be used to inform SPC and the next RTMCF agenda.
18. Following the RTMCF3, a one-day Workshop on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Enforcement was held. The outcomes of that workshop are provided in Annex 3.

Next RTMCF meeting

19. The next RTMCF meeting will be held in late October or early November 2020 in Noumea.

Annex 1 – Common themes

Session 1 SPC Member Country and Territory Presentations

During the country presentations about coastal fisheries and aquaculture national priorities, the following common themes and issues emerged.

- Fragmented geographies and fragmented policies that hinder outreach, monitoring, data collection, scaling-up of Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM), and awareness efforts.
- Capacity issues in all areas, including technical, stock assessment, data management, MCS, and project feasibility assessment (value chain analysis, commercial viability) skills, and limited access to technical equipment.
- Inadequate technical and budgetary capacity for data collection and analysis to inform management and development of both CF and aquaculture.
- Marketing issues and studies in fisheries and aquaculture products, including market access.
- Need for a more conducive environment for private sector engagement (financing, market information, feasibility assessment) in CF and aquaculture.
- Improved access to aquaculture feeds of sufficient quality and reasonable cost.
- Weak legislative base for CF and aquaculture management and enforcement.
- Issues of jurisdictional coordination between relevant agencies.
- Pressure to diversify fishery products, through post-harvest processing/value-adding, and by adding new species for aquaculture.
- Biosecurity measures should also address food safety and import/export standards issues.
- Community based fisheries management CBFM is highlighted as a continued area for up-scaling that needs more attention and development.
- Sea safety needs to be highlighted and solutions developed.
- Gender balance, climate change, and staff turn-over are cross-cutting issues that to be considered and mainstreamed within these other themes.

Commentary that arose from country interventions in the plenary discussions about the above issues:

- Many of these are long-term issues, and they always will be. Dynamic and evolving fisheries agencies need tools and capacity in order to adapt, by updating and changing technologies, methodologies, and uses of fishery resources to stay current.
- Loss of institutional capacity due to staff turnover is a perennial issue.
- While Session 1 mainly identified “issues” and “constraints”, participants recognise that strategies and actions can be developed to address them. It will be useful to highlight success stories. Impact evaluation techniques applied in other parts of the world can be used to assess program success in addressing these issues among PICTs.
- The importance of supporting the subsistence and food security sectors in both CF and aquaculture needs to be emphasised.

Annex 2 - Brainstorming

Session 6: Priority new and/or emerging issues in the region

Coastal fisheries

Fish-based and non-fish-based livelihoods:

- Innovative new FAD designs to improve upon current models
- Value-adding of fish waste products
- Value-adding and processing, and improved access to seafood products
- Revival of support for fisheries cooperatives within the context of successful CBFM
- Diversification of fisheries (e.g. diamondback squid, small pelagic species, etc.) to reduce the amount of fishing effort on resources under pressure
- Alternative livelihoods in CBFM to include handicrafts

Political will:

- High-level buy-in campaign for decision-makers in coastal fisheries
- Identify and adopt strategies to increase political will in coastal fisheries decision-making
- Lack of political support for coastal fisheries

Legislation, management, and MCS&E:

- Review and develop fit-for-purpose coastal fisheries legislation
- Management plans for key fish species
- MCS and enforcement is a new issue that is a challenge in areas where traditional marine tenure is strong

External environmental issues:

- Management addressing coral bleaching
- Identify and adopt climate change adaptations for coastal fisheries
- Address the micro-plastics issue in seafood

Other:

- Strengthen technical capacity to support coastal fisheries in PICTs
- SPC to advise on setting of annual budgets sufficient to manage coastal fisheries
- Make available updated information on market prices of fish
- Lack of proper infrastructure (offices, labs, fish markets)

Aquaculture

New species for aquaculture:

- Exploration of new species for re-stocking, food security, and livelihoods
- Potential for domestication and culture of new species already present in the region but not yet farmed, under a flexible funding system
- Select species for aquaculture that are resilient to climate change

Enabling environment:

- Review and develop fit-for-purpose aquaculture legislation

- Address the issue of staff turn-over and loss of technical capacity
- Infrastructure and capacity to implement aquaculture projects

Feed development and other inputs:

- Feed development using ingredients present in the region (local sources)
- Develop strategies to improve access by fish farmers and institutions to aquaculture equipment
- Feed formulation know-how and ingredients
- Development of simple, local, low-cost, country-specific and sustainable aqua techniques

Value-adding:

- Value-adding techniques to be adopted for seafood products
- Support to scale-up in post-harvest and value-adding
- Development of new aquaculture products, both edible (e.g. fish fillets) and non-edible

Sea ranching:

- Need for more research on sea cucumber sea ranching
- Prove the cost effectiveness of sea ranching

Awareness and education:

- Awareness and education tools for aquaculture

Annex 3 – Workshop on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Enforcement

1. Coastal fisheries and aquaculture are vital to the livelihoods of many smaller Pacific Island countries, as well as providing a major source of protein. Offshore Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Enforcement (MSC&E) is often given higher priority due to the significant financial gains from access fees and fines for infringements and, consequently, benefits from more resources to ensure compliance. By contrast, coastal fisheries provide far more employment than offshore at a national level, but they need to compete for a limited amount of national resources and often, education, public health and infrastructure take priority. The first challenge faced in the development and implementation of an effective coastal fisheries MCS&E strategy is how to prioritise and raise the profile of this area.
2. Case studies from New Zealand, Kiribati and other Pacific Islands highlighted the necessity to control illegal activity at the initial stage to prevent it becoming a large scale problem. Recognising the significance of these crimes also encourages a compliance culture within the community. Some countries also presented on positive experiences in coastal fisheries and aquaculture surveillance and enforcement.
3. Evidence gathering and correct documentation are fundamental to any successful law enforcement. It is crucial to get the basic details right before confronting larger scale infringements. As a way of assisting fisheries officers to do this, a simplified approach to enforcement for coastal fisheries and aquaculture infringements was proposed for members to discuss. The approach includes a number of actions such as awareness raising and education, ongoing training of authorised officers, adoption of a step-by-step incident interview book for inspections and the use of administrative penalties, such as warnings or spot fines, as well as a database to record coastal fisheries and aquaculture enforcement data and information that could reveal trends in offences over time. Ultimately, it is vital for fishers and enforcement officers to understand the national coastal fisheries and aquaculture legislation and regulations.

Fisheries data and information collection and exchange

- **Workshop Action 1:** The workshop calls for HoF to:
 - a. Consider the establishment of fisheries bodies or services including recognition of community contribution in collecting coastal fisheries and aquaculture information;
 - b. Develop tools to share information and enhance collaboration among government agencies and NGOs within each country or territory; and
 - c. Promote exchanges between countries/territories to share best practices.

Professionalization of the coastal fisheries sector

- **Workshop Action 2:** The workshop requests HoF to take steps to increase the professional profile of both fishers and authorised officers in each country or territory by:
 - a. Creating a statute for small-scale fishers that would ensure social security, sea safety and access to incentives (e.g. tax exemption or other benefits);

- b. Enhancing the visibility of authorised officers through the use of identification badges and distinctive uniforms;
- c. Where possible, enhance the visibility of community wardens as well.

Awareness raising and education

- **Workshop Action 3:** The workshop recommends that HoF promote the use of media and other awareness tools to explain regulations and publicise violations, and include coastal fisheries law and compliance in education curricula.

Simplified enforcement of coastal fisheries and aquaculture regulations

- **Workshop Action 4:** The workshop requests HoF to raise the profile of coastal fisheries and aquaculture MCS&E in each country or territory through any or all of the following, as applicable:
 - a. Training of authorised officers on regulations and case file building for prosecution;
 - b. Use of a step-by-step incident-interview book to facilitate case building;
 - c. Development of a tailored app and database for preparation of case files;
 - d. Adoption of an enforcement policy for coastal fisheries and aquaculture violations;
 - e. Establishment of administrative (or civil) penalties to deal with minor offences, including a demerit point system;
 - f. Review of fisheries by-laws and regulations applicable in each country or territory.

The Workshop on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Monitoring, Control, Surveillance and Enforcement is supported by the Australian and New Zealand Governments and implemented by SPC

