

MFAT-funded Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Governance Project update

In the previous issue of SPC Fisheries Newsletter (#152) we ran an article on the three new staff members who had been recruited by the Pacific Community (SPC) to undertake a project that will address coastal fisheries governance priorities.¹ The project is funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and focuses on strengthening governance structures and processes – specifically legislation, policy and monitoring, control, surveillance and enforcement (MCS&E), which remain weak for coastal fisheries and aquaculture.

The project has now been going for six months and here, we provide an update on what the three staff members, Jason Raubani, Ariella D'Andrea and Ian Freeman, have undertaken and discovered so far along with future directions of the team.

Members of the team have undertaken visits to American Samoa, Fiji, French Polynesia, Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. The focus of work in each country has been slightly different but some general findings are provided below.

Ariella reports that the countries that she has visited generally have fisheries legislation in place but it is often dated or missing key relevant sections for today's coastal fisheries and aquaculture requirements. For example, some countries have regulations that support species size limits and limit the use of certain fishing gear but this is not the case in all countries. In other instances, a new fisheries act has been adopted fairly recently but regulations have not yet been adopted or updated for its implementation. Finally, in some cases provisions concerning enforcement of fisheries legislation need to be reinforced. For example, sanctions for fisheries offences may be too low or difficult to apply in coastal fisheries, or the powers of enforcement officers may not be clearly established.

Since the onset of the project, Ariella has been assisting American Samoa, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Samoa and Tonga in strengthening their coastal fisheries legislation. Requests have generally either focused on the overhaul of coastal fisheries and aquaculture legislation, or on the development of specific regulations such as those concerning the exploitation of sea cucumbers. In September, Ariella has hosted a staff member of the Tongan Ministry of Fisheries for a two-week collaboration focusing on improving and updating Tonga's coastal fisheries legislation.

Jason has been very active in assisting with the development of management plans and policy in Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. He also notes that many members have management plans and policies for coastal fisheries and aquacul-

ture but these are often dated and infrequently used in the day-to-day management of the coastal fisheries resources.

As part of building capacity of member countries, which is an output under the project, Jason recently hosted four attachments from Solomon Islands and Tonga to progress the review, development and finalisation of aquaculture management and development plans for the two respective countries. While the four officers were at SPC headquarters, assistance was also provided on a Seaweed Management Plan, a Baitfish Fishery Management Plan for Solomon Islands, a Sport/ Game Fishing Plan and an Implementation Plan for the newly approved Marine Aquarium Trade Fishery Management Plan for Tonga.

Ian has also found coastal fisheries MCS&E is lacking in most countries with some inspection work of markets and fish vendors being undertaken but very few prosecutions for illegal activity occurring. Ian has been working with New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries (MPI) to develop a three-part course in 'Coastal Fisheries MCS&E Proficiency' and has delivered the first two parts of this course to Vanuatu fisheries officers. As part of this collaborative work, SPC and MPI also undertook a series of stakeholder meetings with a private consultant to conduct a review of coastal fisheries MCS&E in Fiji.

Ian recently hosted two attachments from Vanuatu at SPC and provided assistance and advice on the development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for fish market and vendor inspections along with SOPs for seafood safety inspections. While at SPC, the attendees of the attachments also worked on a series of community awareness and education posters for coastal fisheries that detail size limits for some species and species that are not permitted to be caught.

Christopher Arthur occupies the Junior Professional Officer – Management and Policy position under this MFAT project. While working, he also uses this opportunity to build his capacity in coastal fisheries policy development. He is on a 12-month contract and had been assisting the coastal fisheries team since his arrival to SPC on the devel-

¹ http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/FishNews/152/FishNews152_06_Freeman.pdf

opment of a few policies for Tonga, Vanuatu and Kiribati.

He was also part the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)/MPI/SPC team that organised a fisheries policy development and mentoring workshop for the Te Vaka Moana member countries in late May this year at Auckland. In addition, under the SPC/MPI collaboration, a training workshop on fisheries policies was organised in Solomon Islands, and a consultation workshop for the review and update of coastal fisheries management plans was held in Vanuatu.

As part of the integrated approach where coastal fisheries staff members from different funding sources work together, Navneel Singh, a Junior Professional for the Coastal Fisheries Science team works closely with the MFAT-funded team. Navneel joined SPC in February 2017 and is funded by the Australia Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. He has been working with the Senior Coastal Fisheries Scientist, the Coastal Fisheries Science Officer and the management team, and assisting with in-water surveys, data entry and analysis, and writing technical reports as his primary role. To date, he has worked on the Fiji coastal fisheries and aquaculture implementation plans, done an in-water survey of sea cucumbers in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, an in-water assessment for finfish in Vanuatu for the RESCCUE² project and creel and market survey database training in Kiribati. Navneel's contract will end in February 2018 and he is scheduled to work on projects in Niue and Wallis.

The project team members have a busy schedule for the rest of 2017 with field trips planned in Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Samoa and Vanuatu. However, the team commitments are light so far for 2018, so if you would like to discuss assistance for your coastal fisheries or aquaculture programmes then please contact one of the team members.



Fish sampling at the Apia market, Samoa; reliable data collection is crucial for effective coastal fisheries management (image: A. D'Andrea, SPC).

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² Restoration of Ecosystem Services and Adaptation to Climate Change project.