



15<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting  
20–24 March 2023



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## Outcomes of the Fifteenth SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

*SPC FAME Secretariat*

## Background

1. The 15<sup>th</sup> Pacific Community (SPC) Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meeting was held in Noumea, New Caledonia, from the 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> March 2023. It was an in-person meeting, which allowed all members and observers to travel to SPC Headquarters and participate in person.
2. Twenty-two members participated in the meeting: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.
3. The SPC HoF meeting is an important regional gathering that covers a wide range of interests, for which national fisheries agencies have responsibility, and for which SPC and, in particular, its Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) provides scientific and technical assistance, as well as capacity building support. The meeting plays a unique and critical role in providing strategic guidance to SPC FAME. Through sharing knowledge and best practices, and identifying sustainable management strategies, the SPC HoF meeting helps to ensure the long-term health and productivity of fisheries resources in the Pacific region.
4. The meeting was chaired by Mr Joseph Gestin, the Director of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries in Wallis and Futuna. Mr Gestin's expertise and leadership in the fisheries and agriculture sector provided valuable guidance and contributed to the success of the meeting. His active involvement in the discussions helped to ensure that the participants engaged in productive and meaningful discussions about sustainable management and development of fisheries and aquaculture resources in the region.
5. Dr Stuart Minchin, SPC Director General, opened the meeting by acknowledging the serious threats posed by extreme weather events and climate change to the livelihoods and well-being of people in the Pacific region. The SPC Strategic Plan 2022–2031 prioritises resilience and climate action, with flagship programs focusing on climate change, oceans, food systems, and gender. The meeting agenda addresses critical regional issues and provides support to the heads of fisheries from SPC members with robust science, tools, innovation, and knowledge. The SPC will also continue to find investments and partnerships to support capability-building in the region's fisheries and aquaculture sectors.

## Progress on the outcomes of the 14<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Fisheries Ministers meetings

6. Heads of Fisheries:
  - a) *Reviewed and acknowledged* the progress on the outcomes of the 14<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Fisheries Ministers Meetings and commended SPC FAME for achieving those results within a short implementation timeframe.
  - b) *Noted* the progress made on the outcomes from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting, as outlined in Information paper 1, with a particular focus on the work of SPC FAME in implementing them.

## SPC FAME results reporting against Business Plan 2022–2027

### 7. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Reviewed and noted* results achieved by SPC FAME, especially in the first year of implementation of its SPC FAME business plan 2022-2027 (Working paper 1).
- b) *Noted* the need to focus more on outcome-based reporting and less on outputs-based reporting.
- c) *Noted* the gaps in progress and encouraged SPC FAME and donors to work to address the key gaps. In particular, the need for more resources for:
  - i. work across the Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme;
  - ii. coastal fisheries science and development;
  - iii. implementing the aquaculture strategy;
  - iv. integrated divisional work on fish aggregating devices; and
  - v. electronic monitoring in oceanic fisheries.
- d) *Acknowledged* the updates made to the interactive results dashboard that enables results to be explored by members, donor and business plan objectives.
- e) *Acknowledged* with thanks the support of the range of donors to the work of SPC.

## SPC FAME priorities and emerging work areas for 2023

### 8. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Reviewed and endorsed* the SPC FAME priority work areas for 2023 and the emerging work areas outlined (Working paper 3).
- b) *Requested* SPC FAME take note of the priorities identified during the meeting. In particular, the following work areas and issues were emphasised:
  - i. facilitate sharing of experiences, information and data between members;
  - ii. continue to work to improve the gender balance across SPC FAME;
  - iii. ensure succession planning for key and senior staff;
  - iv. ensure appropriate planning around development of and transition from the oceanic stock assessment software MULTIFAN-CL following retirement of the chief developer;
  - v. expand the Pacific Islands Fisheries Professional programme to include young professionals, including in the area of fisheries development and wider national staff; and
  - vi. enhance the use of online and 'offline' training approaches.
- c) *Requested* SPC FAME strive to provide all members access to all support and training opportunities, despite the constraints of particular donors.
- d) *Requested* SPC FAME to continue ensuring that priorities are adjusted and aligned to both regional and member plans and needs.

## Future arrangements for HoF

9. Heads of Fisheries reached consensus that:
  - a) The meeting should continue to convene annually and in-person.
  - b) The meetings would be conducted in a hybrid format, at least biennially to enhance participation.
  - c) The HoF meeting be rescheduled from March to April each year.
  - d) Meeting duration be tailored to the meeting agenda but should be no more than three days with up to two days of side meetings and/or workshops.
  - e) The focus of HoF should continue to be on regional issues and strategic in nature, ensuring technical issues are assigned to technical meetings.
  - f) SPC should develop the draft agenda in close consultation with members and the previous and incoming Chair and should survey members on possible items to include prior to drafting.
  - g) The HoF meeting keeps the existing format of presentations and break-out group discussions; use break-out groups only as needed, and allow more time for feedback to plenary.
  - h) During meetings, technology should be used to support discussions, but ensure it supports a consensus approach.
  - i) Ensure time is scheduled within the HoF week to allow members and SPC staff to interact and develop processes to ensure this can be achieved efficiently.

## SPC Flagships – Oceans, Gender, Climate Change and Food Systems

10. Heads of Fisheries:
  - a) *Noted* the development of SPC flagship programmes to address common challenges and opportunities facing the region and *welcomed* the intention to integrate capabilities across SPC to serve member needs.
  - b) *Noted* the update on the Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS) and encouraged expansion of approaches to share information with youth, national educational bodies and communities.
  - c) *Noted* SPC is developing an Ocean Flagship to address key ocean issues in the region in line with the 2050 Blue Continent Strategy and SPC 2022-2031 Strategic Plan.
  - d) *Noted and acknowledged the development of SPC's Gender Equality Flagship* that would provide an over-arching framework for action on cross-cutting issue of gender equality.
  - e) *Noted* the importance of supporting gender equality and women's empowerment in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors.
  - f) *Noted* the need to continue to collect comprehensive and reliable national and regional data on fisheries, oceans and gender in the fisheries sector.

11. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted* resilience and climate action are at the heart of SPC's new Strategic Plan 2022-2031 and that SPC is developing a Climate Change Flagship roadmap, which will integrate and strengthen the resources that support SPC's climate actions for members.
- b) *Acknowledged* the Climate Change Flagship request to fisheries officials and their stakeholders for support to further strengthen and shape the flagship's ambitions over the short, medium and long term.
- c) *Noted* the climate change flagship will help mainstream fisheries and aquaculture climate change related impacts, opportunities, and resource needs into SPC's broader efforts to build capability and mobilise climate finance and resources.

12. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted* the update from SPC's Food Systems flagship (Information paper 6), including key global, regional and internal developments.
- b) *Acknowledged* marine ecosystems, fisheries, and aquatic and blue foods are at the centre of Pacific Food Systems, and fundamental for the health and prosperity of Pacific peoples and nations.
- c) *Supported* the integrated approaches to assist members to address food systems challenges and opportunities.
- d) *Highlighted* the opportunity for members to raise the profile of blue foods within the Aquatic/Blue Foods Coalition of the UNFSS.

## Process and timeline for supporting members review of regional policies - *A new song for coastal fisheries* and *Roadmap for sustainable fisheries*

13. In 2022, the Pacific Fisheries Ministers at their 3<sup>rd</sup> Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting in Tarawa, Kiribati, tasked their fisheries officials, supported by SPC and FFA, to review existing regional fisheries policies, including the *New Song for Coastal Fisheries* and the *Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Fisheries* to ensure close alignment with implementation of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.

14. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Discussed* the proposed objectives, scope, process and timeline to review the two regional fisheries policies.
- b) *Noted* that more time was required:
  - i. to work through the details of the review objectives, process and timeline;
  - ii. for SPC to consult further with FFA.
- c) *Agreed* that members would provide any additional feedback to SPC within 3 weeks.
- d) *Agreed* that after the FFC meeting SPC would distribute a revised proposal on the review to members for intersessional consideration.

## Transforming aquaculture in the region through the regional aquaculture strategy

### 15. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted the update* on the next steps in the development of a new regional aquaculture strategy, based on identified medium- and long-term aquaculture needs.
- b) *Confirmed* the revised process for the development of the regional aquaculture strategy.
- c) *Endorsed* the preliminary goals and objectives suggested in the Regional Aquaculture Assessment that will inform consultation with members towards development of a Pacific Regional Aquaculture Strategy.
- d) *Highlighted* the broader opportunities related to restorative aquaculture, as noted within the Regional Aquaculture Assessment.

## Update on the Regional Aquatic Biosecurity Framework

### 16. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted* that the mid-term review of the Regional Aquatic Biosecurity Framework will now progress, having been delayed by COVID-19.
- b) *Noted* the need to nominate national aquatic biosecurity focal points to help facilitate the development of aquatic biosecurity networks.
- c) *Tasked* SPC to work with members to establish the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity Implementation Committee.

## SPC FAME Climate Change activity report

### 17. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted* progress made in the past 12 months to implement SPC FAME's work programmes related to climate change.
- b) *Tasked* SPC FAME to apply a climate change perspective particularly for the most vulnerable members across its work programmes and activities.
- c) *Noted* the progress in enhancing the relevant laboratory facilities at SPC Noumea to support this work and looked forward to the opportunities for national support and developing the capabilities of national scientists.
- d) *Acknowledged* and thanked New Zealand for supporting activities around fisheries and ocean monitoring to support an "advanced warning system" for the impacts of climate change on tuna fisheries.
- e) *Endorsed* the proposed Terms of Reference for the SPC FAME Climate Change Oversight Committee and for Palau to Chair the first meeting of that Committee.

## The Green Climate Fund “Adapting tuna-dependent Pacific Island Communities and economies to climate change”

### 18. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Reiterated* the importance of member-led governance for the GCF project and agreed to a governance structure that clearly separated the role of the accredited entity from that of the executing entity. The executing entity is responsible for project implementation. The role of the accredited entity is to ensure the project implementation adheres to GCF rules and procedures.
- b) *Requested* that SPC FAME provide a clarification document for discussion at or around the FFC officials meeting that provides further information and examples on the six co-finance categories.

## Climate change and fisheries report card dashboard

### 19. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted* the ongoing development of climate and ecosystem indicators and their role to inform discussions under the standing agenda items on climate change at WCPFC meetings.
- b) *Noted* the need for WCPFC to adopt candidate indicators.
- c) *Noted* the development of the climate change and fisheries report card dashboard.

## Outcomes from 5th Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Report and the 2nd Community Based Fisheries Dialogue

### 20. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted with appreciation* the Outcomes and Actions Report from the 5<sup>th</sup> Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCFA5), provided as *Background paper 2a* and outlined in *Working paper 8*.
- b) *Noted with appreciation* the Outcomes and Actions Report from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (CBFD2), provided as *Background paper 2b* and outlined in *Working paper 8*.
- c) *Considered and endorsed* recommendations 14(a), 14(b), 17(a), 17(b), 17(c), 27(a), 27(b), and 27(c) from the RTMCFA5 to HoF15.
- d) *Considered and endorsed* recommendations 35(a), 35(b) and 35(c) from the CBFD2 to HoF15.

## Wider SPC-supported fisheries related initiatives

### 21. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Noted* the establishment of the Pacific Islands Ocean Acidification Centre (Information paper 11) in 2021 and the progress made developing the regional monitoring framework.

- b) *Noted* the Pacific Maritime Zones Status update (Information paper 13) and *acknowledged* the development of the Pacific Maritime Boundaries Dashboard.

## SPC FAME tools

### 22. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Acknowledged* the various tools developed by SPC FAME that enable enhancement and efficiency in supporting members.
- b) *Supported* SPC FAME to continue to invest in innovation and research, that enhance capacity and capability of members in addressing critical issues in data collection and curation, analysis and dissemination.

## Specific Outcomes from HoF to the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Fisheries Ministers' Meeting

### 23. Heads of Fisheries:

- a) *Tasked* SPC FAME to develop a concise brief on key outcomes from the 15<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting for presentation to officials at the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Fisheries Ministers' Meeting.

## Closing

- 24. The Heads of Fisheries adopted the 15<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Outcomes document.
- 25. The meeting was closed by Dr Paula Vivili, Deputy Director General, SPC