

Sustainable development and strategic planning for New Caledonia's aquarium fishery

A targeted fishery for the aquarium trade has been operational in New Caledonia for the past 15 years. However, to date, this fishery has focused mostly on a few species that command high market prices. Following the recent establishment of a new company (AquariumFish NewCaledonia), whose aim is to diversify the existing aquarium trade fishery, local authorities have raised a number of questions.

These questions include:

- What is the best way to ensure that development and diversification of the fishery is conducted in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable fashion?
- What should best practices for collection, holding and packing of targeted species be in order to ensure maximum survival rates at collection and holding facilities, and while travelling, and upon arrival?
- What management measures are needed to optimise the sustainable exploitation of the resource in New Caledonia?

Following a request by the aquaculture and fisheries department of the Southern Province Development Agency (Département de l'aquaculture et des pêches, Direction du Développement Rural Province Sud – DDR) to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) for assistance in the matter, SPC's Coastal Fisheries Programme held a two-day workshop (23–24 November) to address the above questions.

Specifically, the workshop's objectives were to:

- capitalise on SPC's network, particularly Tony Nahacky, a very experienced and knowledgeable collector and industry operator in the region;
- present experiences, lessons learned and challenges encountered in the aquarium trade business at the scale of New Caledonia;
- draft recommendations, in collaboration with all workshop participants, of "next steps" for the aquarium industry in New Caledonia.

To open the workshop, Antoine Teitelbaum, owner of AquariumFish NewCaledonia, gave participants the unique opportunity of a guided tour of his holding facility, and answered questions they had. The remainder of the workshop was held at SPC. Tony Nahacky presented the history of two successful, yet very different, examples of the industry — one from Hawaii, where the trade is industrialised and contributes significantly to the economic returns of the Big Island; and the other from Fiji, where although contributing to the livelihoods of a large number of community members, the trade operates at a much more basic level. Other workshop presentations

included a summary of aquarium fisheries development throughout the Pacific Islands region over the last 10 years (Being Yeeting); an overview of New Caledonia's aquarium fishery (Bernard Fao); the economics of the marine ornamental trade in the Pacific (Michael Sharp); a review of SPC's current and planned aquarium trade programme activities (Colette Wabnitz); and an overview of SPC's ornamentals permit and export database (Frank Magron). A number of short films demonstrating best collection practices and the short documentary feature "The dollar-fish island" by Eric Clua were also shown.

One of the key outputs of the workshop was that local authorities walked away with a better understanding of how the trade operates and some of the challenges faced by the industry in the region. The workshop also highlighted the special context in which the trade operates in New Caledonia. Local authorities indicated that currently, no further funding would be provided to individuals expressing an interest in establishing themselves as aquarium trade operators and that a list of conditions would, in all likelihood, be appended to ornamental fishing licenses, reflecting a number of the recommendations coming out of the workshop. These would need to be discussed in consultation with the relevant authorities before being implemented, but could include for example, limits on the total length and mesh size of nets used; specific catch reporting requirements; the prohibition on damaging habitat while collecting marine ornamentals; and the recommendation to encourage rotation of collection areas and to avoid collection within a certain distance from dive locations.

Local authorities also expressed great interest in obtaining copies of the best practice fact sheets for the marine ornamental industry that are currently being drafted by SPC for the region. Once translated, these fact sheets will also be adapted to fit the needs and specificities of New Caledonia.

For more information:

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