

Samoa's crown-of-thorns clean-up campaign

Source: Adapted from a media release issued by the Samoa Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 27 April 2015.

With technical and funding assistance from the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the German Government, the Samoa Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries joined forces with village fisheries management committees to implement a crown-of-thorns – or *alamea* as it is named locally – clean-up campaign.

The clean-up was carried out as one of the major activities of the SPC/GIZ Coping with Climate Change in the Pacific Island Region (CCCPIR) Programme. The programme addresses and focuses on five important development sectors in the Pacific Island region, namely: land use (agriculture, forestry and land-use planning), fisheries, education, energy and tourism. The SPC/GIZ CCCPIR project supports Pacific Island countries' efforts to increase their resilience and capacity to adapt to the effects of climate change.

Alamea is a large, nocturnal, corallivore starfish, a carnivorous predator that preys on reef coral polyps. Scientific studies have revealed that each *alamea* can consume up to six square metres of living coral reef per year. *Alamea* consumes the microscopic animals that make food for the corals. As a consequence, the coral dies and turns whitish (bleaches) in a week. The *alamea* has been reported responsible for massive coral bleaching in popular coral reef systems, such as the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

The Samoa campaign began on Upolu, in the Falealatai District. From 23–27 March, the seven villages of Sama'ilaualo, Falevai, Matanofo, Matautu, Siufaga, Pata and Samatau were covered. From 7–14 April they worked in Falealili District, covering the eleven villages of Matatufu, Sapōe, Salani, Salesatele, Sapunaoa, Satalo, Malaemalu, Tafatafa, Matavai, Matautu and Saleilua.

The campaign then moved to the island of Savaii. From 19–24 April, the six villages of Asau, Auala, Vaisala, Fagasa, Sataua and Papa in the Asau District were covered. From 4–8 May, the campaign covered the subvillages of Siufaga, Malae, Sapini, Luua and Salimu in the village of Faga.

So far, the campaign has removed over 5,000 juvenile, sub-adult and adult *alamea*, indicating a crown-of-thorns outbreak was taking place in the lagoons and reefs of Samoa. Removal of *alamea* from the reefs minimises the impacts of natural stressors on the marine environment and important habitats.

The campaign also strengthened the partnership with local communities participating in the community-based fisheries management programme. The programme is encouraging the management of fisheries and the marine environment by village communities as resource owners and users, with the Samoa Fisheries Division and partners providing technical and supporting services. Members of the village fisheries management committees from all villages and districts were also on site to spearhead the campaign in their respective villages.

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April 2015 crown-of-thorns collection campaign at Itu-Asau District: Fisheries staff with Vaisala Village Fisheries Management and Advisory Committee representatives...

*... and part of their catch
(Images: Etuati Ropeti)*