



<b>Agenda Item:</b>	4
<b>Paper No:</b>	RFMM4.WP01
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Outcomes of the Sixteenth SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting</b>

**Summary:**

The Pacific Community (SPC) Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meeting was held in-person at the SPC Headquarters in Noumea, New Caledonia, from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The meeting focused on important regional issues related to the management of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, including the impact of climate change and the need to harness the latest innovation and technology to enhance data collection, analysis and utilisation. The main work programmes discussed and endorsed during the meeting were: (1) SPC's crucial role in coordinating and facilitating capacity development for Members 'Observer Programmes, sustained through the Regional Observer Cost-Recovery (ROCR) fund, (2) SPC's work on climate change and its impact on fisheries, the need to develop a coastal fisheries and aquaculture climate change plan, (3) the ongoing regionally critical stock assessments for tuna and associated advice for sustainable management, and, (4) the progress on the review of the Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries and the New Song for Coastal Fisheries. The meeting had spent considerable effort prioritizing the critical work, and on integration of fisheries data collection, analysis and utilisation.

**Recommendations**

Ministers are invited to:

- i. **Note** the outcomes of the 16<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting.

## **Introduction/Background**

1. The Pacific Community (SPC) Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meeting is an annual regional gathering for heads of fisheries, covering a wide range of interests, for which member fisheries agencies have responsibility, and for which the SPC and its Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) division provides scientific and technical assistance, as well as capacity building support. The meeting plays a unique and critical role in providing strategic guidance and direction to SPC FAME. It facilitates sharing of knowledge and best practices as well as identification of sustainable fisheries management strategies. The SPC HoF meeting is instrumental in ensuring the long-term sustainable management of members fisheries and aquaculture resources in the Blue Pacific Continent.
2. The 16th SPC HoF meeting was held in-person in Noumea, New Caledonia, from the 22nd to 26th April 2024, and attended by members and partners. Twenty-three members participated: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna.
3. The meeting was chaired by Mr Archie Soliai, the Director of the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources in American Samoa.

## **16<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting outcomes**

4. The Heads of Fisheries discussed critical regional issues concerning the management of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture. The Outcomes of the 16th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting<sup>1</sup> identified key actions to guide the SPC's work programmes in 2024 and beyond.
5. The key issues discussed included the impact of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture, ecosystem and beyond, the need to harness the latest innovation and technology to enhance data collection and monitoring and control and surveillance and the necessary investment required to support these critical work areas.
6. The Heads of Fisheries considered the future focus of the Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme (CFAP), recognised the critical challenges faced by CFAP in terms of funding, staffing and the high number of member requests and regional priorities, and noted the need to work with donors to significantly increase the funding support for the CFAP, particularly for areas where resources are limited such as fisheries science and fisheries development.
7. The Heads of Fisheries reviewed and noted the positive progress on implementation of members' needs and priorities, including strategic directions provided during 15th SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting and the 4th Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting which guided the SPC FAME work programme for April 2023 to March 2024.
8. The Heads of Fisheries discussed the status and progress of the Regional Aquaculture Strategy (PRAS), in conjunction with the mid-term review of the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity, and the consultation process in which members emphasised the need to include the private sector and civil society representatives.
9. The Heads of Fisheries were also updated on the progress of the review of the Regional Roadmap and the New Song for Coastal Fisheries and directed SPC and FFA to consider the review a highest priority. The need to ensure these policies implement the

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<sup>1</sup> [Outcomes and actions report from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Community-based Fisheries Dialogue.](#)

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2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and consider important sub-regional issues was also highlighted. Further information is in Working paper 10.

10. Gender and social inclusion (GESI) continue to be streamlined across and at the forefront of SPC fisheries and aquaculture work. Heads of Fisheries were updated on the progress of SPC's Gender Equality Flagship, the recent FFA/SPC Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Forum in Solomon Islands and the gender and fisheries research on coastal fisheries and aquaculture in Kiribati.

11. The Heads of Fisheries acknowledged and endorsed the Outcomes and Actions Reports from the 6th Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCFA6) and the 3rd Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (CBFD3)<sup>2</sup>. They also considered and endorsed specific recommendations from both reports to guide their work on sustainable coastal fisheries and aquaculture management in the region.

12. Outcomes from CBFD3 to HOF16 and SPC includes several recommendations regarding community-based fisheries management at the regional and member level. These included an update on the progress for increased support and resourcing to Community-based Fisheries Management, meaningful inclusion and or participation of CSOs in developing and reviewing member regulations and rules, taking into consideration the fishers' need to fish for income and food. Recognition of community and traditional level governance systems in member legal frameworks, and where appropriate encourage member agencies to develop and/or foster strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with civil society groups and networks, towards strengthening CBFM. The CBFD outcomes are provided in Working paper 3.

### **Key issues to be considered:**

#### **Development in tuna fisheries monitoring, member observer programme and E-reporting and monitoring**

13. Observers play a critical role in fisheries management and in regional efforts to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Starting in 2009, the PNA 3rd Implementing Arrangement (IA) and the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission's (WCPFC) Conservation and Management Measure 2008-01 (CMM2008-01) mandated 100% observer coverage on purse seiner vessels and 5% on longliners. This required a substantial increase in the number of observers, from 181 in 2009 to at least 635 by 2012, with over 800 observers active by 2016. SPC coordinates and facilitates capacity development for Members observer programmes through the Regional Observer Cost-Recovery (ROCR) fund.

14. The ROCR was endorsed by FFC94 to provide regional support services to for programme development and infrastructure support to members individually and collectively. The ROCR mechanism is a fee applied through the FFA vessel regional register on behalf of FFA Members since 2017. The uses of the fund were listed in the FFC94 decision and can only be changed by the FFC. SPC and FFA developed a Service Agreement (SA) to access ROCR funds for these specific purposes, ensuring transparency and collaboration, with budgets planned in three-year cycles with input from members via the Regional Observer Co-ordinators Workshop (ROCW).

15. Heads of Fisheries emphasised the need for ongoing technical support for the certification and training of member fisheries observers, highlighting the program's significant role in providing employment opportunities and fostering career development in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> [Outcomes and actions report from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Community-based Fisheries Dialogue](#)

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16. SPC and FFA were directed to develop a longer-term arrangement to ensure efficient administration of the Regional Observer Cost-Recovery (ROCR) mechanism as endorsed by the 94th and the 130th Forum Fisheries Committees, and to ensure that SPC activities that support member observer programmes are adequately funded, and to provide regular reporting of progress to members through e-mail, the first report being due 30th August 2024.

17. The latest advancements in observer monitoring within regional tuna fisheries, particularly the implementation of electronic reporting across all monitoring programs, were presented to Heads of Fisheries. Electronic reporting applications such as 'OnBoard' (e-logsheet reporting), 'OnShore' (e-Port Sampling), and 'OLLO' (e-observer monitoring) are being implemented at the request of various countries, with the number of users increasing.

### **Update on Climate change initiatives**

18. The breadth and depth of SPC's work in climate change continues to be consolidated and integrated into its One SPC climate change flagship. This has enabled SPC to harness collective knowledge and resources, delivering more effective and better-coordinated approaches across the organisation's respective climate change work.

19. Heads of Fisheries were updated on SPC's fisheries activities in climate change and related initiatives in fisheries and ocean monitoring, including the progress of the Pacific Regional Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment.

20. The need to fully understand the impact of climate change is critical when developing adaptation strategies to address these impacts. It was noted that where adaptation strategies are unable to fully address the impacts of climate change, any shortfalls could be mitigated through loss and damage mechanisms and future arrangements to pursue climate justice.

21. Heads of Fisheries stressed the need to document the impacts of climate change on fisheries, with a particular emphasis on those in coastal and nearshore areas, to support the development of evidence-based adaptation strategies and tasked SPC prepare a coastal fisheries and aquaculture climate change plan for consideration by HOF17.

### **Update on regional data - recent developments, data gaps and challenges**

22. The member statistics and fisheries offices play a crucial role in capturing and ensuring accurate fisheries and aquaculture data that support fisheries management, economic planning and inform policies at the member level.

23. The SPC Pacific Data Hub is an integrated platform for sharing data and related resources. This platform aims to facilitate access to a wide range of information, enhancing collaboration and data-driven decision-making across the Pacific region. It provides a centralized repository for various types of data, including fisheries, climate change, health, and socio-economic statistics, supporting sustainable development and informed policymaking.

24. Fisheries, aquaculture, and marine ecosystems-related data are critical for the effective monitoring and assessment of regional and member fisheries resources. These data are essential for scientific analyses and stock assessments of tuna and other stocks, including evaluation of the implications of climate change for the region's resources, providing the foundation for advice that informs decisions to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of relevant stocks.

25. The SPC FAME data governance policy outlines how SPC handles fisheries, aquaculture, and marine ecosystems-related data on behalf of its members, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the confidentiality and appropriate use of fisheries data

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gathered at the member level. SPC continues to ensure the policy is updated to ensure relevant data fields for members are reflected. Heads of Fisheries endorsed the addition of the three data fields: FAD sonar, cannery receipts, and transshipment data classified as high risk and non-public domain, within the Appendix A of the policy.

26. The challenges in capturing the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture within standard calculations of member accounts were highlighted by members and SPC Statistic for Development Division (SDD) was urged to consider these critical resource areas when performing wider evaluations of member economies.

27. SPC 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. This includes the integration of its oceanic and coastal fisheries data management systems to support members access their relevant data set and to scale up the use of e-tools and facilitate knowledge exchange among countries.

28. SPC's also continue to expand its efforts in the digital area to support digital transformation of its members. A notable initiative is Digital Earth Pacific, an operational earth observation system that uses decades of satellite data to show how local environments are changing over time. This includes changes to landcover and land use to better target humanitarian assistance after disasters, mapping of changing coastlines caused by climate change or storm events, and understanding how mangrove growth has changed without having to map this manually. Heads of Fisheries noted the potential benefit of the tool for resource and ecosystem monitoring of relevance to coastal and oceanic fisheries and aquaculture; assessment, development and management of marine and coastal resources; and tracking the impacts of climate change.

### **Recommendations:**

29. Ministers are invited to note the outcomes of the 16th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting.