

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

2nd SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

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**Marine Resources Division
Information Section
(Activities carried out in 2000)**

Fisheries Information Section
Marine Resources Division
Secretariat of the Pacific Community
Noumea, New Caledonia



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Introduction

The Secretariat of the Pacific Community first implemented fisheries information services in 1989 in order to improve the information processing and dissemination capacities of its Marine Resources Division. The Information Section co-ordinates provision of information, on a regular or on-demand basis, to fisheries experts, development officers, extension agents, planners, management personnel and other individuals involved in fisheries development and management on a national, regional or international level. Many of these people work in remote areas where communications are difficult, thereby limiting their access to technical fisheries advice and information.

The number of information requests is steadily growing. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community puts great importance on fisheries information and fisheries scientists in our region are becoming more aware of the services the Information Section can offer. Information is mainly disseminated by means of Special Interest Groups. This is now a well-known concept and our SIG newsletters, which are published in both French and English version, are greatly appreciated within the region due to the quantity and quality of the information they contain.

A more detailed report on the Information Section's activities in 2000 is given thereafter.

Organisational layout

During 1998, the Marine Resources Division was restructured. The Information Section, which functions more as a service than as a fixed-term project, is now directly responsible to Division Management. This change was justified by the Section's cross-cutting activities, developed over the past two years.

As of June 2001, the Section's staff includes:

- Fisheries Information Adviser: Jean-Paul Gaudechoux (France)
- Fisheries Information Officer: Aymeric Desurmont (France)
- Fisheries Associate: James Uan (Kiribati)
- Project Assistant: Erina Avazeri (France)

Financial support

The Fisheries Information Project has been funded by the Government of France since April 1989. Up until October 1994, the Project only covered the post of Fisheries Information Adviser. However a very significant increase in funding to the Section has allowed hiring of an Administrative Assistant in October 1994, a Fisheries Associate (a post shared with the Training Section) in February 1995, and a Fisheries Information Officer in March 1995.

In 2000, the Information Section benefited from XB funding from the following donors: France, Australia (through AusAID) and the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Council

The European Union funding planned as part of SPRCARF (South Pacific Region Comparative Assessment of Reef Fisheries) was not available in 2000 but is supposed to be in 2001.

Information section

Objective

The Section's objective, as set out in the 1999-2003 Corporate Plan, is as follows:

Promote information transfer in countries and territories through dissemination of current fishery information and maintenance of technical networks

To do this, the Section has implemented two work strategies:

- Provision of information (Special Interest Groups Information Bulletins, Fisheries Newsletters, pamphlets, posters), on a regular or on-demand basis, to fisheries experts, development officers, extension agents, planners, management personnel and other individuals involved in fisheries development and management on a national, regional or international level.
- Assistance to national fisheries services (support in systematically organising collections at the local or national level, creating small libraries, providing on-site training for staff, arranging consultancies and many other forms of assistance so as to resolve, where needed, occasional problems of a more specific nature).

Principal expected outcomes

The most recent fisheries technical meetings, which were held in Noumea, expressed their satisfaction with the work conducted by the Fisheries Information Section over the past few years. Once again, member countries and territories clearly expressed their desire to see the Information Section become more involved in:

- a. Information campaigns for the general public, fishermen and village communities (assistance in producing posters on commercial fish or shellfish species, information bulletins and educational leaflets);
- b. publication of annual reports or booklets on local regulations for the fisheries services of member countries and territories;
- c. training for fishery service agents in information collection and distribution.

For that reason, these lines of work have been given priority in 2001.

Information section 2000 activities report

Regional activities

Special Interest Groups

One of the Section's main activities since 1990 has been to create Special Interest Group networks on fisheries-related topics of particular interest to fisheries experts in the Pacific. These Special Interest Groups resulted from the Coastal Fisheries Resources Workshop organised by SPC in March 1988, during which the participants expressed their concerns about the lack of measures to foster contact and exchange of information among fisheries experts in the region. During creation of the new Special Interest Group networks, these experts were consulted by means of a questionnaire so as to identify the principle areas of interest regionally. By the end of December 2000, more than 1,500 responses to the questionnaire had been received, 70% from within the Pacific, and the Section continues to receive responses on a regular basis at the rate of about 15 per month.

Responses to the survey have more clearly identified those areas of interest to the largest number of fisheries experts in the region, i.e. those for which a Special Interest Group (SIGs) should be formed. At several different SPC fisheries conferences and workshops, recommendations were also made about the creation of SIGs. The following nine SIGs were formed in response to these directives: *Beche-de-Mer, Pearl Oyster, Ciguatera, Trochus, Traditional Marine Resource Management and Knowledge, Fisheries Education and Training, Fish Aggregating Devices, Live Reef Fish, and Women in Fisheries.*

The Ciguatera Special Interest Group has been put on hold and no information bulletins have been published over the past several years as there has not been many new developments in research on the toxic agent responsible for this illness. However, the Section has directed its effort towards prevention through publication of a poster and leaflet. The poster was published in partnership with the French Institute of Research for Development (IRD). The leaflet will be published in collaboration with the Louis Malarde Institute in Papeete. Funding has been obtained from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Pacific Fund, to produce these support materials.

The SPC is assisting the Special Interest Groups by disseminating, about twice yearly, technical papers along with information and correspondence on subjects of particular interest to each group's specialists. This is mainly accomplished by means of information bulletins designed for each group. These bulletins mainly consist of articles submitted by the group's member-experts, which are compiled by an outside specialist chosen to serve as publication manager due to his/her experience in the region and area of expertise. Using technical co-ordinators as publication managers guarantees that the quality of information provided remains at a high level and corresponds to the needs of the region. To date about 150 bulletins have been published in both English and French.

Following a recommendation from the first Heads of Fisheries Conference in 1999, a Special Interest Group on Aquaculture was supposed to be created last year. This was not possible as SPC was not able to identify the resources needed to set up an Aquaculture Programme within the Marine Resources Division until the end of 2000. This XB funding has now made it possible to hire an Aquaculture Adviser, one of whose tasks will be to collaborate with the Information Section on the creation of a Aquaculture Special Interest Group. This new network will serve as a clearinghouse for information on aquaculture.

SPC Fisheries Newsletter

The SPC Fisheries Newsletter is published quarterly in both English and French and provides pertinent information about SPC Fisheries Programme activities and general developments in the sector, while at the same time supplying technical information about certain aspects of fishing. Among recently published articles can be cited:

- Australian boat builders move to Eritrea, Africa
- Use of acoustic methods to characterise the tuna environment and estimate tuna biomass without reference to catch data
- Fisheries Development Section explores new technologies on a Tongan longline boat F/V *Kylie*
- New skills for fishers in the Bank Islands
- Live reef fish trade meeting and visit to Hong Kong
- The 2000 SPC-Nelson Polytechnic practical fishing module

The *Fisheries Newsletter* thus provides a very effective means for the regular exchange of information and expertise among fisheries service officers in the region. Generally, the *Fisheries Newsletter* has about 40 pages and is very widely distributed throughout the region (i.e. more than 800 addresses on the mailing list including 100 in French-speaking territories).

SPC Fisheries Address Book

A well-known and very highly-regarded address book entitled Useful Addresses to Pacific Islands Fisheries Personnel used to be published annually as part of a regional FAO/UNPD programme to support fisheries in the Pacific. When the activities of this programme ceased in 1992, the South Pacific Commission decided to continue publication of the address book. The 2000 and 2001 editions were widely distributed throughout the region. In addition to more than 1300 addresses listed for some 50 countries and territories, each chapter corresponding to an island country or territory includes a map and the surface area of the country or territory's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The 2001 version of the address book is now available for download from the Marine Resources Division's Web site. (<http://www.spc.int/coastfish>)

Website

An Internet website (<http://www.spc.int/coastfish/news>) was created in 1998. This site was greatly expanded in 2000 and it is now possible to read and download all the documents that the Information Section has produced over the past few years. These documents are available in "pdf", "html" and "MS Word" formats in both French and English. The Information Section also assisted the other programmes to set up their own Web sites. A discussion list on live reef fish for export and the aquarium trade was created to allow those involved in this sector to communicate in real time.

Pacific Island Marine Resources Information System (PIMRIS)

The Information Section is one of the ways (the other being the SPC Library) by which the SPC participates in the Pacific Island Marine Resources Information System (PIMRIS). This is a collaborative activity begun in 1988 in which the SPC works with the Forum Fisheries Agency, the University of the South Pacific, the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC), and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). The agencies involved in PIMRIS provide various services to their members, in particular bibliographic or documentary research, information services on an as-needed basis, assistance in both collecting information and compiling a computerised bibliographic database (called Moana) about marine resources in the Pacific.

The SPC participates in these activities through its Fisheries Information Section whose Adviser usually represents the SPO on the PIMRIS Steering Committee. Since the SPC is a bilingual organisation, its membership in PIMRIS allows better dissemination of information to French-speaking territories and, in the long run, better integration of these territories in the region as a whole.

National activities

Requests for information

Responding to requests for information is an ongoing activity for all sections of the SPC Marine Resources Division. Its implementation is co-ordinated by the Information Section. Normally, requests for information are handled by those SPC Fisheries Officers competent in the technical area concerned ; this step leads to the preparation of a list of useful documents and information sources or provision of specific technical advice or sometimes both. This initial information can be supplemented by bibliographic research carried out at the SPC's library using both in-house and external databases. If the information found is not enough, it is sometimes possible to contact other Pacific Islands Marine Resources Information Systems (PRIMRIS) centres or outside sources to receive further information.

The frequency of information requests from fisheries experts in the Pacific has increased over the past few years. Two factors, which have a cause and effect relationship, seem to be behind this trend, i.e. the increasing importance which the SPC and other agencies participating in PIMRIS give to fisheries information, on the one hand, and a much greater awareness on the part of regional fisheries experts of the types of service offered, on the other. This trend should continue and even strengthen over the coming year, mainly due to the development of new methods of communication in the region, i.e. e-mail and access to Internet (Web).

Training attachments

In the past, the Information Section organised short-term training attachments for fisheries agents from various fisheries services in the region, particularly Fiji and Papua New Guinea. These training attachments, which lasted anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks, allowed the officers involved to gain the knowledge they needed about the publication of information bulletins along with experience in information research, entry and classification.

Given the countries' interest in this type of training, SPC decided to create a Fisheries Associate Post (a post shared with Fisheries Training Section). This position, which has the one-year non-renewable contract, is reserved for Pacific island fisheries service officers. The training provided allows them to familiarise themselves with the techniques used for disseminating fisheries research information and, upon return to their countries, be able to set up a small resource centre in their own departments or even produce a fisheries newsletter. The training provided to Mr Henry Yule (Papua New Guinea), the first to hold this post, proved to be a success. With the assistance of PIMRIS, Mr Yule reorganised, upon returning to his home country, the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Office library, which even began to publish its own fisheries newsletter (the first in the region). The second agent to hold this post, Mr Terihauroa Luciani, joined the Training Section in August 1997. Mrs. Silika Ngahe from the Tonga Fisheries Department was hired in 1998.

In 1999, we decided that it would be better to reduce the length of training detachments from one year to three or four months. National fisheries services, which often operate with a limited number of staff, welcomed this initiative. We can now also host several Pacific Island fisheries agents in the space of a year. Mr. Nooroa Roi from the Cook Islands' Ministry of Marine Resources produced a set of educational documents for schools on the Cook Islands' marine resources. Mr. Graham Nimoho from the Vanuatu Department of Fisheries produced two information leaflets on fishing practices in Vanuatu. James Uan, recruited in May 2001, will be mainly involved in developing a training curriculum for the Kiribati Fisheries Division

Assistance provided to National Fisheries Services

The Twenty-Sixth Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries allowed island countries to make their needs known, especially in the area of disseminating information to local fishermen (e.g. extension pamphlets, fisheries regulations, posters) or publishing annual reports.

In the latter case, information is often available but has not been processed (e.g. due to a lack of funding or training). The Information Section recently received requests for assistance in publishing this type of document, particularly from Papua New Guinea, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Tonga, Cook Islands and the Solomon Islands.

As the end of the 1980s, the FAO South Pacific Regional Fisheries Support Programme produced a series of fish posters for a large number of Pacific countries. Although these posters used poor quality photos, they were very popular. As the stocks had run out, several countries and territories in the region (including Wallis and Futuna and Tonga) asked for the Information Section's assistance in producing new posters. In order to meet this demand, the Section has decided to call on the services of a Hawaiian artist to produce original watercolours of each fish to appear on the poster. This ambitious project should take several years of work and partial funding has already been identified (AusAID, Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council).

As mentioned above, Island countries and territories possess large quantities of information related to fisheries research. However, serious gaps exist at the collection and systematic organisation level. Through PIMRIS, the Information Section can propose a wide range of services and ready-to-use products, including support in systematically organising collection at the local or national level, creating small libraries, providing on-site training for staff, arranging consultancies and many other forms of assistance so as to resolve, where needed, occasional problems of a more specific nature. Additional funding for this work was provided by the French government and training activities were carried out in the following countries in 2000: American Samoa, Tonga and Samoa.

The training provided allowed the following goals to be accomplished: records holdings were reorganised using an appropriate classification system, computerised databases were evaluated, the latest version of CD/ISIS was installed, basic procedures were suggested to facilitate access to information from library services and library staff received basic training in the collection, organisation and dissemination of information. The various libraries involved were linked electronically to the PIMRIS Co-ordination Unit (based in Suva, Fiji) so as to facilitate the flow and dissemination of information.

Assistance to other SPC Sections

The Information Section provided support to the other Coastal Fisheries Programme sections in finalising and publishing certain technical reports, in both English and French, which had remained on hold for a number of years. The trend towards increasing the number of in-house publications at the Marine Resources Division will continue into the future, as the Information Section is emphasising the rapid processing and distribution of this type of information. For 2001, plans are already underway to produce several publications for the Reef Resource Assessment and Management Section.

Collaboration with the Oceanic Fisheries Programme also made it possible to publish the first two issues of a newsletter for observers on fishing vessels. The Information Section will also take part in producing national reports on the status of tuna resources in Pacific Island countries.

Conclusion

The collection, processing and dissemination of information are activities that SPC can carry out for its members and for which it is well-equipped. By facilitating the flow of information to the region's technical experts, the Information Section also helps the other sections of the Coastal Fisheries Programme complete their work.

The last two years have been marked by a heightened awareness on the part of member countries and territories with regards to the SPC's information services in the fishing sector and this has brought about an increase in demand.

In particular, efforts will be made to continue developing the Marine Resources Division's Website to facilitate the dissemination of information. Training activities will also be carried out on an as-needs basis for the library staff of regional fisheries services.