

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

**1st SPC Heads of Fisheries
Meeting**

*(Noumea, New Caledonia, 9–13 August
1999)*

Background Paper 7

Original: French

Information Section activities, 1997–1999

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



Marine Resources Division Information Section

Information Section activities, 1997–1999

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 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.

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.

The Section's staff includes :

- Fisheries Information Adviser: *Jean-Paul Gaudechoux*
- Fisheries Information Officer: *Aymeric Desurmont*
- Fisheries Associate:
- Project Assistant: *Erina Avazeri*

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 May 1999, more than 1,400 responses to the questionnaire had been received, 75% from within the Pacific, and the Section continues to receive responses on a regular basis at the rate of about 20 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 should be formed. At several different SPC fisheries conferences and workshops, recommendations were

also made about the creation of Special Interest Groups. The following dix groups 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, Women in Fisheries and Aquaculture.*

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 100 bulletins have been published in both English and French.

The *Live Reef Fish* Bulletin will see an increase in its size following work carried out at the second SPC Fisheries Management Workshop. At this Workshop, participants gave their approval to a regional live reef fish strategy, deeming that this initiative should be given high priority. This regional strategy will permit development of the tools and devices needed to sustainably manage and preserve reef fish resources. This strategy includes five basic components, including a very important information one.

In addition, during the Workshop, participants adopted a regional aquaculture strategy. This strategy should guide regional institutions in co-ordinating the efficient provision of future aquacultural advice and assistance to SPC member countries and territories. Participants asked that the Information Section implement a 10th Special Interest Group network and to publish another information bulletin for this topic.

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 :

- *Fishing around Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in Vanuatu*
- *Longline tuna fishing off the coast of Cairns*
- *Fishing boat safety in Pacific island countries*
- *Developing Inshore Sportfishing in Palau*
- *Assessment of commercial fishing resources in the lagoon of the Northern Province of New Caledonia*

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 700 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 1999 edition was 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). This address book is available both on diskette and at the Marine

Resources Division's Web-site.

Internet Site

An Internet website (<http://www.spc.org.nc/coastalfish/news>) was created in 1998 from which those interested can consult or download the various publications produced by the Section. This site is constantly being upgraded.

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 detachments

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 sessions, 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 Teriihauroa Luciani, joined the Training Section in August 1997. This post was then re-opened for applications and Mrs. Silika Ngahe of the Tonga Fisheries Service was hired in February 1998. This post will soon be re-opened for applications.

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). Requests for assistance in publishing this type of document were received by the Information Section, in particular from Vanuatu, Niue and Palau. The Section then published pamphlets about local fishing regulations for Niue (in both English and the local language) and Palau (in English). The Section also published a pamphlet (in Bishlama) for the Vanuatu Fisheries Service in order to educate coastal village communities about special regulations applying to certain marine species. The Tonga Fisheries Service requested assistance in the publishing their annual activities report. The Section also produced posters for the Kiribati Fisheries Service and assisted the NFA in Papua New Guinea publish the National Fisheries Act.

Fishery departments throughout the region are becoming increasingly aware of the services that the Information Section can offer and 1999 will undoubtedly see an increase in this type of activity. In fact, during the recent Fisheries Management Workshop, several requests for assistance were received.

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 February 1998: the Marshall Islands, Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia (States of Yap, Pohnpei and the Central Government). PIMRIS' Co-ordinator also went to Nauru and Kiribati in 1999 in order to train fisheries service staff there.

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 lent the other Coastal Fisheries Programme sections its support 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 1999, plans are already underway to produce several publications for the Reef Resource Assessment and Management Section.

Conclusion

The collection, processing and dissemination of information are activities which SPC can carry out for its members and for which it is well-equipped. For the proper functioning of the other sections of the Coastal Fisheries Programme, it is essential that the dissemination of information to technicians in the region be encouraged.

The past two years have been marked by an increased demand for and greater awareness of the SPC information services in the Fisheries Sector. The Information Section will continue its current activities and even increase them so as to be able to respond to these new requests. In particular, efforts will be made to continue developing the Marine Resources Division's Website in order to better disseminate information. Training activities will also be carried out on an as-needs basis for the library staff of regional fisheries services.

Finally, special emphasis was given to collaborating with the French Research Institute for Development (IRD, ex ORSTOM), in particular for the production of a bilingual poster about ciguatera.