

Pacific fisheries leaders emphasise building resilience and strengthening recovery in fisheries

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Pacific fisheries resources³

Home to
12.5 million people

The Pacific Islands region consists of
14 independent countries and 8 territories

14 countries

8 territories

The Pacific Ocean occupies **one-third of the globe**

The Pacific Islands region covers about 28 million km² of ocean and 551,000 km² of land

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³ [https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis/?lc=en&df\[ds\]=SPC2&df\[id\]=DF_POP_PROJ&df\[ag\]=SPC&df\[vs\]=3.0&dq=.T.MIDYEARPOPEST.&pd=2015%2C2025&ly\[c\]=TIME_PERIOD](https://stats.pacificdata.org/vis/?lc=en&df[ds]=SPC2&df[id]=DF_POP_PROJ&df[ag]=SPC&df[vs]=3.0&dq=.T.MIDYEARPOPEST.&pd=2015%2C2025&ly[c]=TIME_PERIOD)

Varied in landmass, ocean space, culture and different levels of economic development, Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) are vastly diverse, yet uniquely similar in the challenges they face. The phrase “one size *does not* fit all” is a fitting description of the region. It is also a model to keep in mind when developing and introducing fisheries management measures.

Fisheries resources are the lifeline of Pacific people, providing food security, supporting livelihoods and employment, and promoting economic growth. For many, these resources are a significant source of government revenue, especially for ocean states with limited landmass and land-based natural resources. For example, Kiribati’s revenue from fisheries contributed 16.2% of the total gross domestic product in 2014 (Gillett 2016), by far the largest contribution among its other natural resources.

Marine fisheries resources are categorised as coastal and oceanic. Both are different with respect to species diversity, resource conditions, and the interventions used in their management (FAO 2009). For instance, the region is home to the largest tuna stock in the world. The tuna fishery provides revenue through fishing access fees, tuna fishing, processing and employment, with an estimated value of USD 4.9 billion per year (Williams and Ruaia 2021). Coastal fisheries on the other hand are a vital source of nutrition, welfare, employment and food security, and are valued at an estimated USD 320–500 million (Gillett 2016).

The benefits derived from these two fisheries resources varies across the island nations. The dispersed geography of these islands within this vast area of water presents several challenges for effective management and monitoring of fisheries resources.

Another challenge for the island nations is their ability to balance their coastal fisheries in a manner that meets the demands of their people to support their livelihoods and economic aspirations versus the need for resource protection, rehabilitation and management of coastal fisheries resources.

Regional efforts to strengthen recovery and build resilience

While the management of these important fishery resources are subject national interests, regional cooperation is required when it comes to conservation and protection. Over the years, the region’s leaders have agreed on several management measures and mechanisms to protect and oversee these valuable resources. In June 2019, a Special Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting was held to review and adopt terms of reference establishing an annual Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM) and this was endorsed by the Pacific Leaders at the 50th Pacific Islands Forum in Tuvalu

in 2019. The RFMM is responsible for sectoral oversight of fisheries issues, including coastal fisheries, and is required to report to Forum Leaders.

This year, during the second Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM2), the fisheries leaders recognised the urgency to strengthen recovery and build resilience at this juncture, as the region struggles to respond to and recover from the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic alongside the effects of climate change on fisheries.

Three important fisheries items were discussed and endorsed as part of the regional effort to build resilience and strengthen recovery:

1. The Pacific Framework for Action on scaling up community-based fisheries management;
2. a proposal to develop a new regional strategy on aquaculture development; and
3. addressing the impact of climate change across the fisheries sector.

The chair of RFMM2, the Rt. Honourable Semi Koroilavesau of Fiji, reiterated a call for concerted action on issues that have historically been addressed in isolation.

“I am hopeful that we can bridge the gap and ensure that our decisions are holistic in nature and are beneficial to our people. Our people expect of us to make traction with some of these key issues because they affect livelihoods, economies, and the sustainability of our resources.” Rt. Honourable Semi Koroilavesau, Minister for Fisheries, Republic of Fiji.

Regional leadership in strengthening community-based fisheries management

Traditionally coastal communities in the Pacific have been involved in managing and protecting coastal fisheries. These communities rely on inshore fisheries for their daily sustenance and income generation. Recognising the vital role of communities in protecting their coastal resources, the fisheries leaders stressed the importance of empowering coastal communities to play a larger role in gaining access and managing marine resources.

At RFMM2, leaders recognised the vital role of communities in protecting coastal resources and have endorsed the Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling-up Community-based Fisheries Management. The framework recognises that coastal community empowerment and support are crucial for scaling up effective management and ensuring sustainable coastal fisheries that provide benefits to Pacific people in terms of food, nutrition, livelihoods, culture and health (Pacific Community 2021).

The ongoing pandemic has caused unprecedented job loss across the region. This is contributing to increasing pressure on coastal fisheries as people migrate back to rural communities and rely on local fishery resources to support their families. The timely endorsement of the framework for action allows PICTs to pick and choose appropriate community-based fisheries management measures that fit their national context without compromising communities' access to their food source.

Regional effort to improve food security, livelihoods and economic resilience through aquaculture development

In the Pacific, aquaculture contributes to food security and income generation through the rearing of low-value fish such as tilapia and milkfish, to high-end products such as pearls, shrimps and marine ornamentals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted markets and supply chains for almost all primary production in and among PICTs, including aquaculture. Small and large businesses involved in aquaculture are struggling, while national food security needs and priorities have changed and continue to change. The United Nations Food Systems Summit in 2021 and the upcoming United Nations Year of Small-Scale Fisheries and Aquaculture are bringing to the fore the central and critical role of aquatic and “blue” foods in global food systems. These discussions are highlighting ways in which aquaculture, through integration and adaptation of food systems approaches, can be harnessed to contribute to sustainable and healthy foods.

The ministers acknowledged the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on the social and economic wellbeing of the Pacific people, and emphasised the importance of coastal fisheries and aquaculture for food security and economic development as the region rebuilds from the impacts of COVID-19.

The ministers endorsed the proposal by SPC's Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) to take stock of where aquaculture currently stands in PICTs' and what direction(s) to take from here to remain resilient and to meet the expectations of Pacific people.

Regional effort for climate resilient and sustainable coastal fisheries and aquaculture

Rapid population growth and movement of people in the Pacific is straining fish stocks and affecting food security and livelihoods. As the Pacific population continues to grow, so will the demand for marine resources. Adding to this dire problem are the effects of climate change: increasing sea surface temperatures cause ocean acidification, rising sea levels

and high rainfalls, resulting in significant loss of coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, and intertidal habitats that provide shelter and food for coastal fish and shellfish. This poses a severe threat to the fisheries and aquaculture sector, which plays a significant role in food and nutrition security for Pacific people.

To address these challenges, fisheries leaders emphasised the importance of having a better understanding of the effects of climate change on the fisheries and aquaculture sector, and endorsed SPC FAME's work programme on climate change and fisheries. They also recognised the need to continue enhancing technical and scientific capacity to support evidence-based planning and management policies that strengthen members' adaption and mitigation activities in the region. SPC's involvement in the Green Climate Fund project – “Adapting tuna-dependent Pacific Island communities and economies to climate change” – was supported. The project aims to strengthen climate change adaptation in 14 Pacific countries by supporting reforms needed to minimise the risks for citizens of countries with economies that are vulnerable to climate-driven redistribution of tuna.

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