

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

4th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

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Information Paper 1

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**Progress Report on the
Outputs of the 3rd SPC
Heads of Fisheries Meeting**

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

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Progress report on the ...

Outputs of the Third SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

2004 notes on progress against the 2003 outputs and recommendations are highlighted against each output in a box like this. All unboxed text is from the original 2003 paper

The third SPC Heads of Fisheries (HoF) Meeting took place at SPC Headquarters in Noumea, from 18-23rd August 2003.

HoF is a regional meeting of Pacific Island countries and territories that covers the entire range of interests under the purview of national and territorial fisheries services. As such it plays a unique role in promoting dialogue and experience-sharing between island nations and territories, as well as guiding the work of the SPC's fisheries programmes. It complements the more sectorally-focussed, political role of the Forum Fisheries Committee, which has a primary emphasis on tuna fisheries management, whilst HoF covers aquaculture, coastal fisheries management and development and living marine resource science, and has a broad-ranging and relatively informal remit for discussion that can cover any arising issue of interest or significance to participants.

The following paragraphs constitute the points of consensus agreement of SPC member country and territory fisheries service heads on issues that arose during the meeting, and which the meeting felt necessary to document, either to help in the management of the SPC work-programme, to draw to the attention of a wider audience, or to signal agreement on issues that require attention by members themselves.

Institutional issues

- 1) SPC member country and territory representatives at HoF3 agreed that the Chair, with the assistance of the secretariat and advice from member countries and territories as necessary, should draft a set of Terms of Reference to guide the operation of future SPC Heads of Fisheries Meetings. This draft would be finalised for approval by the 4th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting and would include:
 - a) Definition of the scope and purpose of the meeting, but one that would not limit the potential for discussion, should HoF desire it, on any issue under the purview of national and territorial fisheries administrations;
 - b) The principle that presentations should be minimised and discussion time maximised, and a general guideline to keep most presentations to less than 20 minutes for maximum impact and effectiveness,
 - c) The authority of each HoF session to approve its own agenda and list of papers to be heard or considered; and
 - d) A requirement that working papers should be made available to representatives at least two weeks in advance of each meeting.

Done: A working paper suggesting Terms of Reference for the SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting has been produced and will be discussed under the HoF4 Agenda

- 2) The meeting agreed that the Chair of HoF3 should provide a brief report on the main outcomes of the meeting, as expressed by this document, to the Chair of the next SPC governing council meeting.

Done: The HoF3 Chair's Report was presented by the Chair, Anton Jimwereiy, to the 33rd SPC Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations in Fiji CRGA, and is appended to this document. The presence of a member country fisheries sector representative presenter was very well-received at this multi-sectoral meeting (which is getting a little tired of seeing just talking heads from the Secretariat) and funding will be available for the Chair, or representative, to present the HoF4 Chair's report to CRGA 34 in Nouméa on 16-19th November 2004¹.

- 3) The Marine Resources Division should inject more rigour into the process of handling requests by member governments and administrations, including immediate acknowledgement, the provision of feedback on the feasibility, particularly economic, of proposed projects, and the negotiation of definite agreements on inputs, outputs and timing. Completed activities should be the subject of a report available (subject to approval of the document by the relevant SPC member) to an appropriate wider audience, and activities would be occasionally reviewed for long-term sustainability and lessons that might be learned;

In process: Official requests are now handled by means of job-sheets available to all fisheries and managerial staff on the SPC internal network, which include references to all documents associated with a request, budgets and agreements. The longer-term outcomes of each job will be annotated on an annual basis, or following each in-country trip by programme staff.

- 4) The Marine Resources Division should report to the next HoF on progress in taking up the accepted recommendations of SPC institutional reviews, including the CFP, OFP & Fisheries Training Course reviews;

In process: Reports to HoF4 will include progress against accepted review recommendations in both CFP and OFP.

- 5) HoF valued the reports on the progress of various long-term multiagency initiatives, and asked that progress on these be formally, if briefly, reported at future HoF meetings. Existing initiatives in which SPC plays a focal role include the regional Aquaculture, Live Reef Fish and the new Coastal Fisheries Management initiatives;

¹ The CRGA 34 meeting notice is at "<http://lyris.spc.int/read/messages?id=31878>"

In process: These will either be reported on as part of the Director's Report to HoF4, or separately during the HoF4 meeting.

- 6) In discussing the relationship between regional organisations, it was recognised that the CROP² process often required further definition through specific agreements and interagency discussion. The meeting welcomed the evidence of cooperation between the SPC Marine Resources Division and other CROP agencies, and in particular welcomed the intention of SPC and USP to develop a more formal understanding to facilitate co-operation on fisheries and aquaculture training and issues of national support.

In process: The FFA/SPC Memorandum of Understanding has been revised since the last HoF meeting, and is available as a background paper, whilst an MOU with USP on fisheries education, training and information is being discussed (and may be broadened to encompass collaboration in other USP/SPC sectors such as Agriculture).

- 7) It was emphasised that a basic principle of the SPC Marine Resources Division should continue to be to work towards reducing member dependency on regional programmes, and promoting the devolution of competencies to the national level wherever appropriate. It was recommended that the next HoF meeting should include a session on local capacity development in fisheries, including the development of a regional inventory of capacity in a range of issues from oceanic fishery assessment to coastal fisheries development and management, and aquaculture. HoF itself will work towards identifying what capacity should be developed or maintained at the regional level and what should be a priority for developing at national level in each country and territory;

In process but “stretching” over a longer timescale is proposed: Since HoF3, there has been a major initiative by the regional community to review and revamp the whole regional agency system, arising from the review of the Pacific Islands Forum. This is primarily aimed at realigning CROP with member country needs and priorities, and the draft SPC/FFA overview of the fisheries sector for this regional exercise is available to Hof as Background Paper 6. Also FFC decided in May 2004 to strategically develop a new Corporate Plan for the Forum Fisheries Agency, and the new WCP Tuna Commission will open its doors in December. It may be better to wait for these changes to be accomplished and for these reviews to gather their data about national capacity and needs before embarking on a gap-filling HoF inventory through the SPC system.

² Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific

However, it is proposed that one of the primary tasks of the SPC Director of Marine Resources before HoF5 would then be, with the cooperation of national and territorial fisheries heads, to put together a comprehensive database of SPC member capacity, building on the information that will have already been collected for the Forum members. A questionnaire will also be circulated during HoF4 to provide some initial guidance.

Strategic Plans

- 8) The lack of specific mention of gender, or women in fisheries, in the *objectives* of the Coastal Fisheries Programme Strategic Plan was noted by the meeting. Although gender is included at the fundamental cross-cutting level of “basic principles and specific policies” in the Annex to the plan, the meeting felt that the issue should also be expressed as a specific strategy or objective at a high level within the plan the next time that this “living document” is published.

In process: The CFP Strategic Plan has not yet been formally re-published – this mid-term amendment will occur after HoF4 and in time for CRGA. The working draft also takes into account the amendment of the Coastal Fisheries Management Section direction resulting from the Coastal Fisheries Management Strategy exercise.

Oceanic Fisheries Programme Review

- 9) The meeting noted the very positive independent review of the Oceanic Fisheries Programme, and commended the Secretariat’s work in this particular area, and endorsed the Secretariat response to the recommendations of the review, particularly the processes that had been set in motion to further develop national capacity in oceanic fishery science and monitoring;

Note: Further review of part of OFP’s work is currently taking place. The development of national capacity in oceanic fishery science and monitoring should be kept on track through the implementation of Output 7 above, and OFP work-in-progress will be reported to HoF4.

- 10) Heads of Fisheries emphasised the positive benefits that would accrue to the region from the comprehensive management regime implicit in the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, and strongly encouraged potential parties to accede to the Convention and to bring it into force as soon as possible;

Achieved by members: The additional ratifications needed to bring the Convention into force occurred before the end of the year.

Coastal Fisheries Programme Review

- 11) The meeting endorsed the main thrust of the Review report and its principal recommendations. The Secretariat response to the Coastal Fisheries Programme review recommendations was generally commended, and it was noted that a mechanism for the prioritisation of proposed actions to implement any recommendations with financial implications would need to be developed, through consultative processes involving Heads of Fisheries, for the benefit of decision-makers and donors. The meeting recognised that there would be opportunity for further comments from the membership after HoF3 before the secretariat response is finalised and there would be another opportunity for member country comment at CRGA in November 2003;

Note: No further comments were received from member countries following HoF3, and CRGA generally noted the secretariat response to the review with approval, whilst accepting the role of HoF in monitoring and prioritising secretariat work within the fisheries sector.

- 12) The meeting particularly highlighted its agreement with major recommendation #4 of the Review, which indicated that the re-establishment of the Coastal Fisheries Programme Manager post, unfunded since 1995, would be likely to lead to considerable improvement in the organisation of the programme, including project accountability, reporting, and the efficiency of services provided to member countries. The meeting urged the Director of Marine Resources to seek means of re-establishing this position, and suggested that, if SPC core funding were unavailable, that external funds be allocated, either from a levy on existing projects, through a new project, or through the realignment of the duty statement of an existing post or vacancy.

Not accomplished: Funding has not yet been acquired for this post which, since it is essentially an administrative position, is likely to require SPC core support. With the withdrawal of the UK from SPC membership and the resultant reduction in core budget such support is now unlikely. An informal proposal to advertise the vacant Reef Fisheries Observatory section head post with a duty statement that would cover some of the work of a Coastal Fisheries Programme Manager was rejected by the donor that funds the post, since this might detract from accomplishing PROCFISH goals. Currently programme coordination duties are being shared between the Divisional Director and CFP section heads, and this mechanism will continue to operate.

Coastal Fisheries Management Strategy

- 13) Heads of Fisheries recognised the problems that are faced at all levels in ensuring the continued sustainability of many Pacific Island coastal fisheries in the face of the changing pressures of commercialisation and population, and in rehabilitating or protecting already-overexploited or otherwise over-impacted coastal fisheries, and recognised SPC's efforts over the past 15 years to assist individual members in addressing these problems. The meeting warmly welcomed the more comprehensive regional

strategic approach now being proposed, and endorsed the goals of the Coastal Fisheries Management Strategy as a multi-agency regional initiative, provided that capacity-building in analysis of information under goal 2 was clearly emphasised. The meeting recognised that the strategy would be a major long-term initiative benefitting all SPC members, and asked SPC to take the strategy forward: to maintain an inventory of capacity for coastal fishery management in each country, to identify existing regional and international capacity for participating in the framework of assistance to PICTs, and to develop action plans to implement priority areas of the strategy with timeframes and progress review mechanisms clearly identified;

In process: The Coastal Fisheries Management Adviser will report to the meeting on progress in fulfilling these recommendations. Since HoF3, the Commonwealth Secretariat has made a considerable contribution to this initiative. A start has been made on compiling an inventory of national and territorial capacity in coastal fishery management, but this will require specific activities in collaboration with each SPC member. The new project document itself constitutes an action plan with timeframes and review processes identified.

14) The meeting asserted that SPC should be clearly identified as the regional “lead agency in coastal fisheries”. SPC should move forward on the priority task of assisting in national and territorial fisheries sustainable development and management, and of making sure that sustainable fisheries management issues are included in broader coastal zone management initiatives;

Note: this general guidance from HoF3 is reflected in current regional processes, but taking account of sustainable fisheries management in broader coastal zone management is a long-term task. The plan for Integrated Strategic Action under the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy will be a major contributing factor to this integration, and the Coastal Fisheries Management Section will take an active role in furthering these broader regional plans.

Fisheries Training Course Review

15) After discussing the recommendations of an independent review, the Meeting endorsed the value of the 6-month SPC fisheries training course as an intensive programme of training in practical topical fisheries issues for serving Pacific Island fisheries officers. It endorsed the findings of the review and SPC’s response, particularly the realignment of the curriculum, and asked SPC to investigate ways of establishing more formal certification of the course;

In Process: The Training Section will provide an update during HoF4, including discussion on mapping a way forward for the training course.

- 16) The meeting suggested that, given the uncertainty of funding and the need to maintain momentum, that SPC urgently investigate with the New Zealand School of Fisheries ways of ensuring delivery of the SPC Fisheries Officer training course for a further cycle, and that SPC investigate, with NZSF, USP and other institutions, mechanisms for articulating the components of the short course into longer-term diploma and degree courses, and of promoting capacity within the region itself to provide fisheries training;

In process: A further cycle has indeed been instituted, after a visit to the Commonwealth Secretariat resulted in a pledge to continue funding to the course for a further year (2004). Discussions have been held with NZSF and USP for articulating the course into other educational qualifications, and on ways of “regionalising” vocational fisheries officer training. Recent correspondence with the Secretary-General suggests that further financial support for Pacific Island trainees may not be forthcoming from the Commonwealth Secretariat, and other sources or mechanisms would need to account for this gap.

Tuna fishery-associated Bycatch

- 17) Heads of Fisheries noted that bycatch is a growing concern of Pacific Island country and territory oceanic fisheries managers and agreed to be proactive in finding ways to mitigate negative impacts on the development of Pacific Island involvement in the region’s tuna fisheries. The meeting noted the assessment work being carried out under the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB) on the issue, and the discussions taking place at other regional fora, and requested SCTB and others to keep Heads of Fisheries informed on the progress being made towards addressing these issues at the regional level.

In Process: Heads of fisheries are indeed being proactive in mitigating bycatch of tuna fisheries (including the Palau shark landings ban). National representatives are invited to update the meeting on any national initiatives to help avoid unwanted bycatch. The report of the SCTB working group on related issues will be included as a late information paper to HoF4, and various aspects of the longline bycatch issue have been discussed at several fora involving SPC staff (including the Bellagio turtle workshop and SPREP migratory species workshop, as well as fisheries-oriented meetings like SCTB).

- 18) HoF3 commended the work of the SPC Coastal Fisheries programme in developing bycatch awareness materials and mitigation techniques as part of its practical fisheries training, information and enterprise development activities;

Note: Bycatch awareness and mitigation have continued to be integrated into SPC work, as will be further reported upon at the HoF4 meeting. The need for longline fisheries to be seen to be doing as much as possible to avoid unsustainable impacts on the marine environment is growing, not reducing, and whole Pacific Island economies are vulnerable to the threat of trade restrictions by fish-importing countries, particularly western countries.

- 19) The meeting pointed out that it is the responsibility of national and territorial Heads of Fisheries to ensure that no species becomes endangered because of fishing. Whilst it is recognised that SPC is not the lead regional agency for endangered species conservation, the meeting encouraged the SPC Marine Resources Division to continue to take account of the interaction between fisheries and endangered species, and to develop capacity in assessing, and assisting in the rehabilitation of, populations of endangered species significantly affected by fishing.

In Process: This statement itself has been very useful in clarifying the role of national and regional fisheries agencies in conservation issues, and will continue to be so in future. Development of capacity has proceeded gradually, particularly with the Live Reef Fish trade, but SPC has not yet succeeded in obtaining dedicated capacity for developing an authoritative assessment of endangered species affected by oceanic fishing, so this continues to be a byproduct of the overall OFP work programme.

(Coastal Fixed) Fish Aggregation Devices

- 20) HoF3 appreciated the information that was beginning to emerge from the FAD experiments being carried out in Niue and Cook Islands with SPC assistance and New Zealand funding, and its value for future decision-making concerning the cost versus the benefits of national artisanal FAD programmes. The meeting suggested that the FAD experiments should continue over a reasonable and sufficient time frame to produce statistically robust results. Promising results were already beginning to emerge concerning the improvement of longevity of devices, and reducing costs, but would need to be extended to cover the average lifetime of FADs whilst the economic and environmental benefits required a longer timeframe to take account of changing fishery economic conditions at both sites. Changes in fishing patterns, particularly relating to sportfishing and tourism, will probably be significant;

In process: A funding proposal was put to the donor, New Zealand, in early 2004 to continue the FAD research project for three years in order to complete the experiment over a more statistically significant time-scale. However, this was not approved. As a result, SPC will work with the Fisheries Departments in Niue and the Cook Islands to try and maintain the current catch and effort data collection system, and continue with the monitoring of the existing FADs on station. The remaining materials will allow the deployment of 1 to 3 additional FADs in each country, and these FADs will be closely monitored and the results presented to the region through Fisheries Newsletter articles and the next HoF meeting.

- 21) The meeting urged the secretariat to continue to document mechanisms by which FAD user groups could be encouraged to play an active and sustainable role in the deployment, maintenance and user-management of FADs;

In process: Mechanisms for encouraging user groups to play a role in FAD management will be covered in the final report of the FAD research project and included in a future article in the Fisheries Newsletter. Based on information collected so far from the FAD project and the experiences of other countries in the region, some of the possible approaches include:

- small-scale fishermen (commercial, recreational and charter) providing local materials for aggregators and putting these on FADs themselves;
- community groups or fishing associations taking over the maintenance of FADs, especially flagpoles, lights (changing batteries), aggregators etc., once they are deployed, and reporting any major concerns or possible repairs needed to the Fisheries Department to attend to;
- users contributing to the cost of funding and maintaining a FAD programme, through some form of licence fee, or levy each fisherman pays annually;
- a levy placed on the sale of all tuna that is sold domestically or exported, with these funds used to run a FAD programme; and
- a development fund for a FAD programme established with a portion or percentage of all commercial fishing vessels' licences (especially foreign and locally-based foreign tuna vessels) paid into the fund.

Aquaculture

22) HoF3 welcomed the preliminary review of aquaculture policy and legislation in the region and endorsed the future plan of action outlined in the review. The meeting suggested that more detailed analysis would be extremely useful to assist many members in making progress towards pro-active sustainable aquaculture management frameworks. It was recognised a better knowledge of the basic principles that might be commonly applied across the region would be useful to all. Several countries invited SPC to examine their legislation for guidance on the commonalities that might be included in a possible regional set of principles.

In process: The Aquaculture Adviser will report to HoF4 on progress against this recommendation.

23) The Meeting welcomed and endorsed the ACIAR QDPI/Worldfish/SPC aquaculture project "Sustainable aquaculture development in Pacific Islands region" and encouraged its timely commencement. With regard to the initiative to develop techniques for the culture of postlarval fish, it was recognised that techniques for reducing natural mortality of pre-recruits could have potentially great benefits, both for culture and for rehabilitating wild stocks. The meeting pointed out that the project would need to clearly demonstrate the sustainability of the technique, in terms of its effect on natural recruitment, in order to address potential public concerns, and that pro-active mechanisms be considered for managing any future postlarval "fishery" that might develop.

Note: An update on the progress of this project will be provided to the HoF meeting as part of the general presentations.

Introduced species

- 24) The Meeting endorsed the draft regional guiding principles for introduction by the SPC/Worldfish/PNG working group, and proposed several followup actions including:
- a) making sure that the guiding principles could be applicable to within-country and inter-island translocation as well as international translocation;
 - b) that capacity for quantifying the economic costs versus benefits of historical and potential translocations be identified and made available to SPC island members through the aquaculture initiative;
 - c) that a web or email-based discussion group be set up under the SPC aquaculture portal, if such is not yet in existence elsewhere, to provide linkages to quick and informal advice on different species that are commonly introduced;
 - d) that basic guidelines on the control or eradication of undesirable historical aquatic introductions, or invasive aquatic species, need to be developed and made available to Pacific Island governments;
 - e) that basic guidelines be developed, in the same manner as the giant clam guidelines approved by HoF/RTMF in the past, to cover several commonly translocated species;
 - f) in view of the existing capacity of many countries in terrestrial quarantine and introduced species control, that a programme of training in aquatic quarantine issues for agricultural quarantine officers needs to be developed, and that the region should work towards the building of specialist aquatic quarantine capacity;
 - g) the desirability of establishing a regional network and early-warning system, based on the experience within SPC of agricultural and human epidemiological networks, to promote the exchange of information between Pacific Islands about outbreaks of aquatic diseases and parasites;

In process: Progress will be reported during the course of the meeting

- 25) While discussing the “Regional guiding principles for introduction and translocation of aquatic organisms for aquaculture & fisheries” the meeting noted the urgency of the related need for the region to more effectively address vessel ballast water discharges as potential introducers of undesirable exotic species, and shipwrecks/groundings. The roles of the SPREP Pacific Pollution (PACPOL) and Invasive Species Programmes, the SPC Regional Maritime Programme and the International Maritime Organisation in this area were recognised, and the SPC Marine Resources Division was asked to encourage more assistance to members on these subjects, in view of the potential impact on coastal fisheries and aquaculture.

Note: The SPC Maritime Programme will provide a brief update to the meeting on recent activities in this area.

Live Reef Fisheries

26) The meeting noted with approval the progress made by the regional Live Reef Fish trade initiative since it was launched by Heads of Fisheries in 1999, and acknowledged the contributions made by several agencies, NGOs and organisations towards the joint goals of the initiative. HoF3 looked forward to the implementation of promising new avenues for achieving or maintaining sustainable management of, and maximum local benefit from, these fisheries, particularly trade certification mechanisms for marine ornamental fisheries, and industry “best practices” for the food-fish trade.

Note: The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has just reviewed work under the regional Memorandum of Understanding on the Live Reef Food Fish Trade, and considers that it has accomplished some very useful progress to date. The report may be available in time for HoF4. The MacArthur Foundation-supported work (which started in 2001 for 3 years) has been given additional funds for another 3 years from 2004 to 2007. The extension will concentrate more on building the technical capacity of member country fisheries staff not so much in assessment, but more importantly in the analysis and interpretation of survey data and translating it into fisheries management advice. This, and other developments in this collaborative wide-ranging initiative will be reported upon during HoF4. One of the Initiative’s major partners is the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC). MAC has developed certification procedures and requirements for Aquarium Fish Trade operators and is currently working in Fiji, Vanuatu and the Cook Islands on company certification. At the moment only Fiji has companies that have been MAC-certified. Paul Holthus, the Director of MAC, will present an update at HoF4. The main difference between MAC and SPC is that the MAC certification process works primarily with the *private sector* to promote sustainable practices via trade, whilst SPC works primarily with *national fisheries departments* to develop management policies and monitoring programmes for the reef and the resource.

27) The meeting welcomed the update on the current status of these fisheries, and took note of the current stagnation of the market and the changing patterns of trade that are resulting from this.

Note: Towards the end of 2003 and for the early part of 2004, activity in the live reef food fish trade (LRFFT) was low. This was a direct result of countries being wiser in managing new proposals and operators as well as lower demand from the traditional LRFFT market in Hong Kong, due to its depressed economy. Mainland China, however, is likely to become an increasingly important market for LRFFT, with its booming economy, once they are able to organise trade relationships with Pacific countries. It is therefore important that Pacific countries are able to establish sound management policies and regulations before then. The LRFT Initiative will continue to provide assistance to Pacific Islands in order to achieve this.

A more detailed description of activities and assistance offered by the Initiative will be presented at HOF4.

Fisheries Assessment

- 28) Heads of Fisheries collectively endorsed the executive report of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish, and drew particular attention to SCTB opinions concerning the status of yellowfin and bigeye tuna resources.

Note: The report of the latest 2004 SCTB will be provided to HoF4, including status reports on yellowfin and bigeye stocks. HoF is not an appropriate forum for negotiating regional tuna fishery *management* actions, at least not for FFA member countries. However, from other meetings some related issues can be noted. For example, action that will help to generally limit impacts on bigeye and yellowfin stocks has been taken at the national and regional levels in cases where the number of licences issued to tuna fishing vessels has been capped and, in the case of purse-seining in the waters of parties to the Palau Arrangement, by introducing a cap on the number of vessel-days fishing in each EEZ. More specific action, particularly in relation to the effect of purse-seining with drifting FADs on stock structure, and fishing in the far west of the WCP, might be implemented through the new WCP Tuna Commission, whilst there remains considerable scope within the Pacific Islands region itself to come to agreement on the regional “envelope” for the longline fishery.

- 29) HoF expressed pride in the level of international respect given to SPC’s scientific work on fisheries, but urged the Secretariat to further improve the interface between science and the public, as well as the existing attention given to high-level decision-makers. The meeting endorsed the intention by the secretariat to produce easily-understood and widely-distributed, yet scientifically rigorous, explanations of the status of fisheries as soon as possible, particularly regional tuna fisheries. HoF strongly wished to redress the potential distorting effect on public perceptions resulting from certain recent high-profile publications that had not yet had the benefit of scientific debate, or the opportunity for equally widely-distributed reply.

In process: The results of an ADB-funded project, in collaboration with FFA, to produce a brochure explaining OFP scientific work in easily-understandable terms will not be published until after HoF4. Concerning “recent high-profile publications”, getting a hearing from the international scientific press has taken some time and, although fair critiques of the 2003 Nature paper discussed at HoF3 have been published over the past year, they have not captured the imagination of the popular press in the same way as the original article that declared that Pacific tuna stocks were virtually wiped out. Judging by statements made at international meetings over the past year, there now appears to be a popular perception that fishing has already removed at least 80% of the biomass of the ocean.

Politicisation of the ocean environment has lagged some decades behind that of the land, but “blue politics” now appears to be here to stay, with public perceptions and lobby groups becoming as important fisheries management drivers as hard information. Although this is mainly a western phenomenon at present, it strongly affects both donor and international community perceptions.

30) Appreciative of the scientific tools being developed by the Oceanic Component of the SPC/EU PROCFish project for better understanding and predicting the broad distribution and prospects of regional tuna stocks and fisheries in relation to the ocean environment, the meeting urged the Secretariat to work towards the adaptation of these methodologies and computer software for use in oceanic fishery management decision-making at the national level, as appropriate.

In process: The paper on albacore longlining during HoF4 and the presentations by the PROCFISH project oceanic component during the Advisory Committee meeting will provide an indication of how these tools are developing.

31) The meeting pointed out the vital role of the Coastal Component of PROCFish in developing a rigorous scientific information-base for improving national and local management of reef fisheries, and several countries expressed great interest in obtaining the collaborative services of the project as soon as possible. The integration of social/economic as well as resource assessment was particularly commended. From the experience of countries and territories that had already taken part in the project, and whilst it was clearly recognised that the project was still a work-in-progress that had not yet developed its final products, the following issues were brought up by the meeting:

a) SPC should make the opinion of HoF known to the European Union, that the expansion of the Coastal component of PROCFish to the 6 new ACP/EU partner countries is strongly endorsed for implementation as soon as possible. HoF further hoped that rapid and efficient implementation of the new projects under the 9th EDF Pacific Regional Strategy fisheries focal sector (COFish and DEVFish, the latter jointly implemented between SPC and FFA) would strengthen the case for implementing a further Oceanic Fisheries scientific project under the reserved funding that is understood to become available after the mid-term review of the 9th EDF by the European Union. The regional work of the Oceanic Component of PROCFISH was beginning to show exciting results, particularly relevant to the establishment and operation of ecosystem-based management of oceanic fisheries, that would need to be increasingly implemented at the national level.

Note: the CoFish agreement was signed in March 2004 and the first batch of funding arrived midyear, and recruitment of extra staff to help cover the additional countries will now proceed. DevFish is expected to be agreed before the end of 2004. The possibility of

extension of the Oceanic Component of PROCFISH appears to be being considered sympathetically by the EU, which is appreciative of the quality of results obtained so far and because of the continuing need to develop tools to enable ecosystem-based management. However, this indication is only informal, and further progress towards an extension depends on the outcome of the PROCFISH/O review, which will hopefully begin during HoF4. In the meantime a no-cost extension to PROCFISH/O, using contingency funds and savings, will be requested.

- b) The US Territories and Tokelau, who are the only remaining SPC members not directly eligible for PROCFish assistance, appreciated the opportunity to be included in discussion of the project, and hoped that SPC attempts to include them in the project work itself in future received favourable attention from potential funding sources, or from potential collaborators willing to use the same regionally-standard methodologies.

Note: the SPC Director-General has agreed to find resources for the PROCFish methodology to be applied in Tokelau, following her visit to the territory, but an appropriate space within the heavy schedule of the EU project needs to be found before this work can be done. The place of Pitcairn within the OCT/PTOM component of the project remains ambiguous. Although SPC has explored possibilities, no way has yet been found for inclusion of US territories in the project, and different methodologies are being applied by the US under existing initiatives and regulatory processes. The US Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council did offer in 2002 to fund a joint reef fishery assessment expert consultation workshop with SPC, but PROCFISH did not have the capacity to organise such a workshop at that time.

- c) The meeting felt that, as with all regional agency scientific and technical projects, the need to express applied research findings in ways that are comprehensible to the general public, as well as to decision-makers, can never be under-emphasised. HoF3 commended SPC's recent efforts to better address this area, and urged still further efforts;

In process: Several brochures addressing bycatch and other issues have been produced by the Fisheries Development and Training Sections through the Information Section, and paragraph 29 refers to the OFP. Information materials for the benefit of the general public will be produced by the Reef Fisheries Observatory, which to date has concentrated on establishing its scientific credentials. This will be a major priority of the newly-appointed section coordinator.

- d) That however, SPC staff should be careful to discuss and clear national sub-project outputs with the relevant national or territorial fisheries Head before publication or public presentation, particularly where these involve recommendations or express opinions.

Done: this is now standard practice, and several potential publications have been sent to individual national or territorial fisheries departments this year for clearance. The Reef Fisheries Observatory data-sharing/confidentiality policy will be discussed at HoF4, and the discussion on revitalising regional information linkages will also be relevant.

- e) That the Coastal component of the PROCFish project should push forward plans, through the regional coastal fisheries data repository, to integrate all relevant existing information available from previous local work into the comparative assessments, including any environmental and socio-economic survey data available. Heads of Fisheries recognised the potential value of both the ecosystem approach and the co-management approach to reef fisheries management, and the need for the firmest possible information-base on which to develop workable approaches, as well as the need for an accessible central repository to avoid potential duplication of effort by the various other agencies and NGOs starting to collect data in this field;

In progress: the repository is accreting. As well as datasets generated by the PROCFISH and LRFFT projects, as well as previous projects such as ICFMaP, some coastal fisheries information has been archived for several member countries, including Kiribati, Tuvalu, Wallis & Futuna, French Polynesia, Vanuatu and Fiji, and we are now working on a mechanism for enabling access at various levels of detail. This will progressed further when a data sharing/confidentiality policy is agreed for the repository by HoF.

- f) That a small but significant gap in scientific fishery assessment services remained between the shallow reef fisheries and the oceanic fisheries work of SPC, in particular the assessment of slope and coastal seamount resources such as deepwater snapper. HoF urged SPC to bring this gap to wider attention at the forthcoming artisanal fisheries meeting associated with the Deepsea 2003 Conference in New Zealand in November.

Done: In the sense that SPC made a presentation at the artisanal fisheries workshop attached to the Dunedin conference and supported the attendance of several Pacific Island representatives. However there has been no result so far. Some views from HoF4 on the current activities of their deepwater snapper fisheries (and indeed any other benthic fisheries) would be welcome.

- g) That, in addition to the video presentation made to HoF, it would help the Coastal component of PROCFish if it produces a short, clear, written explanation of project aims and activities for public information. This should also make clear that the different services previously provided on a small-scale by the former CFP Resource Assessment and Management Section are now separated and expanded into the Reef Fisheries Observatory and the Coastal Fisheries Management Section. HoF recognised

that PROCFish/C, under the SPC Reef Fisheries Observatory, is not intended to provide direct advice to governments on coastal fishery management mechanisms like the SPC Coastal Fisheries Management Section, and not intended to carry out in-depth trials of community-based sustainable fishery management systems at pilot sites like the SPREP (Coastal component) of the GEF International Waters Project, but to provide objective, scientifically-based information for use by decision-makers in reef fishery management processes.

In process: the PROCFish Advisory Committee during HoF4 will be a test-bed for the explanation of the role and services of the PROCFish/C subproject, and the production of this sort of information will be a major priority of the newly-appointed section coordinator after HoF4.

Other Issues

32) Improving the value and quality of fisheries sector exports remains a major and growing need for support at the regional level. SPC should work with FFA, the Forum Secretariat, USP and others to develop more comprehensive regional support services in this area;

In process: But progress is slow, and needs the involvement of the private sector, whilst donors often prefer to engage directly with the private sector, or via bilateral mechanisms, or via general trade or development projects with more generalised agencies, for this sort of work. The FFA/SPC CoFish project, and a workshop organised by USP in September to assist the private fisheries sector understand the implications of the new Tuna Convention, will lead to better private-sector networking and provide a better point of engagement for regional and governmental assistance. A multi-agency, multi-donor, initiative mediated by MOU, in the same manner as the Live Reef Fish Initiative, may be the best way of harnessing future regional-level support.

33) Electronic (CD-ROM-based) libraries of information useful to Pacific Island fisheries departments should be developed and made available;

In process: The Fisheries Information Section has asked the SPC Library and Information Technology Sections for assistance and software is currently being evaluated. In the meantime, a list of all fisheries-related information held at the SPC library will be made available at HoF4.

34) Heads of Fisheries requested that the next HoF meeting be provided with a report on safety at sea for artisanal fishers, based on the recommendations of the forthcoming FAO/SPC regional expert consultation on the same subject.

Done: The report has been prepared, and there will also be a session at HoF4 to actively discuss ways of improving safety at sea for small fishing vessels.

35) The Meeting appreciated the briefing on forthcoming meetings provided by IP12 and asked the Secretariat to expand its calendar of events and meetings of interest to HoF (www.spc.int/coastfish/meetings.htm). The calendar should provide more comprehensive coverage, should include short briefing notes on each event, and should be occasionally distributed to HoF representatives as well being maintained on the website.

In process: However the expectation of producing an annotated events calendar was not fulfilled as completely as expected by HoF3. Although the web-based calendar of events was updated, a regular update was not actively distributed to HoF representatives because the frequency of new events was low. This will be improved upon now that the SPC-HOF emailing list is up and running, and such non-critical activities are less likely to be overlooked. A briefing paper summarising recent and upcoming events has been produced for HoF4 as Information Paper 4.

In closing, a spokesman for the meeting highly commended the HoF Chair from Nauru, Anton Jimwereiy, assisted by Peter Jacob, for managing the deliberations and the outputs of the meeting so effectively, and thanked the Secretariat both for the presentations, and the opportunity to freely and collectively discuss fisheries issues of wide-ranging interest and relevance. The SPC Marine Resources Division was leading the region in “doing what it is supposed to do” within its area of competence, with foresight, dedication, and “a perspective on the real needs of the region”. Finally, it was strongly felt by all present that HoF needed to meet more often than has been the case in recent years, and hoped that the Secretariat would be able to collect together enough resources to enable the fourth HoF meeting to take place in 2004, particularly given the number of “burning issues” that had already been placed on the agenda.

Note: This list of recommendations is to signal points of consensus agreement of SPC member country and territory fisheries service heads on certain issues raised during the 3rd SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting, and identified by the Chair. These recommendations do not constitute a complete report of the meeting, nor do they constitute a complete work-programme for SPC (the SPC Strategic Programme Plans should be consulted for this) but are intended for the guidance of all with a stake or an interest in Pacific Island fisheries. Some of these recommendations identify gaps in regional support, or identify newly-arising problems and priorities, or simply identify agreement on a course of action. Other agencies apart from SPC are invited to note these issues raised by Pacific Island countries and territories, and warmly invited to assist the region in addressing them, either in concert with SPC, or within their own capacity, as appropriate.