

**FIFTIETH MEETING OF THE
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATIONS**
(17–19 November 2020, Virtual Meeting)

Working Paper

AGENDA ITEM No. 10: CROP Cohesion and Coordination

(Paper presented by the Secretariat)

Purpose

1. This paper presents an update on CROP (Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific)¹ cohesion and coordination with a focus on:
 - i. progress on CROP’s Strategic Work Agenda for 2019–2020;
 - ii. collaboration during the COVID-19 pandemic and support for recovery and transformation in the region;
 - iii. strengthening CROP coordination arrangements and exploring efficiencies.

Key points

2. Considerable progress was made on the CROP Strategic Work Agenda for 2019–2020 despite the impact of COVID-19. Collaboration has remained strong, particularly in providing support for consultations on the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent; regional health issues; climate change and disaster resilience; fisheries; ocean affairs; sea-level rise and maritime boundaries priorities. Regular meetings of CROP Heads, CROP Deputies and related coordination efforts throughout the pandemic have underpinned this progress.
3. SPC has played a central role in supporting this work, given its strengths in areas relevant to COVID-19 assessment and response, capability for remote and virtual engagement, and extensive regional coverage. SPC’s Public Health Division has been on the front line in informing and coordinating regional responses to the pandemic, and its ICT support systems have underpinned its ability to shift service delivery methods quickly and identify opportunities for recovery and transformation.

¹ CROP agencies include the Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO); Pacific Community (SPC); Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA); Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS); Pacific Power Association (PPA); Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP); South Pacific Tourism Organisation (SPTO); and the University of the South Pacific (USP).

4. SPC has led and supported key aspects of COVID-19 monitoring, response and recovery in close collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) as Chair of CROP, and in support of CROP and international and regional stakeholders (WHO and other United Nations agencies, civil society organisations, and the private sector). SPC's long-term investments in science, statistics and data collection have benefited all regional agencies and stakeholders in enabling assessments of impacts on people and resources, and options for recovery and transformation. Remote capacity building, digital transformation, integrated food systems, economic diversification and people-centred approaches to recovery are examples of areas in which SPC has led significant efforts and worked collaboratively with CROP to help the region cope with current challenges and explore opportunities for building back a stronger Blue Pacific Continent in a post COVID-19 world.

Recommendations

5. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. note CROP's progress against its Strategic Work Agenda for 2019–2020 and the process for developing an extended working agenda for 2021;
 - ii. welcome SPC's central role in supporting collective CROP responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and identification of areas to support the region's recovery;
 - iii. acknowledge the collaborative work by SPC and other CROP agencies on key issues including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent; regional health; climate change and disaster resilience; fisheries; and ocean affairs, sea-level rise and maritime boundaries priorities;
 - iv. encourage the Secretariat, in collaboration with other CROP agencies, to continue efforts to streamline service delivery, explore efficiency gains and share relevant experience, including to inform the Regional Architecture Review in 2021.
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CROP Cohesion and Coordination

Background

6. Guided by the CROP Charter 2018 and Framework for Pacific Regionalism (FPR), CROP intergovernmental agencies work together to support the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' increased commitment to regionalism. CROP architecture and coordination arrangements are managed by PIFS as the permanent Chair of CROP. Several layers of governance, coordination and reporting (supported by time-bound objectives) underpin CROP collaboration. Annex 1 provides a diagram of CROP architecture and coordination mechanisms.
7. Annual meetings of CROP Executives and the Chairs of Governing Councils play an important part in increasing the alignment of CROP agencies' efforts. They met in November 2019 to agree on the CROP Strategic Work Agenda for 2019–2020,² which sets out how CROP will work together over this period to deliver on Forum Leaders' decisions from the 50th Pacific Islands Forum. The Agenda includes work priorities, objectives and deliverables, ways of working, and a calendar of engagements.
8. The Strategic Work Agenda has nine priority areas for 2019–2020:
 - i. 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and the regional architecture
 - ii. Climate change and disaster resilience
 - iii. Regional security
 - iv. Sea level rise, maritime boundaries and baselines
 - v. Nuclear testing legacy issues
 - vi. Biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ)
 - vii. Regional mechanism to address oil spills
 - viii. Regional fisheries
 - ix. Regional health issues
9. The 2020 CROP Annual Report to Pacific Islands Forum Leaders provides a comprehensive report of progress against these priorities. As the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major challenge this year, the report includes a special update on CROP efforts to support the responses and recovery of Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs). It also provides an overview of the coordination arrangements between CROP agencies to facilitate collaboration in a focused and timebound way.
10. SPC works across several areas relevant to COVID impact assessment and response, and together with PIFS has played an important role in supporting CROP and the region in 2020. SPC's expertise in public health, statistics, data and information management and capacity building, and availability of support systems set up to service a dispersed organisation, have been critical to the effectiveness of this role.

² CROP Strategic Work Agenda 2020: https://www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/CROP-Strategic-Work-Agenda-2019-2020_Final-@13.3.20.pdf

Analysis

Highlights from the Annual Report on the CROP Strategic Work Agenda 2019–2020

11. SPC has contributed to all the priorities of the Strategic Work Agenda as can be seen in the Annual Report. Below are some highlights of this contribution to give members an idea of the breadth of work that SPC carries out in collaboration with CROP members. (These examples by no means provide comprehensive coverage of all these efforts.)

12. Under PIFS leadership, the consultation process, and engagement in the development of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, has progressed this year. SPC participates in, and contributes to, key mechanisms including:
 - i. the FOC (Forum Officials Committee) Subcommittee for the 2050 Strategy and the Register of Experts;
 - ii. the CROP Taskforce on the 2050 Strategy, and the CROP Sustainable Development Working Group that feeds into this process;
 - iii. ‘Drivers of Change’ consultations at regional and national level, building on experience in developing the SPC Strategic Plan 2021+. PIFS and SPC worked closely to provide in-country support to two PICTs (New Caledonia and Niue). SPC staff on the ground helped facilitate national consultations, while PIFS joined remotely to guide the process.

13. In response to Leaders’ priorities for Climate Change and disaster resilience, SPC worked closely with regional agencies across numerous areas, including:
 - i. Raising awareness of climate change impacts on fisheries, including with FFA officials and the members of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). SPC worked with FFA, PIFS, SPREP and USP to develop and deliver comprehensive briefings and papers on climate change and fisheries/ocean issues to fisheries officials and ministerial meetings³ throughout the year.
 - ii. Sharing world-leading science, modelling, maritime boundaries work and policy papers with CROP to support a common understanding of the potential impacts of climate on fisheries in the region and on jurisdictional integrity.
 - iii. Hosting the Pacific Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Hub, a multi-partner initiative with SPREP, GIZ and others, which supports PICTs’ accelerated implementation of their NDCs. SPC is also a member of the NDC Partnership at global level, which promotes increased ambition and implementation.
 - iv. Developing a Charter of Principles to strengthen SPC’s MOU and collaboration with SPREP.
 - v. Supporting, through a ‘navigation role’ at CEO level, the reinvigoration of the Working Arm on Climate Change to complement ‘One CROP’ COP⁴ support and related international advocacy.

³ 16th Regular Session of WCPFC (December 2019); Pre-Forum Fisheries Officials Workshop on Climate Change (July 2020); inaugural Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (August 2020).

⁴ Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Climate Change Framework Convention (UNFCCC).

- vi. At executive level, together with PIFS, SPREP and FFA, collaborating to deliver CROP and regional messaging, and advocacy with the Presidency of COP26 (United Kingdom), to amplify Pacific priorities and climate/ocean nexus issues to shape COP26.
 - vii. In consultation with other CROP agencies, providing briefings at several international events/meetings on climate security issues in the region (including maritime boundaries, and climate change impacts on oceans and food security), including Pacific SIDS Missions in New York in preparation for ECOSOC,⁵ the UN Security Council Special Debate on Climate Change and Security, UN General Assembly-related events, and Pacific States of the African, Caribbean, Pacific Group in negotiations for a post-Cotonou arrangement.
 - viii. As part of the One CROP team for UNFCCC COP 25, supporting delegations on ocean-climate issues and convening and participating in multiple side events. The SPC delegation was also part of the Friends of Ocean and Climate group that successfully negotiated the first formal inclusion of the ocean in the Blue COP decision.
14. In delivering on Leaders' decisions on sea-level rise, maritime boundaries and baselines, SPC has continued to play a lead role (as it has for the last 10 years) in engaging other CROP members and stakeholders in this important work. SPC continues to work closely with PIFS, the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner (OPOC), FFA and SPREP to support members and regional and international stakeholders. This work has included:
- i. coordinating the maritime boundaries consortium of partners, and leading efforts to provide technical and legal advice (in collaboration with PIFS) to SPC members on maritime boundaries and delineation of maritime zones;
 - ii. supporting members in revising and preparing submissions for extended continental shelf claims to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf;
 - iii. with PIFS, FFA, and OPOC, providing legal and policy support, high-level diplomacy and advocacy, and coordination of regional approaches, and supporting members at UN meetings and other relevant international and regional meetings.
 - iv. convening a high-level UNFCCC side event at COP25 to give international visibility to the impact of sea-level rise and climate change on maritime boundaries and ongoing work in the region.
15. Delivery on Forum Leaders' fisheries decisions has been led by FFA strongly supported by SPC, and by PIFS, SPREP and USP in their respective areas of expertise. A snapshot of work in this area included:
- i. implementing the Regional Longline Strategy, which is on track;
 - ii. producing the Tuna Fishery Report Card and Coastal Fisheries Report Card for 2019;
 - iii. holding the inaugural Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting (August 2020);
 - iv. incorporating fisheries as a focus of the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent;
 - v. raising awareness of the implications of climate change for fisheries, and options for addressing this issue.

⁵ United Nations Economic and Social Council.

16. Delivery on Forum Leaders' health decisions has been led by SPC and PIFS, with CROP collaboration through the Health & Population and Gender Working Groups. Achievements in this area included:
 - i. continued development of the Pacific legislative framework for non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which is to be finalised and possibly endorsed in 2021;
 - ii. implementation of the Pacific NCD Roadmap, which is monitored annually using the MANA⁶ dashboard. The baseline MANA report has been published.
 - iii. establishment of five additional multi-sectoral NCD taskforces in PICTs.
 - iv. progress on developing policies on food and drinks linked to NCDs, tobacco and alcohol taxes, and evidence for more targeted investments and monitoring.
17. SPC is a member of a CROP Taskforce established to address Leaders' priorities on nuclear testing legacy issues. The work plan includes CROP support for affected member countries and collective Forum advocacy.
18. In 2019, good progress was made in addressing Leaders' priorities in negotiations for a new Implementing Agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). COVID-19 has held up progress in 2020. Support was provided to member delegations for negotiations at the Third Intergovernmental Conference on BBNJ in August 2019 and subsequent analysis of the BBNJ 'zero draft'. Although the negotiations have been delayed, they remain high on the list of priorities in the lead-up to the focus on oceans in 2021, and on the climate/ocean track ahead of COP26. SPC will continue to play a key role in these efforts.

CROP COVID-19 response, recovery and collaboration towards transformation

19. From March 2020, CROP Heads held weekly teleconferences (subsequently fortnightly and monthly) to share information, coordinate resourcing, and provide collective advice to member countries. In a standing agenda item, SPC provided updates on the global and regional status of COVID-19 and guidance on health and safety arrangements to assist with CROP efforts to continue working under requirements for social distancing and increased hygiene. SPC led the development of a Joint CROP Statement on 8 May 2020 on supporting the regional response and recovery, and developed a key messages guide for use by CROP agencies and member countries.
20. SPC worked closely with PIFS, members and other partners to support the establishment of the Pacific Humanitarian Pathway for COVID-19, including the development of common regional protocols on the deployment of technical teams; customs; immigration; and repatriation and diplomatic clearances. CROP agencies, led by SPC and PIFS, have also actively participated in the WHO-led Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT) and its pillar working groups, including on social inclusion, logistics and partnerships.
21. CROP Heads collaborated to reprioritise regional cooperation funding to support COVID-19 response and recovery efforts where possible, while protecting the sustainability of existing programmes. CROP agencies have also been working to coordinate donor engagement on COVID-19, including through a proposed roundtable of regional development partners.

⁶ Pacific Monitoring Alliance for NCD Action (MANA).

22. In support of regional recovery efforts, CROP agencies have collaborated to assess the economic and social impact of COVID-19 across the Pacific region, and priorities for recovery over the short, medium and longer term, for the consideration of Pacific ministers and leaders. This work includes:
- i. a regional assessment of the economic effects of COVID-19 for the consideration of Forum Economic Ministers;
 - ii. establishment of a CROP Taskforce to undertake a longer-term socio-economic impact assessment. In this context, SPC's Statistics for Development Division and Pacific Data Hub have been key in providing baseline information and advocating for more coordinated approaches to COVID assessments in PICTs;
 - iii. SPC has also contributed to UN-led COVID-19 socio-economic impact assessments in the region, building on its work in developing regional reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.
23. The breadth of SPC's sector and geographic coverage, databases and information management, and significant back-office support through its ICT systems and various regional offices, have assisted significantly in the continuation and augmentation of many programmes during the pandemic. These experiences have been shared with CROP regularly through the CROP Heads meeting and have helped to develop focused and collaborative CROP support for recovery and transformation. Work has included the following:
- i. Bringing attention to, and monitoring the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups, and the increased incidence of violence in homes.
 - ii. SPC and PIFS, as Co-Chairs of the Gender CROP Working Group, recalibrated their efforts to focus on the impacts of COVID-19 and provided early outreach to address the above issues, e.g. the 'Thursdays in Black' campaign.
 - iii. Working with FFA and PIFS to tailor COVID-19 quarantine and safety protocols to enable safe continued operation of important fishing vessels and monitoring and surveillance arrangements.
 - iv. Supporting delivery of food and livelihood products to market under travel restrictions by designing specific health and safety protocols, e.g. getting produce and fish from rural Fiji into Suva when Suva went into lockdown.
 - v. SPC developed a 'Digital Transformation and Empowerment' concept note as the basis for a coordinated strategy and approach to support the region's response and recovery. The concept is shaped around objectives of remaining functional through virtual means, if necessary; identifying e-commerce opportunities to replace losses in other key sectors, such as tourism and fisheries; delivering capacity building, training and education remotely; and expanding market access despite reductions in air and sea transport.
 - vi. Working with partners to maintain important science and collection of samples and data to monitor fish stocks under restricted travel arrangements.

- vii. Expanding collaborative efforts to strengthen food systems, including domestic food security, through CePaCT's⁷ rapid deployment/distribution of vegetable seed and tissue culture plants, and through providing training in suitable aquaculture options for communities and the private sector.
- viii. Exploring options for 'building back better' including climate-compatible development.

CROP architecture and cohesion

24. The diagram in Annex A, *CROP architecture and coordination*, provides an overview of the current governing arrangements, coordination meetings, taskforces and working groups, and hierarchical relationships, that make up the primary CROP coordination arrangements.
25. There are currently 18 CROP-specific meetings, taskforces or working group arrangements. It is worth noting, however, that several of those mechanisms have been dormant in recent years (Gender, Marine, WARD, and the Sustainable Development working groups). As a result, in May, CROP Heads decided to act as navigators in reviewing/re-purposing these groups as required. In addition, there are four new CROP taskforces (2050 Strategy; International Engagement; Socio-economic Impact Assessment; and Nuclear Issues). These are timebound mechanisms with specific terms of reference for delivery, per the 2018 CROP Charter.
26. Each of these arrangements involves at least one meeting a year (but often more), regular reporting to CROP and substantive engagement capacities. It is a complex and capacity-intensive coordination arrangement that requires considerable staff time and investment by individual agencies if they are to engage effectively and consistently, and contribute to CROP goals in a meaningful way. These arrangements are being refined by CROP Heads to ensure alignment and stronger collaborative efforts across CROP and other important regional stakeholders. SPC contributes substantively to all CROP mechanisms, and chairs or co-chairs four of the working groups:
- i. Gender Working Group (Co-Chair with PIFS).
 - ii. Working Arm on Resilient Development (Alternating Chair; SPREP is now Chair with SPC providing navigating support).
 - iii. Health and Population Working Group (SPC is Chair and PIFS provides secretariat support).
 - iv. Marine Sector Working Group (FFA and SPC are Alternating Chairs).
27. At the CROP Heads meeting in February 2020, in line with the decisions of the Forum Officials Committee (July 2019), PIFS requested that corporate harmonisation continue to be a focus for CROP in the interest of collaboration and cost savings. CROP Heads were requested to encourage their Heads of Corporate Services to pursue practical examples of harmonisation and to continue to work together to strengthen CROP systems. In this vein, the joint travel tender undertaken by PIFS and SPC in late 2019 was cited as a good example.
28. While COVID has delayed some plans for corporate harmonisation in the short term, the constrained fiscal environment brought about by the pandemic highlights the need to seek efficiency gains and streamline the regional architecture and coordination arrangements wherever possible. These efforts, which Forum Leaders called for in 2019, should feed into the CROP Regional Architecture Review associated with delivering on the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Key areas of back-office support, such as ICT connectivity and support services, finance, procurement and human resources, may require more focused assessments in this

⁷ Centre for Pacific Crops and Trees (SPC).

context. In this regard, the lessons learned by SPC as a relatively large institution that continually explores efficiency measures, could help to inform potential opportunities among CROP.

Conclusion

29. In late 2020, Heads of CROP agencies will meet with CROP Governing Council Chairs to discuss and agree on a CROP Strategic Work Agenda for 2021 that reflects Forum Leaders' priorities and also how the region has fared during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Agenda will include an ongoing focus on response and recovery, the 2050 Strategy for a Blue Pacific Continent, and a related review of the regional architecture.
30. SPC has contributed significantly – as part of the regional architecture – to addressing Leaders' priorities to date and throughout the COVID response. It is well placed to support the key priorities of Forum Leaders and the region's response, recovery and transformation efforts following COVID-19. This work requires considerable dedicated capacity and strong coordination across SPC, with PIFS and other CROP agencies, and with a wide range of regional stakeholders. Efforts to strengthen SPC's Senior Leadership Team and organisational structure, and its focus on improved service delivery and efficiency gains, will enhance SPC's ability to support this work. The frequent meetings of CROP Heads and Deputies during the pandemic have also helped to identify key areas for continued collaboration, e.g. digital transformation, and responses to compound challenges such as a pandemic, climate change and natural disasters.
31. As the largest regional organisation in CROP, SPC's own initiatives in recent years to develop more integrated programming across divisions and areas of work, streamline core services and explore efficiencies and cost recovery, provide useful lessons to support similar CROP efforts. SPC is working closely with PIFS to share these experiences and lessons learned through various CROP arrangements.

Recommendations

32. CRGA is invited to:
 - i. note CROP's progress against its Strategic Work Agenda for 2019–2020 and the process for developing an extended working agenda for 2021;
 - ii. welcome SPC's central role in supporting collective CROP responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and identification of areas to support the region's recovery;
 - iii. acknowledge the collaborative work by SPC and other CROP agencies on key issues including the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent; regional health; climate change and disaster resilience; fisheries; and ocean affairs, sea-level rise, and maritime boundaries priorities;
 - iv. encourage the Secretariat, in collaboration with other CROP agencies, to continue efforts to streamline service delivery and explore efficiency gains and to share these experiences, including to inform the Regional Architecture Review in 2021.
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Annex A

CROP Architecture and Coordination Arrangements

