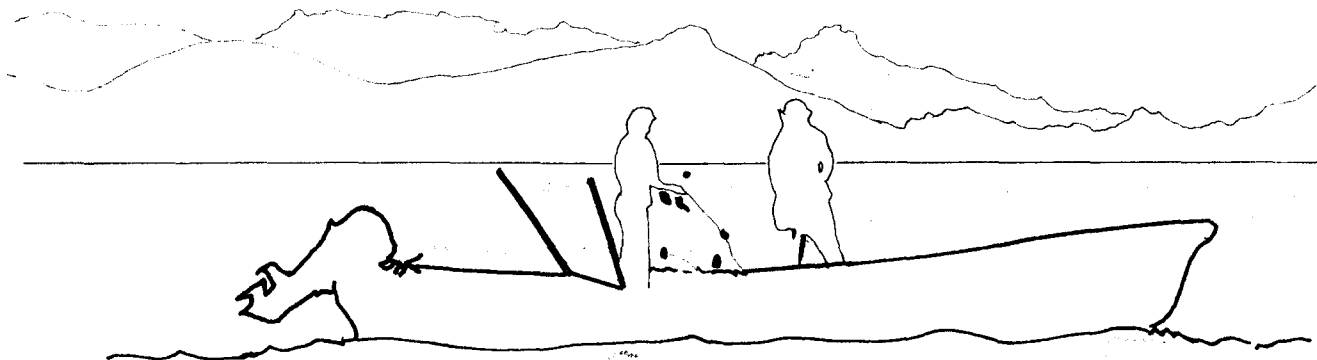


# FOCUS ON IFRP

The IFRP, the Inshore Fisheries Research Project, is a newly-created project within the overall umbrella of the SPC Fisheries Programme. The project, headed by a Senior Inshore Fisheries Scientist, Mr Garry Preston, was established in 1987 in response to numerous requests from Pacific Island countries for assistance and research in the field of inshore fisheries resources. The project's major objectives are to improve the capabilities of Pacific Island countries to assess and monitor the status of exploited or exploitable inshore marine resources, and to collect the information necessary to formulate national fisheries development and management plans or strategies. The IFRP is funded by the United Kingdom on an extra-budgetary basis for a three-year period. Following a general introduction to the SPC Fisheries Programme and the various projects that make up this programme, we turn to the Inshore Fisheries Research Project. Highlights of the project's activities follow a short interview with Mr Preston.



## THE SPC FISHERIES PROGRAMME

The area served by the South Pacific Commission contains approximately five million people scattered over some thirty million square kilometres. More than ninety-eight per cent of this area is the Pacific Ocean. This percentage emphasises the importance of marine resources to the social, cultural and economic well-being of the people of the region.

The South Pacific Commission has played and continues to play a major role in the development of the region's fisheries at subsistence, commercial and industrial levels. Today, marine resources retain their traditional importance to the diet and cultures of Pacific Island peoples. The value of marine products harvested for commercial uses has also increased from insignificance to rival the total value of all other renewable resources combined. Nevertheless, many countries are only now beginning to implement national fisheries development programmes, and assistance to the development of national and regional fisheries remains a priority activity of SPC.

In keeping with the importance of marine resources, assistance to member countries in fisheries development is the Commission's largest single activity. The Commission's activities in this field are broadly divisible into two areas, which nevertheless show considerable overlap and integration, and which relate respectively to the development and management of small-scale inshore fisheries, with the focus on the provision of technical assistance and training at national and regional levels, and to the conduct of a programme of catch and effort monitoring and scientific

research on behalf of member countries to generate the resource information necessary for the rational exploitation and sound management of the expanding international tuna fisheries in the SPC area.

With increasing commercial use of the region's fisheries resources, Pacific Island countries have a growing need for assistance in surveying, understanding and developing their potentials, and for training of fishermen and fisheries officers. Countries' needs in fisheries are increasing and changing. The SPC's fisheries programmes, because of their inherent flexibility and direct control by governments, have and will continue to evolve accordingly. They provide a balance of inshore and oceanic fisheries projects to cover the broad spectrum of fisheries assessment, development and training needs of member countries.

The SPC Fisheries Programme, headed by the Fisheries Co-ordinator, Mr Barney Smith, comprises the following five main projects: the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme (TBAP), the Regional Fisheries Training Project (RFTP), the Deep Sea Fisheries Development Project (DSFDP), the Fish Handling and Processing Project (FHPP) and the Inshore Fisheries Research Project (IFRP).

### **The Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme**

The TBAP's objectives are to conduct scientific research on stocks of tunas and billfish supporting fisheries in the SPC region and on the environmental factors which affect them, in order to help countries develop, manage and rationally exploit the renewable oceanic resources of the region. Its priority activities include assessment of interaction between fisheries for economic species, assessing and monitoring the levels of exploitation of stocks of commercially important tuna and billfish species, studies on the biology and ecology of commercially important tuna, billfish and bait species, provision of fisheries observers and advice on development of observer programmes and monitoring the use of fish aggregation devices.

In support of its investigations on fishery interactions, the TBAP is about to embark on a major, new, large-scale tagging project that will add substantially to existing knowledge of the yellowfin and skipjack stocks in the region. This project will become the major focus of TBAP research activities over the 1989-91 triennium.

The Fisheries Statistics Project lies within the ambit of the TBAP and was set up to provide statistical services to national fisheries departments, and SPC programmes. Its priority is to maintain and report on the regional oceanic fisheries data base and assist with the collection and analysis of fisheries data at regional and national levels. A major new initiative of the project is the establishment and maintenance of tuna fishery data bases on microcomputers located at national fisheries departments.

### **The Inshore Fisheries Research Project**

The IFRP is a new project established in 1987 to assist SPC member countries acquire the information necessary for the sound and rational management of national fishery resources, in the face of increasing levels of exploitation in many Pacific Island fisheries. The project's objectives are to enhance the national capabilities of Pacific Island countries to carry out baseline resource surveys and assessments and to establish and maintain national small-scale fishery statistics collection and analysis programmes, by providing advice, technical assistance and training.

### **The Deep Sea Fisheries Development Project**

The DSFD Project was established in 1979 and is one of SPC's largest running and most successful activities. By providing expert advice and assistance in the field, the DSFDP aims to assist in the development of small-scale capture fisheries throughout the SPC region, in order to generate income-earning opportunities at all levels, and enable Pacific Island countries to meet their commitments in effectively utilising national marine resources. The project is a village-level, rural

development project, with several roving masterfishermen. It promotes the development and expansion of artisanal fisheries that are at present underutilised. It introduces and demonstrates simple and inexpensive fishery equipment and techniques. It also develops, evaluates and demonstrates new or alternative fishing techniques which enable artisanal fishermen to improve catches or diversify their activities.

### **The Fish Handling and Processing Project**

The FHPP was initiated in 1986 as part of SPC's Coastal Fisheries Programme, to improve marine resource utilisation in the post-harvest fisheries sector. The project provides expert advice in the field of post-harvest fisheries to help countries utilise the catch to its maximum potential by upgrading fish handling practices at all levels in national fishing industries. It develops and promotes the use of simple processing techniques. Finally, it assists with identification and development of marketing opportunities, both local and export, to increase availability of food fish for local consumption and to increase financial returns to countries from fish produce.



**Pacific inshore fishery resources can support small, productive fisheries indefinitely, providing that development proceeds cautiously, with realistic production targets based on scientific advice. The SPC Inshore Fisheries Research Project is working to increase the capacity of South Pacific Island countries to manage their fisheries rationally.**

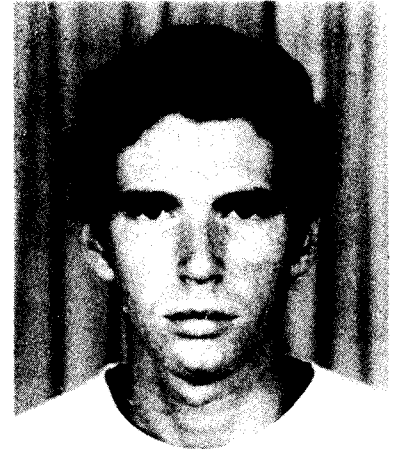
### **The Regional Fisheries Training Project**

The Regional Fisheries Training Project, implemented in August 1985, was conceived as an umbrella project which would co-ordinate all ongoing SPC fisheries training activities and develop and promote a programme of short-term vocational or specialised training activities tailored to meet the specific needs of individual countries or groups of countries. Training courses have been held in specialised areas of fisheries refrigeration, fish handling and processing, fish catching methods and extension skills, and echo sounding. The Pacific Islands Fisheries Officers Training Course is held annually at the Nelson Polytechnic in New Zealand.

## SENIOR INSHORE FISHERIES SCIENTIST GARRY PRESTON INTRODUCES THE NEW INSHORE FISHERIES RESEARCH PROJECT

*The Inshore Fisheries Research Project is a newly-established project within SPC; why was there a need to single out inshore fisheries research in particular, as opposed to other types of fisheries activities?*

The IFRP arose in 1986 after quite a long period of planning and developing the programme, because SPC was receiving requests from its member countries to undertake fishery research projects that concerned inshore and coastal marine resources. At that time we had no real capacity to do this type of work. The Commission's Coastal Fisheries Programme was geared to doing development work. The staff were mainly involved in technical fisheries training, demonstrations of new fishing styles to fishermen and fishing groups, gear development, post-harvest handling and processing - that sort of thing. The Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme, which is the Commission's other major fisheries activity, had a good body of scientific staff, but its mandate is to concentrate on tuna and billfish, not on inshore resources. In fact, the TBAP had from time to time carried out work on inshore resources in response to country requests, but this was never the Programme's purpose. As we started to get more and more requests for inshore research work, we realised that we needed to develop our ability to respond to them.



*What exactly is your role as Senior Inshore Fisheries Scientist in the project?*

As well as undertaking field activities on behalf of the project, I am responsible for its overall co-ordination and administration. At the moment we are a small team - two scientists, an information officer and a project secretary - but we will be involved in a lot of activities with other organisations doing research in the region. We want to try to involve Pacific Island scientists in the work of the project wherever there is an opportunity, so that they gain by experience, and we gain from their assistance. A number of field projects are coming up that require a lot of forward planning, and we also expect to take on occasional short-term research associates who will undertake specific projects - that mainly involve literature research or data analysis - of regional significance. I will be responsible for administering project staff, activities and finance, and generally making sure things run as smoothly as we can manage.

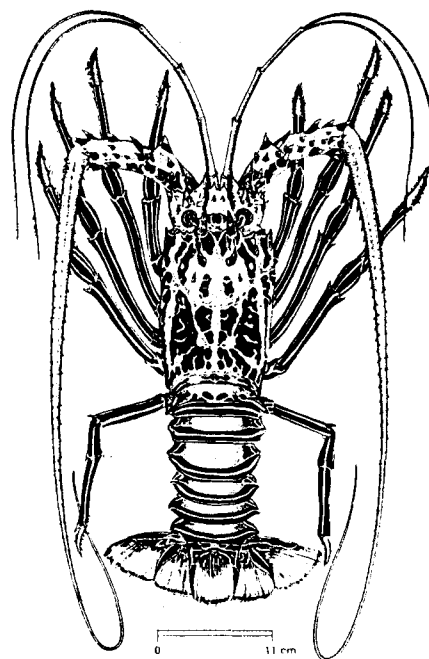
*In March 1988, SPC held a major two-week workshop on Pacific Island Inshore Fishery Resources, which brought together fishery specialists and marine biologists from throughout the tropical Pacific. The workshop, mentioned briefly in our first issue of **Pacific Impact**, was in fact the inaugural activity of the Inshore Fisheries Research Project. What were the major objectives of this workshop and are you satisfied with the results of the workshop itself?*

The workshop was really envisaged as the project's launching pad, and I think it served that function very well. Its aims were to enable a drawing together of current information on the biology and management of the region's most important inshore fishery resources, and to try to get this information to people working on them. The large participation really helped. As well as establishing a big network of personal contacts which we are now starting to build on, it enabled a good flow of information about the workshop back into the region. Since then we have had so much demand for working papers that we are now planning to publish some of them in a series of resource review documents. Overall, I believe the workshop established a lot of momentum for the IFRP and we will be trying our best to maintain it.

*Could you give specific examples of questions discussed during the workshop that you consider to be of particular importance to the project and to inshore fisheries research in general?*

There are quite a few I could give - some are general, some are more specific. In a general sense, some of the fundamental issues that relate to fishery management were among the most interesting. For instance, in the Pacific, the approach to fishery management is the same as it has traditionally been - and still is - in the Western world: leave things alone until a crisis happens, then try to introduce regulations that simply cause further problems to fishermen who are already struggling because the fishery is declining. But a lot of this approach stems from the idea that access to the resources of the sea is a basic human right. In fact, this idea has been introduced from the West. In many parts of the Pacific, marine tenure is an accepted fact, and the waters of the sea, and the fish that swim in them, can be owned just as much as gardens and the things growing in them can. Ownership of resources gives the fishery manager one of his most powerful tools - limiting access. There seems to be a lot of potential in the Pacific for looking at ways in which 'modern' and 'traditional' management concepts can be combined to produce a system of fishery control that people will relate to and accept, because it fits in with what they are used to.

This is a broad conceptual issue. The distance that Pacific Island countries will go towards improving on the Western system of fishery management, which experience has shown fails in just about every case, will depend on the specific fisheries they have to deal with, local politics and interests, etc. The IFRP is more likely to be involved in dealing with specific fishery issues, and again many issues were raised at the workshop that are directly relevant to some of them. For instance, some species, such as tropical lobsters, have long larval lives (up to a year) during which they live in the surface waters of the open sea. They may drift many hundreds of miles before settling on the reef. So, is there any point in one island country imposing regulations on the local lobster fishery, even if these animals seem to be overfished? Most of the animals are probably coming from an up-current spawning stock in another country, while the effects of overfishing on juvenile production are probably causing more trouble to someone else downstream than they are to local fishermen. These are the types of question that have not really been answered yet, but that are basic to managing the fishery, and so they are of great interest and significance to what we do.



*Most of the items covered during the workshop, and it is assumed to be true of the project as well, seem to be overtly technical in nature. What do you think would be the major advantages to be derived from the project by the island countries themselves?*

Many of the biological questions discussed were fairly technical, but then this was a workshop of technical specialists. However, the topics of communication, consultation and information were talked about a lot. Most researchers realise that their data will be worth more to them if they put them into perspective by talking to fishermen and other resource users about what they mean. Likewise, most are aware that fishery management is all about managing people first and fish second. Fishermen can be a mine of information on local resources, and the fact that they are being consulted helps them feel that they are involved in research and management programmes, and that may get some benefits from it. It is very much a two-way process, and the whole concept of communication, at both technical and non-technical levels, was given a lot of emphasis. Organisations like SPC were urged to put effort into developing public and school-level education materials on fisheries, and to try to encourage policy-makers to become more aware of the basic common sense science that underlies fishery management. If we make any progress at all in this, I

think there will be benefits for most countries. In the short term, however, the main gain for countries will be in having a body that they can call on to deal with specific fishery research issues that they are having difficulty in dealing with using their own resources and in being able to have their own staff gain field experience by participating in our activities.



**Traditional fishing canoes in Daru, Papua New Guinea. Making use of the fishermen's knowledge of their local resources and consulting with them in developing fisheries management systems were two of the strongest points to come out of the workshop.**

*The workshop finished with a half-day session which aimed to identify specific fishery research and management problems in the region, and areas where programmes such as the IFRP could make the biggest impact. What were the major problems identified by the meeting?*

They were very wide ranging. Maintaining contact with other researchers, getting up-to-date information and other aspects of the overall communication problem in the region figured widely in the discussions. Specialist training was an area felt to have been neglected, and there were many representatives of Pacific Island countries who said that aid donors were happy to fund fisheries development projects in the region but did not see the value of supporting research to ensure that development was within the limits of what local resources could sustain. More specifically, many countries had particular needs for data or statistics on local fisheries for certain species, or in certain areas. Some technical concerns - such as ciguatera fish poisoning - were common to a number of countries. Quite a few appear to need technical support in establishing and maintaining computer-based systems to store and process fishery data. It is hard to generalise, as the needs of most countries are quite specific.

*The project seems already to have raised a wide interest amongst fishery scientists and marine resource specialists from in and around the region. How do you see the evolution of the project in the near future?*

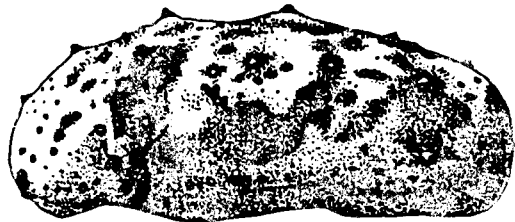
Our stated aim is to help Pacific Island countries develop their own capacities to gather and understand the data they need for effective management of their inshore fishery resources. This means involvement in a wide range of activities, from field survey work and fishery statistics collection, to advising on possible regulatory approaches to fisheries in need of management. It also

means involvement in a wide range of activities, from field survey work and fishery statistics collection, to advising on possible regulatory approaches to fisheries in need of management. It also means communication. By that I mean helping research workers keep in touch, and ensuring that research results are made known in places where they are of relevance, so that people don't end up duplicating each other's work. That is something that happens all the time in the Pacific Islands, because communications and contacts are so poor. We plan to help people keep in touch, to undertake the field work that we are asked to do as quickly and effectively as possible, to deliver results that people can understand and use, and to do what we can to help Pacific Island countries become self-sufficient in managing their marine resources in a more effective way than the West has been able to do so far.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF FORTHCOMING IFRP ACTIVITIES

### Bêche-de-mer resource survey and assessment in Fiji

Bêche-de-mer, or sea cucumbers, represent an important cash crop for many remote or rural areas where alternative earning opportunities may be limited. The final product, which is cooked, smoked and sun-dried, is a high-priced delicacy in many South-East Asian markets and is therefore a valuable export earner for many Pacific nations. The last three or four years have seen a boom in production from the Pacific region associated with drops in supplies from major producing countries elsewhere in the world, together with rapidly expanding levels of imports into mainland China. The rocketing Pacific production has led to fears - that are probably justified - that small local resources may be unable to sustain the present high, and increasing, levels of fishing pressure. Management of the bêche-de-mer fishery to date has been haphazard in the Pacific Islands, with exploitation levels and strategies being largely determined by market forces. These have resulted in periodic booms in production, interspersed with lulls during which the resources have been more or less left alone. In many countries a more considered approach to management appears to be necessary now. Meaningful management strategies, which will probably need to be different for each exploited sea cucumber species, need to be developed in some countries as a matter of some urgency.



In Fiji, a vast increase in trade of bêche-de-mer recently took place, after many years of encouragement and training by the Fiji Fisheries Division. Unfortunately, this increase is neither due to improved processing methods attracting higher prices, or improved fishing methods, but solely to the fact that the South-East Asian import market is now accepting low-value species such as *driloli*, as well as the 'traditional' *sucuwalu*, *loaloa* and *dri*.

Starting in 1984, *driloli* production has increased exponentially until production became 95 per cent of the total in 1987. Since the lower-value species are found in shallow water, harvesting is much easier than for the 'traditional' teatfish and blackfish. This vast increase in exploitation is worrying because we simply do not know the extent of *driloli* stocks. *Driloli* is said to be 'very common', and large numbers were reported from the Bua area early in 1987. However, after hearing reports that harvesters take everything from their collection area without practising any sort of management at all, and in the absence of hard data, the Fisheries Officer of Fiji's Northern Division was prompted to recommend a lower size limit of two centimetres. As well as being a resource-protection measure, this limit is sensible to the exporters, as very small *driloli* are of no value to the export market.



A curing stage in the processing of bêche-de-mer, one of the most valuable inshore fishery resources of the Pacific Islands. The bêche-de-mer trade is presently undergoing a boom that is causing concern to fisheries managers.

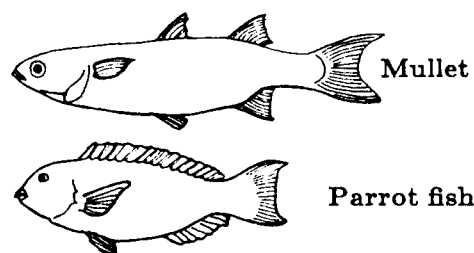
In order to provide realistic management guidelines, and as a basis for possible legislation, hard data are needed. Fiji's Fisheries Division has thus put together a proposal for a resource survey and assessment of Fiji's bêche-de-mer. This intensive survey is to take place in a well-exploited area, to provide baseline stock-assessment data. Some basic biological experiments will also be performed to help determine growth-rates, spawning seasons, etc. The survey will include stock-density estimates and size/depth profiles. Continued work will aim to define ecological constraints on *Holothuria atra* stock-density, and produce a map of suitable areas and exploited areas. The experiments include setting up a 'pen' containing tagged animals and aquarium-based spawning experiments on a monthly basis. Juveniles also need to be identified, if possible.

The survey will be conducted by staff from the Fiji Fisheries Division with laboratory and tagging equipments to be performed at the 'Oyster Laboratory' of the Fisheries Division on the USP campus in Suva (a research vessel will be available for outer island trips). The South Pacific Commission's Fisheries Programme is providing a grant of F\$ 6 400 for the conduct of this survey as well as technical assistance from the Inshore Fisheries Research Project.

#### IFRP participates in fishery resource assessment survey on Palmerston in Cook Islands

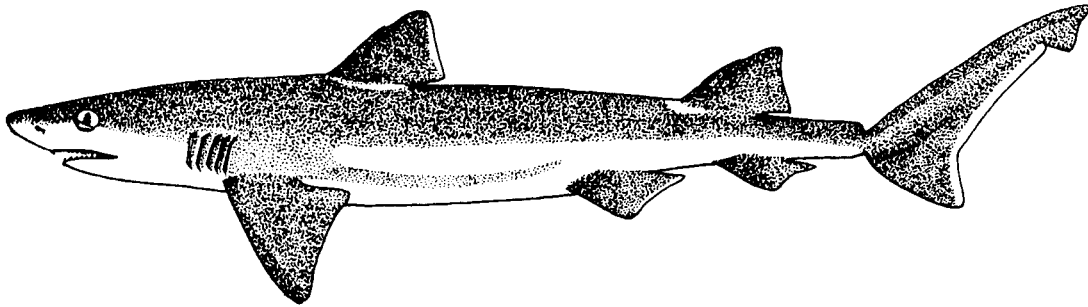
Palmerston Island is one of the major fish suppliers to Rarotonga, the capital of Cook Islands, and is developing a level of 'industrialisation' in reef fish harvesting/processing which gives rise to genuine concern for fishery management. The Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources has identified an urgent need to conduct a comprehensive survey of the parrot-fish (Scaridae) fishery on the island.

The survey is designed to provide baseline information on the fishery, and identify and establish appropriate monitoring and management measures. Coupled with this, it is desirable to identify and assess alternative fishery resources on the atoll, to enable diversification of artisanal fisheries. Possible resources to be targeted include: *Trochus niloticus*, tridacnid clams (especially *Tridacna maxima*), turban/green snails (*Turbo setosus/argyrostomus/etc.*), rock lobsters (*Panulirus*





*penicillatus* and other species), mullets (*Mugilidae*) and other reef and lagoon fishes, deep-bottom snappers (*Etelis* spp.), bêche-de-mer, *Decapterus* and other baitfish, as well as sharks. This exercise will also enable Fisheries Research Officers from other countries within the region to participate in an island-specific survey as a training exercise, for a ten-day period during the survey.

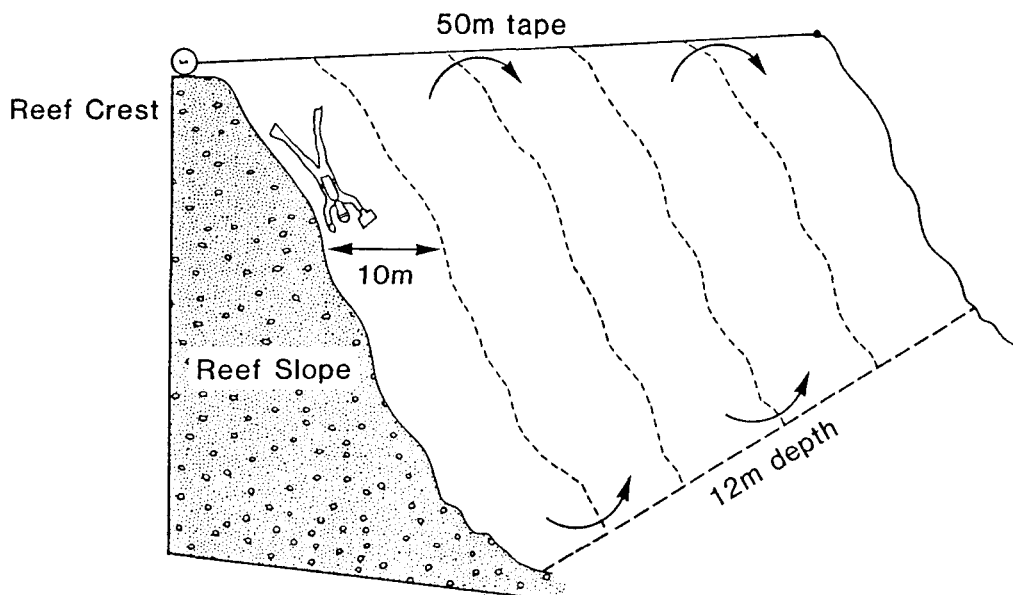


The survey will be organised by Fisheries Scientists Neil Sims and Ned Howard of the Cook Islands Ministry of Marine Resources. SPC contributions include the costs of consultant scientist Dr Tony Lewis, who has extensive experience in the conduct of this type of 'broadbrush' resource survey, and who will be in overall charge of the field work. Senior Inshore Fisheries Scientist Garry Preston will also participate. In particular he will aim to identify and document those aspects of the survey methodology that can be extended to other countries to co-ordinate the collection of information necessary to interpret SPOT satellite images of the major marine themes in Palmerston, and to contribute to the field work itself, particularly visual fish census and test fishing aspects. The Forum Fisheries Agency will also be contributing financially to the project, and an FFA staff member will accompany the team.

#### Training in visual assessment of fish stocks - an ideal fishery survey technique for the Pacific Islands

One of the objectives of the Inshore Fishery Research Project is to assist Pacific Island countries conduct surveys of marine resources, and to develop their own capacities to undertake survey work. The Workshop on Pacific Inshore Fishery Resources had, as a major focus, discussions of a variety of survey techniques and their application. During the discussions, the growing application and usefulness of visual survey and census techniques became evident and aroused the interest of a number of participants from Pacific Island countries.

#### Method of Rapid Visual Census of Fishes on Reef Slopes



Visual assessment of fishery resources is one of the few marine survey techniques that is cheap, requires little equipment and unsophisticated technology, is relatively simple to learn and carry out, is relatively non-selective, and is non-destructive, which allows repeat sampling in the same location. It has application both as an indicator of environmental quality, and as a means of directly assessing local populations of exploitable fish species. The incorporation of visual census elements into surveys that also include more common fishery survey techniques - exploitable such as test fishing - allows considerable extension of the information that can be gained by either technique alone.

A short (two-week) training course in visual census techniques is presently under development for participants from the Pacific Islands region who are required to carry out surveys of fishery resources as a routine part of their work. The programme, which will be heavily field-oriented, is currently under development in co-operation with the University of the South Pacific and the James Cook University of North Queensland. Along with other marine resource institutes in Queensland, the James Cook University has pioneered the use of visual assessment techniques in marine surveys. The venue will be one of the two university campuses, as yet to be decided on. Because of the nature of this type of training, and consideration of safety during extended periods of SCUBA diving, not more than eight trainees will be able to take part.

#### **Analysis of SPC deep-bottom fishing data to provide unique information on deep-bottom resources in the Pacific**

The SPC Deep Sea Fisheries Development Project has been operating since 1979 and has now completed over 50 assignments to various parts of the Pacific Islands region. During the course of its work the project has collected data on weight, number and species composition of the catch (and occasionally basic biological information), fishing effort, and economic aspects of the fishing operation, from over 100 coastal localities, including a number of remote atolls and reefs. All these data are held in their raw form by the Commission. Their interpretation has so far been limited to the analysis needed to draw basic conclusions about the extent of the deep-bottom resource and the economics of local fishing activities.

This body of data represents a unique source of information about the nature of deep-bottom resources throughout the Pacific region. A more detailed, global analysis would permit investigation of trends in the resource geographically and over time, study of the biological characteristics and population dynamics of the various species and species complexes, the estimation of fishing potentials of areas where this has not so far been investigated, and the development of guidelines for managing the various components of the deep-bottom fishery in SPC member countries. The importance of these data is recognised both by the Commission, and by the Fisheries Officers of its member countries, who have urged SPC to undertake the more detailed analysis now being proposed. The Commission has so far been unable to oblige because up to now it has lacked the manpower and support facilities to undertake this work.

The establishment of the SPC Inshore Fisheries Research Project has led to a new emphasis on resource assessment, monitoring and management within the Commission's Fisheries Programme. The project presents a means whereby the DSFDP data analysis can at last be undertaken, either directly by IFRP staff, or with the assistance of other interested organisations. The work to be done includes developing a data entry and storage system, sorting and coding original data forms (some of this will need to be done in conjunction with the Master Fishermen who carried out the original fishing, particularly in the case of the early project visits), data entry, the development of routines for data processing and analysis, extensive consultation with the Master Fishermen and other fishery specialists in interpreting analytical results, and preparation of publications based on raw, analysed and interpreted data.

#### **Large demand for documentation from workshop leads to publication of resource reviews**

The Workshop on Pacific Inshore Fishery Resources was an outstanding success in terms of raising awareness of inshore fishery research and management issues among the region's fishery scientists, bringing them up-to-date on current research knowledge, and establishing an impor-

tant network of formal and informal contacts. The large number of technical documents presented to the meeting brought out the results of recent research work in the region that, in many cases, would probably have remained unpublished and uncirculated. This documentation (including 23 working papers, 108 background papers and 26 information papers) represents a unique body of information on the region's inshore fishery resources. That this is true is attested to by the large and unexpected number of requests that have been received for copies of the papers presented.

Demand for the working papers has given renewed impetus to an idea that has been circulating within the SPC Fisheries Programme for some time. This is the production of a series of Resource Reviews which will draw together current information on the region's more important inshore resources. While not synopses as such, it is envisaged that these reviews will summarise basic biological and management information pertaining to the resources in question, and then add to this by emphasising information on the fisheries existing within the region.

The papers from the workshop represent an excellent starting point for such reviews. The approach envisaged is to take selected papers from the workshop that are relevant to a particular resource topic or theme and to combine them as the main body of a review document. Transcriptions of the relevant discussion sessions and of oral presentations from the workshop (which were recorded) will be added, as will relevant papers from recent SPC fisheries meetings, *Fisheries Newsletters*, etc. In some cases, additional material will be solicited from fishery specialists or scientists known to be working in the subject field. The collected material will be edited for content, style and presentation and subsequently published as an SPC document, making it far more comprehensive and widely available than the material presented in the workshop papers as they now stand. The proposed resource review documents include: demersal and reef fish, pelagic fish, Trochus and green snail, bivalve molluscs, crustaceans, miscellaneous resources (including bêche-de-mer), resource enhancement, statistics and stock assessment, resource surveys, management and regulation, inshore fishery research in Pacific Island countries, and ciguatera and other marine toxins.

#### **Establishment of special interest groups**

Timely access to specialised information on marine resources has been identified as a major problem facing fishery researchers and development workers in the Pacific Islands region. As a step towards improving the accessibility and exchange of relevant fishery information, the Inshore Fisheries Research Project has initiated the process of establishing a number of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) in which it is anticipated that fishery scientists and development workers of the region will participate. The function of maintaining SIGs will ultimately devolve onto the Fisheries Information Sub-project.

A SIG will essentially comprise a group of individuals with a common interest in a given fisheries-related topic or group of similar topics. A listing of active members of each SIG will be maintained at SPC headquarters and used as a mailing list for the distribution of relevant information on the topic in question. Each SIG member will be contacted once every 6 months and asked to prepare a brief report on his or her activities (if any) in the subject field concerned. These will be compiled into a short information package and circulated to other SIG members. Where appropriate, extracts of SIG material will be included in the SPC *Fisheries Newsletter* and other SPC publications.

The SIG will also act as a network whereby individuals can seek technical information from other members of the group. Group members will be encouraged to copy substantive items of correspondence to the SIG manager for possible circulation to other members of the SIG.

A questionnaire on the areas of greatest interest was circulated to the region's fisheries workers in June 1988. The degree of specialisation of the various SIGs will depend on the information gathered from the responses. The topic areas covered by each SIG will be adjusted to ensure that this membership is achieved. The number of SIGs to be established will also depend on the degree of response, but will be limited to a maximum of about 10. This is the extent of the Commission's ability to handle this service at present.