



## Women in fisheries profiles

# Empowering Tuvalu fisheries: Matelina Stuart's journey in communications and awareness

*Tupeope Samani<sup>1</sup> and Matelina Stuart<sup>2</sup>*

Meet Matelina Stuart, the driving force behind transforming the communication efforts at the Tuvalu Fisheries Department. As Fisheries Librarian and Public Relations Officer, Matelina has taken significant strides to enhance how the department engages with the public, bridging gaps in knowledge, and creating impactful awareness materials.

In November 2019, Matelina embarked on a transformative two-week work attachment in Noumea, New Caledonia, funded by the Pacific Regional Oceanscape Program under the World Bank and the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership Programme (PEUMP). This opportunity focused on honing her skills in communications and information dissemination. During this time, she mastered Canva, a graphic design platform that revolutionised her approach to creating professional, polished content. Since then, Matelina has used Canva to elevate the quality of visuals shared across the department's Facebook page<sup>3</sup> and website<sup>4</sup>, moving away from Microsoft Office tools and embracing a more modern and creative approach. Her efforts have not gone unnoticed, with colleagues praising the new, refined look of the department's communications.

Matelina has also been strategic in crafting messages that resonate with various audiences. By advising her team on the use of the local Tuvaluan language, she ensures that the content is culturally relevant and easily understood, particularly for local community members and donors. This cultural sensitivity has made a lasting impact on how the department communicates.

In July 2023 and April 2024, Matelina participated in PEUMP co-funded communications training workshops led by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency in Suva and Lautoka, where she learned to use artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT. These tools have streamlined her storytelling process, reducing the time spent drafting social

media posts and website content. What once took over 30 minutes now takes significantly less, making her work more efficient without compromising quality.

Matelina's passion for education goes beyond social media. She has conducted awareness sessions in primary schools, using videos such as Fishers Tales<sup>5</sup> and Guardians of the Pacific<sup>6</sup> to engage students and their families. These sessions have sparked interest from mothers, who have requested copies of the videos to share with their communities. By tailoring these videos in the local language during workshops on the outer islands, Matelina ensures everyone can connect with the content, regardless of age or background.

In March 2024, Matelina joined a strategic communications workshop that focused on creating video and radio content for sustainable fisheries management. This workshop highlighted the potential for the department to create engaging, locally relevant content. A standout success was a video<sup>7</sup> produced by the Tuvalu Climate Action Network Communications Officer and Niutao Community Fisheries Officer, which reached over 16,000 views on Facebook, showcasing the power of localised storytelling.

Despite these achievements, Matelina faces ongoing challenges. As the sole person handling both communications and library management, she struggles to balance the demands of these roles. Limited resources, such as a digital camera and colour printer, funded by the Tuvalu Fisheries Support Programme under New Zealand, restrict the department's ability to expand its communications efforts. Broadcasting on Tuvalu TV also presents financial hurdles, with high costs limiting the reach of their content to Funafuti viewers only. External donor support remains crucial to overcoming these barriers.

Through her dedication and creativity, Matelina continues to make waves in Tuvalu's fisheries sector, empowering her community with knowledge and driving sustainable change. Her story is a testament to the power of communication, innovation and cultural connection in making a lasting impact.

<sup>1</sup> Pacific Community, Pacific European Union Marine Partnership Programme. [tupeopes@spc.int](mailto:tupeopes@spc.int)

<sup>2</sup> Tuvalu Fisheries Department. [mstuart614@gmail.com](mailto:mstuart614@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup> Tuvalu Fisheries Department Facebook page link: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100064525366745>

<sup>4</sup> Tuvalu Fisheries website link: <https://tuvalufisheries.tv/>

<sup>5</sup> Link to the Fishers Tale videos: <https://cbfm.spc.int/resources/species-and-habitats/fishers-tales-videos>

<sup>6</sup> Link to the Guardians of the Pacific videos: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCq-WnF3Hdrl2\\_eEya24Bram3XJCsigy](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCq-WnF3Hdrl2_eEya24Bram3XJCsigy)

<sup>7</sup> Link to the video produced by TUCAN officer: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3231397027005093>