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Building the science foundations for a Pacific approach to sustainable, evidence-based coastal fisheries management

FAME Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme and Minderoo Foundation

Background

1. Coastal/inshore fisheries provide the primary or secondary source of income for up to fifty per cent of households in the Pacific region. Amongst rural populations, 50–90% of the animal-sourced protein consumed comes from fish¹. Pacific island coastal fisheries are central to the Pacific way of life and are estimated to make up 49% of the total fisheries contribution to GDP.
2. Populations across the PICTs continue to grow, there is greater access to motorised vessels and refrigeration and more efficient fishing technology. Fishing of coastal resources is no longer only artisanal, with commercial interests prevalent and growing.
3. Climate change is exacerbating the effects of overfishing of coastal systems.
4. National governments across the PICTs are looking to maximise the contribution of their marine resources to their economies and well-being.
5. Maintaining and managing sustainable populations of coastal fisheries resources within this environment requires regular collection of appropriate data and information that can deliver assessments of stock health and timely information for pro-active management.

The problem

6. Recognition of the need to improve data collection in coastal fisheries across the PICTs has been a focal issue since the first Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF) in 2017. This need is reflected in the following strategies documents:
 - [A New Song for Coastal Fisheries](#)
 - Pathways to Change Framework, Objective 2: Adequate and relevant information to inform management and policy.
 - [A Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries](#)
 - Coastal Fisheries Strategy 1: Provide relevant information to inform management and policy
 - [Pacific framework for action on scaling up community based fisheries management: 2021-2025](#)
 - Objective 1: Information, awareness and communications.
 - Coastal communities and relevant stakeholders regularly receive information that supports resource management and are able to provide feedback and raise concerns through appropriate and effective communication mechanisms.
7. Recent global/regional assessments of coastal fisheries stocks by FAO, the World Bank and the Minderoo Foundation have been unable to effectively assess the health of coastal fisheries stocks across small island developing states, including the Pacific islands region, due to a lack of suitable data.
8. To date, work to improve this situation has predominantly involved short-term funding models, focussed on capacity building and development without considering long-term sustainability.

¹ HIES Data 2010-2020

Towards a solution

9. The general problems and issues around fisheries data collection have been well documented for many years and remain unchanged, highlighting the need to revisit approaches to addressing these issues.
10. Effective management decisions can be made on the health of coastal fisheries stocks based on a minimum set of suitable data, as long as this information is collected consistently and reliably. Additional data and further analyses can be added to this core monitoring approach, catering to the needs and contexts of individual members. Such an approach is more attuned to the known capacities and resource levels that exist across the PICTs.
11. Effective use of data is crucial to putting appropriate management measures in place. Semi-automated data systems can facilitate analysis and reporting, allowing quick use of information towards management decisions and policy. In addition, entry costs to use these data systems are low and with high potential for scaling across the region.
12. SPC has developed a [Coastal Fisheries Data Management System](#) with an integrated e-data platform. This system enables fisheries officers to capture a minimal set of core data using a mobile application [IKASAVEA](#). Once data are entered, analysis, interpretation, and reporting can be semi-automated with outputs delivered to managers through the web platform for rapid actions as required.
13. SPC sees potential in this approach, but we recognise the need for PICT member input to ensure suitability for different contexts and capacities across the region, and to ensure that the resulting information and analysis are useful for those making management and policy decisions.
14. Moving forward with this approach will require significant mobilisation of resources and capacity by SPC, along with a commitment from interested member PICT's over both the short and long term.
15. SPC, as the primary fisheries science provider for the PICT's for over 60 years, is well placed to facilitate and support this approach over the long-term.

SPC and the Minderoo Foundation

16. The Minderoo Foundation are a modern philanthropic organisation that embraces taking on tough, persistent issues with the potential to drive massive change
17. SPC and the Minderoo Foundation are exploring an opportunity to partner on building the foundations for a sustainable Pacific approach to, evidence-based coastal fisheries management.
18. A partnership with the Minderoo Foundation will draw on their investment strength and expertise to help integrate a simple, refined system for coastal fisheries monitoring and management through regional coastal fisheries agencies. The intention is to work towards a regional standard for coastal fisheries data collection that is flexible enough to suit many PICTs, but still provides useful information at both national and regional levels.
19. Recognising the weakness of previous shorter-term approaches, this online platform, paired with training tools and a mobile application, will continue to be supported and developed by SPC once the beyond the life of an agreement with the Minderoo Foundation.

20. The concept for the project is currently being developed with the Minderoo Foundation but if/when implementation begins, there may be a pilot phase where the proposed data systems and approach are implemented with a few PICT members - collaboratively refining methods and incorporating these data into management plans – followed by a phase where these systems (and SPC support in using them) will become more widely available.
21. A productive and effective relationship between philanthropy, SPC and the PICT's will provide a powerful example of how future challenges for the Pacific can be approached.

