



Pacific
Community
Communauté
du Pacifique

**PACIFIC COMMUNITY
(SPC)**

**SECOND MEETING OF COASTAL FISHERIES WORKING GROUP
Noumea, April 18th, 2018**

Agenda Item:	Value lost and to be gained for Sea Cucumber Fisheries
Paper Title:	Political support for increasing the sustainable returns for communities and national governments from sea cucumber fisheries
Submitted by:	Hugh Govan, Consultant, SPC PROP, Bêche de Mer

Issue

Pacific Island leaders and regional policies have clearly recognized the importance of coastal fisheries for food security, livelihoods and income. The most valuable coastal fishery in a number of PICTs is sea cucumbers, in several cases second in value only to the offshore fishery for tuna.

Results from the SPC PROP project on sea cucumber fisheries has confirmed previous findings that the high value of processed sea cucumber (bêche de mer) in the Asian markets has led to severe overexploitation which in combination with insufficient enforcement of regulations is leading to spiraling decline in landings and value generated by the fishery.

Work commissioned under PROP and previous SPC projects has produced alarming evidence that the inadequate management of sea cucumber fisheries is resulting in substantial losses to communities and national revenue:

- Modeling of sea cucumber fisheries by Carleton et al. (2013) found that more conservative management and more rigorous enforcement of regulations would likely increase the average annual value to countries of bêche de mer exports by 80-105%.
- Comparison of historical landings and application of conservative export values suggest that at least double the current average annual revenue should be achievable from fisheries if recovery is allowed and sustained (MSG FTAC Brief 4.2).
- Analysis of the recorded size composition of landings of 4 species of sea cucumber estimates that if minimum legal size limits were enforced landing and revenue from all these species would increase, in some cases up to 97% more weight and up to 144% more revenue.

The above findings strongly suggest that enforcement of simple management rules could generate at least double the revenue but improvements in processing and interventions to ensure fairer pricing could result in triple the revenue. To put this into context, for Melanesian countries alone the current estimated export value of USD 14 million per year could exceed USD 40 million. By comparison, the value of aquaculture in these countries is considerably lower, around USD 4 million (Gillett 2016).

Achieving substantially improved management is on the face of it relatively simple, involving greater control and oversight of traders and exporters to ensure rigid adherence to minimum size limits at least and other regulations and license conditions as appropriate.

However, implementation and enforcement of management plans are consistently undermined by political and/or trader interference or influence - manifest by examples including:

- Declaring open season of the sea cucumber fishery before stocks are adequately recovered
- Declaring open season dates before regulations and/or management systems are in place and operational
- Interfering with due enforcement of regulations or penalties
- Exemptions or other mechanisms that suspend technical or best practice precautionary regulations

- Undue or inappropriate influence in licencing procedures
- Lack of emphasis or support to implement regulations or criteria under the management plan (exporter criteria, export levies, minimum sizes).
- Setting inappropriately low minimum buyer prices or export values

Proposal

It is important that the CFWG recognize the important dividends that resolving this issue will yield to communities and national revenue. The wider political and governance elements at stake are beyond the capacity of fisheries agencies to address and require wider and higher level interventions.

The MSG's Fisheries Technical Advisory Committee proposed a high level political approach to addressing the issue under their work program which was subsequently approved at the SOM. The approach involves engaging at all possible regional ministerial and other gatherings with the object of urging leaders, ministers, politicians and decision-makers to:

- Recognize the substantial losses to community and government revenue incurred through poor management of sea cucumber fisheries
- Reduce political interference and opportunities for corruption that undermine sustainable management aimed at sustaining maximum long term benefits from sea cucumber fisheries
- Ensure resourcing for adequate enforcement of minimum size limits and other appropriate regulations making use of cost recovery mechanisms where needed

The support of CFWG is requested to highlight this as an important regional management issue to be raised through appropriate channels at regional meetings including PIFL, FFEM, FFC Official, FFC Ministerial, MSWG, HoF, CROP heads. The CFWG is further requested to consider including this for reporting as an important issue under Goal 1 of the coastal fisheries report card which is to be presented to HOF, FFC officials and FFCMIN meetings.

Information sources

- Carleton C., Hambrey J., Govan H. and Medley P. 2013. Effective management of sea cucumber fisheries and the bêche-de-mer trade in Melanesia: Bringing the industry under rational control. A report prepared by Nautilus Consultants on behalf of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Noumea, New Caledonia, Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 55 p. + annexes + appendices[<http://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/3e9e2>]
- Govan, H. 2017. Sea cucumber fisheries and management in Melanesia: Review and policy briefs. For the MSG Fisheries Technical Advisory Committee <http://www.msgsec.info/index.php/publicationsdocuments-a-downloads/study-reports>
- Govan, H. and R. Masu. 2018. "Melanesian Spearhead Group of countries tackles sea cucumber fisheries management" News item, SPC Fisheries Newsletter. #154 <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/en/publications/bulletins/fisheries-newsletter.html>
- Govan, H. 2018. A review of sea cucumber fisheries and management in Melanesia. SPC Fisheries Newsletter. #154 <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/en/publications/bulletins/fisheries-newsletter.html>
- Lee, S., Govan, H., Wolff, M., Purcell, S. Submitted. Economic and other benefits of enforcing size limits in Melanesian sea cucumber fisheries. SPC Fisheries Newsletter.
- MSG FTAC agreed outcomes on coastal fisheries and plan of action on sea cucumber fishery management and bêche de mer trade. Outcomes of 6th MSG FTAC Meeting, Port Vila, 13-17 November 2017