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**Marine Resources Division  
Director's Report 2003**

**Marine Resources Division  
Secretariat of the Pacific Community  
Noumea, New Caledonia**

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## Introduction

1. Rather than write an "Overview of the Marine Resources Division" as has been the case for previous<sup>1</sup> Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meetings and SPC Committees of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA), we will emulate the tradition of the Forum Fisheries Agency and call this the "Director's Report". It is the report of the SPC executive responsible for fisheries to the major stakeholders in this Division of the organisation – member government fisheries sector decision-makers.
2. One major difference between this and the FFA Director's report is the lack of emphasis on administrative issues. This is because member country oversight of SPC is divided amongst sectoral meetings and CRGA:- the pivotal committee that decides the overall administrative policy of the joint SPC work-programmes and the balance between them – a role that the Forum Fisheries Committee itself normally plays within FFA in addition to its fisheries policy role. The SPC Director of Marine Resources also has to report to CRGA on administrative and financial issues.
3. The SPC Marine Resources Division does not have a unitary brief, unlike FFA's remit to coordinate regional aspects of the overall management of tuna fisheries, but is split into two separate programmes<sup>2</sup>, one to work with the region and with member countries and territories in providing *scientific advice to assist in the management of major tuna fisheries*, and one to provide advice to member countries and territories on the management and development of *coastal and small-scale domestic* fisheries. However, FFA and both the SPC Fisheries Programmes work towards the overall vision of the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy:
4. "A healthy Ocean that sustains the livelihoods and aspirations of Pacific Island communities"
5. Both the Oceanic and the Coastal Fisheries Programmes of the SPC Marine Resources Division have been externally, independently reviewed during the period since the 2<sup>nd</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting (HoF2), and these reviews will be presented at HoF3 (see WP3, IP3, WP5 and IP5). Although independent programme reviews have been carried out several times on the OFP, the CFP is normally reviewed internally, or externally project-by-project and this is the first time that an independent whole-programme CFP review has been carried out.

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<sup>1</sup> HoF2 (2001) papers can be perused at <http://www.spc.int/coastfish/Reports/RTMF28/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> The SPC Marine Resources Division also technically includes the SPC Regional Maritime Programme, but this is separately managed and administered out of SPC Suva and does not report to the Director of Marine Resources.

6. There is enough information available at this meeting, particularly through the Programme Strategic Plans (see WP2, IP2 and IP4), Programme Workplans (see IP8 and IP9) and the programme review documents, for new HoF participants to obtain an overview of what are the fundamental aims and functionalities of SPC's fisheries programmes without going into detail here, but briefly:-

- The Oceanic Fisheries Programme provides advice to tuna fisheries managers on the status and prospects of tuna fishery stocks and their ecosystems. It works in close consultation with FFA. Indeed, the Forum Fisheries Committee, whose composition is a major subset of HoF, is also normally considered to be a stakeholder in the OFP. Although there have been occasional suggestions that FFA and OFP should be merged, there are benefits to maintaining a separate existence, not least being the fact that SPC's broader membership is beneficial to an advisory service that needs to acquire data and analytical support from a broad area, whilst FFA's narrower membership, confined to entities whose ultimate fisheries decision-making authority is geographically centred within the region, is conducive to effective consensus fisheries decision-making. The OFP has three closely-interrelated sections (see IP2 and IP3 for more information):
  - (Oceanic Fisheries) Stock Assessment & Modelling;
  - (Oceanic Fisheries) Statistics & Monitoring;
  - (Oceanic Fisheries) Biology & Ecology.
- The Coastal Fisheries Programme provides advice and expert support to Pacific Island fisheries services on a wide range of issues (apart from tuna fisheries management and stock assessment) where solutions are more effectively achieved by regional collaboration. Although it is called the "Coastal" "Fisheries" Programme because it was initially concentrated entirely on issues related to reef fisheries, the risk involved in basing economic development on such a fragile base as reef fisheries has meant that its development work over the past decade has been increasingly focussed on small-scale Pacific Island tuna fishery development, and more recently on aquaculture. The CFP currently has 6 sections (see IP4 and IP5 for more information), which operate in a more decentralised manner than OFP sections, but which have certain notable interdependencies:
  - Fisheries Development;
  - Reef Fisheries Observatory (covers stock assessment, statistics/monitoring and biology/ecology in a similar sense to the OFP work on oceanic pelagics);
  - Aquaculture (a relatively new section providing capacity building and institutional support for Pacific Island aquaculture services, and a focal point for a multi-agency regional aquaculture strategy);
  - Coastal Fisheries Management (currently specialised mainly in community and co-management);

- Fisheries Training (skills development in member country fisheries departments & private sector fisheries);
- Fisheries Information.

### **Achievements of the Marine Resources Division Fisheries Programmes**

7. It is difficult for an organisation like SPC, whose primary purpose is to assist *others*, to quantify its own achievements, and it is particularly difficult to separate out the organisation's role in those achievements. Explaining such difficulties is usually seen as an excuse for underachievement, and when donors themselves are under pressure to demonstrate how much progress their money has bought, it often leads to organisations claiming sole ownership of group achievements (e.g. "six MPAs were established"), or claiming intermediate events as actual achievements (e.g. "the 2<sup>nd</sup> Heads of Fisheries Meeting was successfully held").

8. It is also difficult to quantify achievements in fields where baseline information is scarce; where monitoring is expensive compared to the value of the activity; and where perceptions are variable, such as artisanal fisheries development or management. One of the major purposes of the new Strategic Programme Plans (see WP2, WP4) therefore is to try to define indicators of progress that can actually be measured and provide a realistic view of the performance of the OFP and CFP. We welcome HoF comments on these indicators to see if they are indeed useful and realistic. It should also be noted that several activities have been launched, particularly under European Union funding, and some in collaboration with FFA, to establish those baselines against which progress in fisheries development and management can better be measured by both SPC and other regional and national institutions in future.

9. HoF is only halfway through the annual budget cycle, and the overall appraisal of achievements for the year against the strategic plan will be considered at CRGA<sup>3</sup> in November, but the preliminary 6-month programme reports against the 2003 workplan are available as IP8 and IP9. A more detailed idea of the activities and outputs of the fisheries programmes can be gained from these documents.

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<sup>3</sup> HoF delegates are encouraged to brief their national or territorial CRGA representatives on fisheries and programme performance issues which may need to be brought up during the SPC governing council meeting.

10. To summarise, recent results which the CFP and OFP have been significantly associated with, or responsible for, include:

- Helped improve national tuna statistical capacity by providing attachment training for fisheries database staff from Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu;
- Provided technical and financial support for new observer programmes in the Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati and New Caledonia, in addition to support for existing national programmes;
- Maintained technical support for national databases, including provision of logsheet data-input, and continued to compile and disseminate research data on tuna fisheries in the WCPO;
- Assisted in regional tuna fishery management decision-making by producing annual regional assessments of the status of albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin tuna stocks for use by national, regional, and international fisheries managers.
- Produced 6 National (tuna) Fisheries Assessments or Tuna Resource Status Reports since HoF2 (Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna, Tokelau, PNG, Kiribati)
- Carried out field survey work for National Reef Fisheries Assessments in 4 countries and territories in the past year
- Improved Pacific Island roles in the management of the regional tuna fishery, and improved national fishery management potential by assisting FFA and member countries in the production of 5 national tuna fishery management plans since HoF2 (Fiji, PNG, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Kiribati)
- Enhanced biological understanding of the horizontal and vertical movements of bigeye and yellowfin tuna through the deployment of pop-up satellite archival tags on 5 bigeye and yellowfin tuna in New Caledonia and PNG and the analysis of bigeye tuna archival tag recoveries from the Coral Sea
- Produced a range of awareness, information and technical materials including a manual on tuna longlining, a brochure, poster and leaflets on bycatch from tuna longlining, waterproof identification cards for turtles, live reef fish, bêche-de-mer, published 15 SIG bulletins, eight Fisheries Newsletters, and numerous miscellaneous publications, field reports, and posters and disseminated this information widely in the region.
- Assisted island members in establishing programmes that encourage participation of local communities in the management of coastal fisheries (American Samoa, Marshall Islands and Fiji).
- Pacific Islands aquaculture skills and experience developed through seven professional attachments involving eight Pacific Island countries, 11 regionally-based consultancies and 8 regional representatives participating in international aquaculture conferences and workshops;

- The potential for aquaculture networking and information significantly improved through the creation of the SPC aquaculture web-portal
- Assisted members in making collective decisions and setting regional priorities by convening regional meetings in aquaculture, reef fisheries assessment and coastal fisheries management, and by providing support to member countries at FFA, SCTB, interim WCPTC, SCG, US treaty and occasionally UN meetings.

11. (Note: this is by no means a complete list of things accomplished, but is an edited version of SPC section head's ideas of their sections' most significant achievements).

12. Like FFA, a significant focus for the OFP has been support to the region during the continuing negotiation process under the pending Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific, although this support emerges mainly from the ongoing fundamental work of assessing the health of regional tuna stocks and developing an understanding of their supporting ecosystem rather than being a separate activity. OFP's role here is congruent with that of Working Group 2 of the preparatory process towards the WCPT Commission, which will be taken further in October at the Rarotonga meeting<sup>4</sup>. Unfortunately, in terms of measurement of OFP achievements, the potential results of this activity are currently imponderable, but since the additional work required is not great, the activity is likely to be cost-effective for the region whatever the final form of the Commission.

### **Status and trends of fisheries**

#### *Oceanic fisheries*

13. The Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish, consisting of SPC, coastal State, and distant water fishing Nation scientists, and others, meets each year prior to any Heads of Fisheries meeting, and produces a consensus opinion on the status of tuna stocks in the region. The executive report of the meeting is provided as Information Paper 14. The FFA Director's report to the Forum Fisheries Committee additionally provides a summary of the economic and management aspects of regional tuna fisheries, and will thus not be covered here.

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.ocean-affairs.com/> for details of interim WCPTC processes.

14. The main recommendations and findings of SCTB, based mainly on assessments provided by the OFP, were:

- Skipjack continues to be in good shape, with current levels of biomass and recruitment at high levels. Fishery impacts on the stock are low-moderate and current levels of catch (about 1.2 million t annually) are easily sustainable under these conditions.
- Albacore in the South Pacific appears to be fished within sustainable limits despite increases in longline catch in recent years. Overall production has been fairly constant over 40 years. While there is no evidence of overall deterioration in stock condition, there have been declines in catch rate in some domestic fisheries as effort has increased, particularly in areas close to unloading sites which have been subject to the most effort. This type of local depletion is expected as fisheries develop. Poor catch rates generally in the region have been experienced during 2003. Data are not yet available to fully assess this development, but possible reasons include current environmental conditions (*El Niño*) impacting albacore catchability, the effects of local depletion, and/or a series of weak year classes entering the longline exploitable population.
- Yellowfin is currently close to full exploitation, with little increase in long-term average yield possible with the current pattern of age-specific fishing mortality. Overall, fishery impacts are moderate, but are differentially higher in the equatorial zone. The main fishery impacts are due to the catches of juvenile yellowfin by the domestic fisheries of Indonesia and Philippines and the purse seine fishery. The longline fishery currently has a minor impact. SCTB continues to recommend that current levels of juvenile yellowfin fishing mortality not be further increased.
- The current assessment for bigeye tuna indicated that the current stock size remains above overfishing levels due primarily to above-average recruitment in the past decade. However, fishing mortality is high and if maintained would eventually bring the stock to an overfished state unless the above-average recruitment conditions continue. Unlike yellowfin, the longline fishery has a substantial impact on the stock, and overall fishery impact is now estimated to be high following increases in catch of juvenile bigeye by the Philippines, Indonesian and purse seine fisheries. The level of uncertainty with the assessment remains high and several technical issues need to be addressed. Nevertheless, SCTB recommended that there be no further increases in fishing mortality and cautioned that, if the results of this year's assessment are confirmed, management authorities will need to consider measures to reduce fishing mortality.

- SCTB reiterated its previous concerns that the results of regional stock assessments are heavily influenced by assumptions that must be made regarding the catch levels and composition from the domestic fisheries of Indonesia and the Philippines. A newly developed fishery in Vietnam may soon fall into the same category. Better data from catch monitoring and sampling programmes needs to be collected from these fisheries and incorporated into regional assessments.
- Regular large-scale tagging experiments should be considered as a routine population monitoring tool for tuna fisheries. A new large-scale tagging effort is urgently needed to refine the assessments for all species.
- SCTB could not decide on a definition of fishing capacity, and given that its primary focus was on stock assessment would thus, by implication, leave this and other scientific questions to be answered by other mechanisms.
- The next SCTB (17) will be held in the Marshall Islands at a date to be decided.

15. An issue this year, that has complicated the process of translating scientific analyses of tuna fisheries into information usable by decision-makers, has been the extremely high profile (by fisheries standards) publication in the journal *Nature* of an academic paper<sup>5</sup> from Dalhousie University in Canada, by Ransom Myers and Boris Worm which implies that mainly longline fishing in the 1950s and early 1960s reduced Pacific regional tuna population levels to around 10% of their unexploited levels. Tuna fishery scientists, including those from the OFP, have taken issue with this interpretation of the data, which is not consistent with more detailed assessments or with the recent history of the fisheries. An interim response to this article has been posted on the SPC web site<sup>6</sup> (and is available as IP 15) pending a more formal published response.

16. The formal report of the WCPTC interim scientific committee (SCG) that followed SCTB is not yet available, but among the recommendations agreed at the meeting are some that will apparently (i) confirm the role of the OFP as data managers for the Commission for the interim (pre-Commission) and transitional periods (initial period after the Commission begins), with a review to assess the cost- effectiveness of the OFP providing these services in the long-term; and (ii) require operational level data (i.e. logsheets) be collected and provided by fishing nations and other members to the Commission (or its data manager) as a fundamental catch and effort data set

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<sup>5</sup> Myers & Worm (*Nature*, 423:280-283, 15 May 2003)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.spc.int/oceanfish/Docs/Research/Myers\\_comments.htm](http://www.spc.int/oceanfish/Docs/Research/Myers_comments.htm)



*Coastal Fisheries*

17. Status and trends in coastal fisheries are somewhat less comprehensively monitored and assessed at the regional level, because of their highly diverse, scattered, and non-industrial nature, and because the ranges of coastal fishery stocks are usually localised, with no obligation for international collaboration in their management under UNCLOS<sup>7</sup>. Although FAO members are obliged to report annually to FAO on the production of fisheries and vessels under their jurisdiction, summarised annually in the FAO "State of Fisheries and Aquaculture" ("SOFIA") report ([http://www.fao.org/sof/sofia/index\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sof/sofia/index_en.htm)), most Pacific Island States' capacity to provide detailed, regular statistics for coastal fisheries, particularly subsistence fisheries, is extremely limited.

18. To date, there has been no regular regional status, or "early warning" report on coastal fisheries. Issues that could benefit from a concerted regional approach (such as the potential for management crisis in the itinerant Live Reef Food Fish Trade in the mid-1990s) are brought to the attention of the region in an ad-hoc manner, if at all. One of the purposes of the new coastal component of the EU-funded PROCFISH project is to enable the SPC Reef Fisheries Observatory to produce an annual regional status report on coastal fisheries, as well as the information that will be produced to guide reef fisheries management at the local and national levels. The first such regional overview will be produced for the 4<sup>th</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting, and will be based on the best available information, from the areas already surveyed by PROCFISH/C plus "intelligence" from all other possible sources, as compiled into the Regional Reef Fisheries Data Repository.

19. The main regional worries in the status and trends of Pacific Island coastal fisheries continue to be this need for better information itself, along with several "problem fisheries" and issues as follows:-

- Live Reef Food Fish Trade – a high-risk fishery with a limited resource-base and high overheads, requiring rigorous attention if it is to be managed sustainably, otherwise requiring severe "failsafe" limitation.
- Beche-de-mer – SPC recently received requests from several countries for advice on the management of this fishery. SPC, in collaboration with Worldfish and others, will be looking for resources to more systematically assist governments in setting up appropriate monitoring and management measures for this significant rural resource;

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<sup>7</sup> although Agenda 21 does reflect an agreement by developed States to assist developing States to accomplish their management.

- Deepwater snapper – a non-traditional fishery in most countries. A comparatively fragile resource, and prone to overcapacity. There will be a meeting in New Zealand in November on artisanal deepwater fisheries, organised by FAO, with SPC input;
- Ciguatera: renewed worry, with reports from places previously unreported, but little systematic monitoring that could point to causes and thus to remedies. Is this matched by unreported reduction of problems in other areas? Is there an increased incidence of ciguatera-laden fish regionally, or has increased commercialisation unlinked more consumers from local knowledge about ciguatera?
- Local tuna longline catch-rate drops, whether associated with climate cycles or local fishing outpacing regional diffusion, and their effects on small-scale and medium-scale domestic tuna fishery development, possibly to the extent of turning commercial attention back to deepwater snapper and reef fisheries;
- Various problems associated with the export of Pacific Island fishery and aquaculture products, including awareness of overseas markets and prices to reduce the possibility of rip-offs, the increasing need for rigorous quality certification, or even resource sustainability certification, and high transport costs;
- Risk management of introduced aquatic species – a need that grows along with the growth of aquaculture enterprise, and the subject of a session at HoF3.

20. [This is only a brief list of current, or new, “major issues” based on the kind of requests that the SPC Coastal Fisheries Programme receives from members, and would benefit from discussion and input by this 3<sup>rd</sup> Heads of Fisheries Meeting. One of the purposes of HoF3 is to define a regional idea of what the most pressing issues actually are, so the CFP can accordingly refine the track of its work-programme, or otherwise seek support for members. Some of these issues will emerge during the round-table discussion on day one. Additional issues or altered priorities will emerge as the meeting continues, and a final list of “pressing domestic fisheries issues” can be discussed at a session on the final day, if the meeting wishes.]

21. Although *perceptions* appear to be developing that almost all Pacific Island fisheries are overfished, overall, there is currently no information to suggest that local reef food and subsistence fisheries are actually unsustainable in most areas,. In general (with some notable exceptions, where Heads of Fisheries will be able to provide authoritative advice) these fisheries are in fairly good shape when compared with historical levels of exploitation, or with the problems of reef artisanal fisheries in other parts of the world. But SPC continues to stress that this is no excuse for complacency. There are definite problems in some areas and species groups, and the overall sustainable status of rural food fisheries will only be maintained, in the face of increasing human populations, urbanisation, or increasing commercialisation, if socially and financially-appropriate monitoring and management, and “ecological insurance”, mechanisms are implemented. The Pacific Islands region is fortunate in still having the opportunity to make sure its coastal food fisheries remain sustainable. Or, if certain islands decide on such a development path, that healthy reef ecosystems remain to enhance a global competitive advantage for Pacific Islands in tourism.

22. To provide a framework for addressing these priority concerns in the context of the whole, the Coastal Fisheries Management Section has consulted with member countries to develop a set of a regional strategies for sustainable coastal fisheries management in Pacific islands (see WP7 and IP7). This process involved a policy meeting on coastal fisheries management, and a regional consultative study, and the strategies will help direct the future activities of the Coastal Fisheries Management Section.

23. Also in the context of developing better regional overviews of coastal fisheries, the Fisheries Development Section is currently compiling a summary of the fisheries development in various SPC member countries and territories, which will be taken further at the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Forum in February 2004 (see IP12), and the Fisheries Training Section maintains a register of fisheries training institutions<sup>8</sup>. The database of people trained is confidential, but overall trends will be summarised in the next Director's report. In the meantime, the Review of the SPC/Nelson Fisheries Training Course (see WP6 and IP6) provides an overview of the current status of fisheries skills development in the region. Bob Gillett and colleagues have produced some very useful regional fisheries overviews in recent years, under commission from FFA, the Asian Development Bank and others, and we highly recommend these.

### **Divisional Administration and Finance**

24. As already mentioned, the Reviews of the OFP and CFP will be considered at this meeting, and both were significant events in the life of the programmes. Both had positive overall conclusions, particularly regarding the quality of outputs, and made useful recommendations to help programmes improve still further, particularly in better directing their services towards the evolving needs of users.

25. Both Programmes have been successful since HoF2 in acquiring funding to continue to support their work-programmes – a considerable improvement on the pessimistic financial outlook of the mid 1990s. Although funding is “lumpy” as large projects begin and end, there has been a steadily increasing trend, which presumably reflects the overall general satisfaction of development partners, stakeholders and donors with previous outputs of the programmes. Although direct financial input from core (derived mainly from member country “subscription fees”) to the fisheries programmes remains small, at less than 5%, core funding is now shared much more equitably amongst SPC programmes, and core supports 100% of the Divisional direction as well as indirectly providing much of the programme support infrastructure through the SPC Corporate Services Division. An additional measure of work-programme security is provided by the harmonisation of programme financing involving the voluntary contributions of SPC's three member donors: Australia, New Zealand and France (see WP2). This is now programmed in three-year cycles, according to strategic programme plans, as opposed to being agreed annually and based on a variety of considerations, as previously.

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<sup>8</sup> also available at [http://www.spc.int/coastfish/Reports/Training\\_Directory/index.htm](http://www.spc.int/coastfish/Reports/Training_Directory/index.htm)

26. And both programmes have expanded into additional office space at SPC headquarters in 2003, with the addition of two floors (including wet-lab space for the scientific sections), largely paid for by core funding. The Fisheries Programmes now include more than 25 staff each, and are likely to expand slightly in 2004 as additional EU-funded projects come on line, and various other functions are strengthened.

27. SPC is however strongly aware that, unlike private enterprise and other spheres of human endeavour, the success of its programmes is not measured by their size, survival or financial throughput, but by the quality and the appropriateness of the service they provide to the region. If services could be better provided through another emergent mechanism, if existing services become obsolete, or if new priorities arise, SPC needs to be both able to detect these, and flexible enough to change, or even to divest itself of certain work-areas.

### **Linkages**

28. The fisheries programmes of the SPC Marine Resources Division maintain a diverse set of institutional linkages, in addition to their primary linkages to member country and territory fisheries administrations.

29. The most important linkage is to the Forum Fisheries Agency, and as well as attending each others meetings of member countries, this linkage is mediated through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) and an annual joint work-programming colloquium between relevant staff. The next SPC/FFA colloquium will be alongside the next Forum Fisheries Committee meeting in Rarotonga and will also discuss expansion of the MOU to define respective tuna fishery development roles, in addition to the current emphasis on provision of scientific support to tuna management.

30. SPC is linked to FFA, and most other regional intergovernmental agencies, through the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) – which is a loose association of working groups drawn together in an annual meeting of agency heads chaired by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. Significant aspects of SPC's involvement in CROP, including the CROP Marine Sector Working Group (MSWG), are reported annually to CRGA, and the CROP MSWG itself met just before this HoF3 meeting.

31. The Division has many other institutional linkages, which will not be detailed here for reasons of space, but where more information is continuously available on the Divisional website [www.spc.int/mrd](http://www.spc.int/mrd), and is provided at other meetings. Five that must be mentioned are our linkages with the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) (built into the Canberra Agreement that founded SPC, as well as being recently the subject of a broad MOU), Worldfish (the recently-changed name for the International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management, or ICLARM), where SPC is currently providing a rented base for its Pacific Islands office, and the US Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council (Wespac) – an SPC member country and territory fisheries management body that both involves SPC in several of its governance processes, and provides support to SPC activities that benefit other island members. The Institute for Research in Development (IRD) is another close partner (both collaboratively and geographically) in several activities, and some of its fisheries research activities are closely aligned with SPC projects. Finally, our newest formal institutional linkage is with the Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia-Pacific (NACA), in which, following special dispensation from the NACA governing council, SPC has actually become a member, and will act as a focal point for NACA linkages to SPC members.

32. Like many governmental and inter-governmental organisations, the SPC fisheries programmes have some problems collaborating with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). However, unlike most institutions this is not for ideological reasons or because of antagonistic roles, but because there is no obvious mechanism for engagement. SPC cannot keep track of every relevant NGO in the region, particularly at the local level, and yet there is no generally-accepted regional NGO focal point similar to, say, the CROP mechanism that links regional intergovernmental organisations. At present collaboration is ad-hoc, and mainly with traditional partners like The Nature Conservancy, through specific joint projects and initiatives.

33. This may or may not be a problem, and at present SPC operates under a policy originating from the last 1997 South Pacific Conference where member governments put SPC in touch with whatever national and local NGOs (or indeed private sector institutions and companies) they consider necessary to help us implement national or local SPC assistance projects, but where national NGOs and companies can consult SPC for the purpose of designing joint projects or activities, provided any resulting request for SPC services is channelled through (and, implicitly, subject to the approval of) government.

**Conclusion**

34. This Director's Report is provided as a general update on SPC-relevant fisheries and institutional issues, for the benefit of participants at the 3<sup>rd</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting. Further details are provided in other presentations or are otherwise available.

35. Although it is not intended primarily as a discussion paper, since many of the topics here will be discussed later in the meeting agenda or brought up during round-table discussion, the Chair may decide that certain issues may warrant immediate discussion or clarification.