

Teen Tuna Tok: Pacific youth-inspiring conversations with fisheries scientists and experts

Pacific youth who want to enter the fields of science, research, marine biology or fisheries sometimes have a tough time finding role models in the region. Knowing that they grow up in the middle of the largest ocean in the world, fish and ocean-related topics are part of their culture and heritage. For teenagers and young adults, having a role model or a person who inspires them are hugely important, so that they can build their own personalities and develop their own set of values. During this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to continue inspiring youth in order to to strengthen their confidence and belief that they can achieve the success they are seeking.

The Teen Tuna Tok initiative

As a joint initiative of the Pacific Community (SPC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), a social media campaign has been launched to initially connect Pacific youth to world-class fisheries experts and scientists for the celebration of World Tuna Day. This celebration, occurring every year on 2 May, is an opportunity to raise awareness about the importance of tuna.

To prepare for this event, Pacific youth were asked to prepare and record on video, questions for tuna scientists on three main topics: tuna and their biology, climate change and tuna, and the importance of tuna to the Pacific. This call for video entries was announced through social media (Facebook and Instagram) a month before the celebration day.

Three weeks later, SPC and FFA received entries from teens from the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea and Tonga.

The content

Surprisingly, participants aged 12 to 17 mostly asked questions about the risk of tuna becoming extinct or overfished, such as :

- 1) Why are tuna such fast swimmers? Why do they migrate from one place to another?
- 2) What are other ways, other than farming, to prevent tuna from becoming extinct?
- 3) How can we prevent tuna from becoming extinct?

SPC and FFA experts were pleased to see that tunas are of great interest to young people in the Pacific, and were surprised to see how concerned they are about the future of tunas. Indeed, it is not yet a commonly known fact that the western and central Pacific Ocean is currently the only ocean region where all four key tuna species can be found in healthy populations, being neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. So, doing their best to avoid the usual expert jargon, FFA and SPC scientists and fisheries experts



shared stories, visual metaphors and used simple words to engage and awaken the youth to the importance of tunas to the people of the Pacific, and to the world.

“Teen Tuna Tok has been a great opportunity to share the science and create what we hope, will be an ongoing dialogue with Pacific youth,” stated Neville Smith, Director of SPC’s Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division.

For the scientists who are used to talking with their peers, it was a refreshing exercise and a great reminder of their own motives. For the teenagers, these conversations were a good learning experience in scientific enquiry, as they allowed the youth to process the concepts in their own terms. The best conversations happen when both sides are truly interested in what the other has to say and there is room for the unexpected.

Check the [Teen Tuna Tok video playlist here](#), or search “Teen Tuna Tok” on YouTube.

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