



Women in fisheries profiles

Dr Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen

Leading the Pacific way

Dr Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen has worked for nearly 20 years in fisheries, including over a decade as the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency Legal Counsel.

In this role she was responsible for providing legal and strategic advice to the Director General and FFA Members on significant Agency and fisheries wide issues. Dr Tupou-Roosen was unanimously appointed by the Fisheries Ministers at the conclusion the 15th Forum Fisheries Committee Ministerial meeting in Cook Islands on 3–5 July, 2018. She began her term as the first female Director-General of FFA in November 2018. Dr Tupou-Roosen gained a Masters of Law in 1997 under a New Zealand scholarship, focusing on international fisheries and achieved First Class Honours. She was also awarded a PhD in Law in 2004 under a Commonwealth Scholarship, with a focus on international and regional fisheries compliance. In pursuing her education, Dr Tupou-Roosen was always intent on returning and serving in the area of fisheries in the Pacific Islands region.

Like others growing up on a Pacific island, my affinity with the ocean runs deep. Swimming, seafood and a never-ending fascination with the ocean has always been a big part of my family life. I have fond memories of accompanying my grandmother to place pandanus in the shallow seawater, in preparation for making mats. In addition, waiting at the wharf at sunset on Saturdays for my father to return from fishing so I could look at the selection of fish, which was then shared and enjoyed amongst the family.

I credit my family for developing my commitment to public service. I was raised by my great-grandmother while my parents worked for the Tongan Government and I learnt very early that there is no replacement for hard work, love for family and a strong faith in what is possible.

From childhood, I wanted to be a lawyer like my father. In my final year of Law School, I studied International Law, which included a section on Law of the Sea. I was hooked! Being able to combine my fascination with the ocean and my studies was ideal and I went on to complete my Masters in International Law. My thesis was on the (then) recently concluded UN Fish Stocks Agreement.

Later, as part of my PhD studies, I visited the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and was so inspired by its mission to maximise the benefits from fisheries for our people that I was determined to work there.

As FFA's Legal Counsel, my role was to provide legal advice on significant agency-wide issues and manage the Legal team.

I'm now humbled to be entrusted by Members with my current role as FFA Director-General. My primary responsibility is to lead our team in facilitating regional cooperation on fisheries management and develop strategies to ensure the sustainable use of our offshore fisheries resources.

I enjoy how dynamic our fisheries work is, with its ever-changing challenges. The most rewarding part of our work is the close collaboration with Members, listening carefully and responding appropriately to ensure we jointly deliver what works best for our countries and our people.

Ensuring that regional solidarity prevails amongst FFA Members can be summed up in one word – cooperation. It epitomises our Pacific Way and will always be our strength. Cooperation has been, and continues to be, at the core of our achievements to establish world-leading tools and standards, such as our monitoring, control and surveillance framework.

Currently, we are working on a project to collect and share information on people involved in illegal unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, rather than being focused heavily on vessel monitoring and compliance histories. I firmly believe this new focus will significantly improve the way we combat IUU fishing.

Our oceans and its fisheries resources is our past, present and future. We always hear that we have a responsibility to sustainably manage our fisheries resources for present and future generations but equally important, I believe we have a duty to those who came before us. They fought hard for the rights we enjoy today, so we need to exercise those rights responsibly.

I reflect often on the unwavering and precious support I receive from my husband and family as well as the opportunity to work with a very close-knit team of like-minded and passionate colleagues. Having the right support at home and at work makes all the difference. It has allowed me to combine motherhood and a career; a gift I never take for granted.

Especially to our young Pacific Islanders reading this: Keep up your faith, Know that anything is possible, Always follow your heart. As with anything in life, there will be bumps along the way but these experiences will only make you stronger.

As for where I will be in 10 years from now: Still committed to contributing to making a positive difference in the lives of our Pacific people. This is a life-long calling for me.