

A roadmap for managing Vanuatu's coastal fisheries in the future

Wednesday, 20 March 2019, marked a significant milestone for the management and development of coastal fisheries in the Republic of Vanuatu. It was the date on which the 'Vanuatu National Roadmap for Coastal Fisheries: 2019–2030' was approved by the Minister responsible for Fisheries. The approval came after a final stakeholder consultation workshop in Port Vila at the end of 2018. The signing and launching of the 'roadmap' culminated after a year's worth of work that started in November 2017, and involved a series of planning, design and review workshops with the Vanuatu Fisheries Department's staff and partners. The roadmap will guide the management and development activities along Vanuatu's coastlines.

Inshore [or coastal] fisheries provide the primary or secondary source of income for up to fifty percent of households in the Pacific region. Amongst rural populations, 50–90% of the animal-sourced protein consumed comes from fish. At the national level, coastal fisheries carry significant cultural and economic value. They are estimated to contribute 49% of the total fisheries contribution to GDP, demonstrating that they are central to the Pacific way of life.¹

Vanuatu is no exception to this. As the cornerstone protein source supporting Ni-Vanuatu living in coastal zones, coastal fisheries are critical to the social, economic and food security of these people. This is evident in that an estimated 72% of households in coastal communities engage in fishing activities in coastal zones for subsistence or commercial purposes² and a per capita consumption of fish ranging from 16–26 kilograms per person.³ Culturally, coastal fisheries are also very important to the people of Vanuatu, and their management is deeply engrained in local custom. In some islands sacred, or *tabu*, areas mean people cannot visit, fish or harvest specific fish species because of their cultural beliefs.

In Vanuatu, coastal fisheries generally refer to fishing activities occurring within 12 nautical miles territorial waters, with the majority of activities concentrating within the limits and peripheries of fringing reefs.

However, Vanuatu's coastal fisheries resources are not in a good shape. There have been noticeable declines for most economically important marine species, such as trochus, sea cucumbers, green snails, lobsters, coconut crabs and giant clams. Figure 2 shows a declining trend in export quantity (tonnes) of trochus, sea cucumbers and green snails.

In areas close to highly populated urban centres, declines in reef finfish resources and shellfish are particularly evident.

Looking into the future, it is projected that coastal marine resource stocks will decrease by 2–5% by 2035, 20% by 2050



Figure 1. From L–R: Hon Hosea Nevu, Minister responsible for Fisheries; Moses Amos, Director-General Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Forestry, Fisheries and Biosecurity; and Sompert Gereva, Deputy Director Coastal Fisheries, during the signing ceremony. (Image: Vanuatu Fisheries Department)

and 20–50% by 2100. These decreases are due, in part, to a predicted rise in sea surface temperatures and an increase in ocean acidification, as well as greater runoff due to higher rainfall and cyclone intensity.⁴

Increased human pressure will also have a significant effect. In 1999, Vanuatu's population was 186,678; a decade later it had risen to 234,023 (2009).⁵ Today, the population stands at around 270,000, with two-thirds of the people living within 1 km of the coast, and depending substantially on coastal fisheries as a source of food and livelihood. While the population continues to grow, the reef area remains the same at 408 km²; the pressure on marine resources will, therefore, intensify as the population grows. Without proper policy guidance and management controls to ensure sustainability, chronic food shortages and poverty will become likely.

The Vanuatu Fisheries Department (VFD) is the mandated government agency responsible for the management, development and conservation of coastal fisheries through the

¹ A new song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea Strategy/ compiled by the Pacific Community.

² Preliminary Report AGRICULTURE CENSUS 2007. National Statistics Office Port Vila, Vanuatu (<https://vnso.gov.vu/index.php/document-library?view=download&fileId=3075>)

³ <http://www.fao.org/fi/oldsite/FCP/en/VUT/profile.htm>

⁴ <http://www.spc.int/climate-change/fisheries/assessment>

⁵ <https://vnso.gov.vu/index.php/document-library?view=download&fileId=3071>

Fisheries Act. VFD has recognised these challenges ahead and, through the vision and leadership of former Director Kalo Pakoa, has taken a significant decision to put in place a policy roadmap that will guide and assist sustainable management to ensure long-term continuous benefits from coastal fisheries for current and future generations.

To realise this, VFD collaborated with partners under the auspices of the Australian government-funded Pathways Project, including the Pacific Community (SPC) and the University of Wollongong. After initiating the process in late 2017, VFD developed its draft roadmap through several planning and drafting stages and subjected it to extensive stakeholder consultation in 2018. The main objective of the consultation process was to present the draft roadmap to all relevant government and non-government stakeholder groups in order to incorporate broader interests, views and activities towards finalising the draft. This consultation provided an opportunity for coastal fisheries stakeholders to discuss the various programmes and activities being implemented within the coastal zone.

The roadmap has a long-term vision that states 'By 2030, secure sustainable coastal fisheries, underpinned by community-based approaches to ensure the resilience and wellbeing of our people'. Figure 3 shows the roadmap's framework structure.

The vision is supported by four overarching outcomes, which refer to different thematic components that make up the vision. These outcomes include resilient communities; effective coastal resource governance, productive and healthy coastal ecosystems, and happy, healthy and wealthy people.

Underneath the four overarching outcomes, six action areas identify clusters of actions that will be addressed. These are critical to realising the overarching outcomes, vision and ultimately the overall success of the roadmap. These action areas include governance, information and knowledge, ecosystem management, markets, health and nutrition, and livelihoods and wellbeing.

Its recent launching will see the roadmap become the key guiding policy document assisting VFD and its stakeholders in the sustainable management, development and conservation of Vanuatu's coastal fisheries resources.

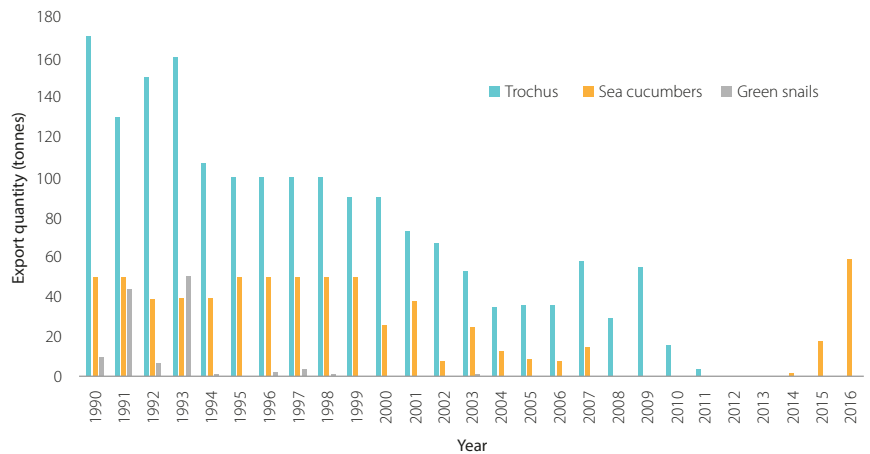


Figure 2. Total export volume of trochus, sea cucumbers and green snails over a period of 26 years, from 1990 to 2016.

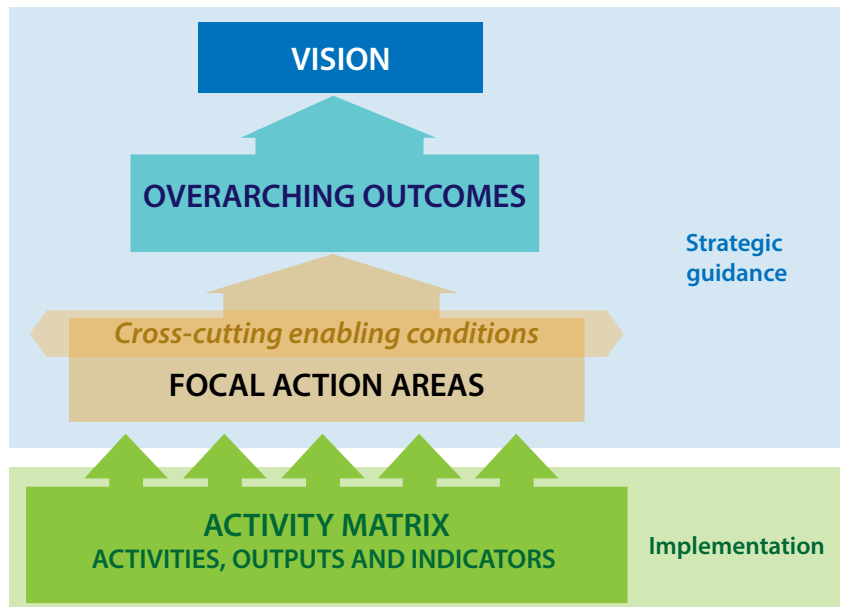


Figure 3. Basic framework structure of the roadmap.

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