

SPC
034.0099
REG
1996
81

SPC/Fisheries 26/Information Paper 7
26 July 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY-SIXTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES (Noumea, New Caledonia, 5 - 9 August 1996)

PACIFIC YEAR OF THE CORAL REEF - 1997 (Paper prepared by the Secretariat)

BACKGROUND

1. The international environmental and marine biological communities have agreed to designate 1997 as the "International Year of the Reef". A small informal secretariat has been set up to coordinate global action, based in the USA at the University of Miami and the Coral Reef Alliance at Berkely California, but the main activity is hoped to be at the regional level around the world. This activity supports the aims of the International Coral Reef Initiative, and was formally declared at the recent International Coral Reef Symposium in Panama, which was attended by the SPC Inshore Fisheries Scientist, and at which SPC presented two papers on the status of coral reef fisheries in the Pacific Islands region (available here as information papers).
2. SPREP has taken on the role of coordinating a Pacific campaign under the global umbrella of the International Year of the Reef. This will probably be the first campaign to get off the ground at the regional level anywhere in the world. A meeting was held in Nadi, Fiji, from 8-12 July 1996, attended by Environment and Fisheries officers from around the region, to plan the campaign. The Pacific campaign is being called the "Pacific Year of the Coral Reef".
3. This paper is to extend awareness of the Pacific Year of the Coral Reef to all Pacific Island fisheries departments, since it is an activity that would benefit from close cooperation between fisheries and environment departments if it is to succeed in its aim of raising public awareness, not only about possible overfishing problems but, more importantly, about the increasing effects of terrestrial influences on reef fisheries.

PACIFIC YEAR OF THE CORAL REEF

4. This should be viewed as an opportunity for fisheries officers to promote inshore fisheries issues which may have been stymied at the political level for too long, such as:-

- reducing the rising death and injury toll from the untrained use of hookah gear for bêche-de-mer diving that is being experienced in some countries;
- the difficulty of setting up marine protected areas, in areas where they are considered desirable;
- problems in getting lands and planning departments interested in the effects that poorly-controlled urban development may have on reef fishing;
- getting action taken to reduce the level of dynamite and poison fishing;
- gaining greater authority to turn down investment proposals that are undesirable from a coastal fishery management point of view, etc.

5. The Pacific Year of the Coral Reef may not be an unmixed blessing for fisheries departments. As with all campaigns, the issues will have to be simplified to get the message across to the public, particularly to schoolchildren, and it is quite possible that all fishing activity on coral reefs will come under suspicion. However, if there is close co-operation between fisheries and environmental officers it will reduce this possibility.

6. The Nadi meeting was a promising start in this respect, and it was fully appreciated by all concerned that a very large proportion of the human population of the Pacific Islands relies almost entirely on reef fisheries for their nutrition. One of the main aims of the campaign is to guard against overexploitation and adverse terrestrial influences so that this food source and income-earning opportunities can be preserved into the future, and this is reflected in the campaign slogan that was decided: **"CORAL REEFS: THEIR HEALTH, OUR FUTURE"**. SPREP was at pains several times to emphasise that this campaign is about "wise use" and not "conservation", in the face of comments from non-Pacific Island participants.

7. The campaign organised by SPREP will involve support and encouragement to individual member country activities, and additional support at the regional level in the form of a regular newsletter, a regional poster competition, advice on carrying out national campaigns, basic resource materials (artwork, video for dubbing or direct broadcast, radio scripts for translation or tapes for broadcast in English, regional media advertisements and publicity, promoting the issue at the Forum and South Pacific Conference, and a small-grants fund to assist national campaign work etc.), a workshop for curriculum developers etc. All of this will be contingent on the necessary funding being acquired, but SPREP appears to have most of the requirements already in place. National environment departments (in collaboration with fisheries departments) have been requested to have basic national campaign frameworks ready for submission to SPREP (Lucille Overhoff is the contact point) by 1st October, so the need for national funding can be assessed. The campaign itself is planned to start on February 11th, 1997, to allow time for the departmental workload accumulated from the Christmas holidays to have cleared, and the campaign will run for 12 months.

8. The SPC Fisheries Programme will not be able to become directly involved in the running of the campaign itself. SPREP is far better prepared to undertake this role, and is in a position to seek the funds to support environmental campaign activities. However, we intend to support SPREP and national activities insofar as existing projects and workloads permit. The existing network of special interest groups and newsletters cover several of the issues in the campaign (such as the live fish export trade and the efforts to keep cyanide fishing out of the Pacific); considerable information on the status of coral reef fishery resources has been compiled and will be made available (and can be translated into a more "user-friendly" format); there are contacts with a large cadre of useful experts in various relevant fields; and (provided the planned connection results) we will be able to host an Internet-based information system to help publicise the campaign in the Pacific Rim and other regions. We will also publicise the campaign in our wider activities, this paper being a case in point.

9. In return, the work of the SPC Integrated Coastal Fisheries Management Project is likely to be enhanced by this increased awareness during the remaining in-country sub-projects, and the Fisheries Information section will benefit from the resource materials and national feedback generated. This increased awareness is also likely to improve the funding prospects for future coral reef fishery related projects that SPC may be required to undertake on behalf of member countries.

10. It should be stressed that this is purely a public awareness campaign, to play the spotlight for a time on some of the issues. It is not designed to directly tackle the issues themselves, but to provide some leverage for national environmental and fisheries departments to accomplish their work more easily. However, direct action on these wider issues is built into the Pacific Strategy under the International Coral Reef Initiative, which was compiled at a SPREP-organised meeting in Suva last November, and which should develop into a general framework for the promotion of information-gathering, coastal management action and national capacity-building regarding Pacific coral reefs.

CONCLUSION

11. Participants are urged to coordinate with their national environment departments (where they are separate) to promote action towards a mutually beneficial set of goals in the coming campaign.

PACIFIC YEAR OF THE CORAL REEF - 1997

Contact Addresses

Pacific Year of the Coral Reef Campaign
Lucille Overhoff
South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
PO BOX 240
Apia
Western Samoa
Tel: +685 21 929
Fax: +685 20 231
Email: sprep@pactok.peg.apc.org

International Year of the Reef Program Coordinator
Robert Ginsburg
RSMAS/University of Miami
4600 Rickenbacker Cswy
Miami FL 33149
USA
Fax: +1 (305) 361-4094/4632
Email: rginsburg@rsmas.miami.edu

Conservation and Public Awareness Committee
Co-chairs: Stephen Colwell and Sue Wells
c/o The Coral Reef Alliance
809 Delaware St.,
Berkeley CA 94710
Tel: +1 (510) 528-2492
Fax: +1 (510) 528-9317
Email: coralreefa@aol.com

