

Annual Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting established to consider coastal fisheries, aquaculture and broader ocean issues affecting fisheries

While regional fisheries ministers in the region meet annually at the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Committee Ministerial Meeting (FFCMIN) to consider tuna and oceanic fisheries issues, there has not been an opportunity for ministers to meet and discuss coastal fisheries and aquaculture issues of regional significance, nor broader oceans management and governance issues related to regional fisheries.



CROP agencies reporting to the Special Regional Fisheries Ministerial Meeting (Pohnpei, FSM, 20 June 2019).

L-r: Roger Cornforth (DDG, SPREP), Dame Meg Taylor (SG, PIFS), Chair, Hon. Marion Henry (Secretary for Resources and Development, FSM); Dr Manu Tupou-Roosen (DG FFA); Dr Andrew Smith (FAME CFP (DD) SPC).

In June 2019, immediately after FFCMIN, a Special Regional Fisheries Ministerial Meeting was held to review and adopt terms of reference establishing an annual Regional

Fisheries Ministers Meeting (RFMM). The establishment of the RFMM was welcomed and endorsed by Pacific Leaders at the 50th Pacific Islands Forum in Tuvalu.¹

¹ www.forumsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/50th-Pacific-Islands-Forum-Communique.pdf

The purpose and role of RFMM is to consider, discuss and take decisions on:

- Coastal fisheries and aquaculture issues of regional significance and/or high importance, including reports from the SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting, coastal fisheries working groups, and the Coastal Fisheries Report Card² on the progress of the Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Fisheries³.
- Broader oceans management and governance issues as they pertain to both coastal and oceanic fisheries, such as the impacts of climate change, ocean acidification and marine pollution on fisheries resources, food security and livelihoods.
- Any fisheries implications arising from wider regional policy processes.
- Fisheries issues to be reported to Pacific Leaders for consideration under the Standing Item on Fisheries, in addition to the outcomes of FFCMIN pertaining to offshore fisheries issues under the mandate of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, and consolidated reporting on the Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Fisheries.

Current members of RFMM are the fisheries ministers of the Pacific Islands Forum and Tokelau. The agenda for RFMM will be developed in advance by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, the Pacific Community, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, and involve early consultation with other relevant regional and/or subregional bodies and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme. RFMM will identify opportunities for engagement with relevant external stakeholders, including civil society organisations and the private sector, development partners, agencies of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific, and working groups.

The Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meeting is the only regional forum for discussing and setting priorities for coastal fisheries and aquaculture, for the joint consideration of oceanic fisheries, coastal fisheries and aquaculture, and where all SPC members participate.

The HoF meeting takes place every two years to discuss the strategic direction and work programme of SPC's Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME), and issues of regional importance to fisheries and aquaculture. Because these issues are only reviewed and discussed every two years, it limits HoF's capacity to be proactive rather than reactive. The 11th HoF meeting (HoF11) in March reviewed HoF's purpose, priorities and direction, and endorsed a two-year trial of annual HoF meetings. HoF will continue to focus on guiding FAME's strategic direction and work plan priorities, and consider strategic regional fisheries policy and governance issues, and emerging issues of concern. HoF11 also agreed that coastal fisheries and aquaculture technical issues should be dealt with by the Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF), with its outcomes forwarded to HoF meetings for consideration.

With HoF to be held annually, and the establishment of RFMM, there is, for the first time, an agreed on flow of information, advice and decisions on coastal fisheries and aquaculture issues at the regional level.

- The Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF) considers the main technical issues affecting coastal fisheries and aquaculture in support of better science-based resource management, equitable access to resources and the safety of fishers. RTMCF will report to:
- HoF, which will continue to focus on guiding FAME's strategic direction and work plan priorities, and consider strategic regional fisheries policy and governance issues, and emerging issues of concern. HoF will report to:
- RFMM, which will consider coastal fisheries and aquaculture issues of regional significance, and broader oceans management and governance issues related to regional fisheries. RFMM will report on fisheries issues to Pacific Leaders for consideration under the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Standing Item on Fisheries.

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² www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Brochures/SPC_2019_Coastal_Fishery_Report_Card.pdf

³ www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Brochures/FFA_SPC_2015_Roadmap.pdf