

Fiji's development of effective coastal fisheries compliance

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Through its 5-year and 20-year national development plans, and the 2017 United Nations Ocean Conference, Fiji has made a strong commitment to improve the management of its inshore fisheries resources. In 2017, Fiji's Ministry of Fisheries (MoF) established the Inshore Fisheries Management Division (IFMD) to directly respond to this commitment. IFMD was established to formulate, review, administer and enforce national fisheries legislation and regulations, and to align, review, implement, monitor and evaluate policies, strategies, plans, programmes and projects to better manage and protect Fiji's inshore fisheries resources. IFMD is supported in its development through support from the New Zealand Government. The division builds on the previous work of officers from the four geographic divisions across Fiji, and seeks to ensure consistent and clear direction for inshore fisheries management and compliance activities.

Under the leadership of IFMD's Principal Fisheries Officer (PFO), Richard Veeran, the division has developed three key functional areas:

- 1) Establish a robust inshore fisheries data collection programme to develop an understanding of the health of Fiji's inshore fisheries stocks and to ensure that informed decisions can be made to support robust management.
- 2) Build strong capacity to develop the fisheries management plans, regulations and policies necessary to ensure Fiji's inshore fisheries are effectively managed and conserved.

- 3) Establish a compliance unit that will effectively and efficiently lead the enforcement of Fiji's inshore fisheries laws.

To ensure the effective targeting of MoF's compliance capability, IFMD has developed an operational compliance strategy (OCS). The OCS provides overarching guidance and coordination for fisheries compliance activities undertaken by MoF and its partner agencies, and recognises the range of activities and different mechanisms that can be used to achieve compliance – from awareness raising and extension activities through to enforcement activities and prosecutions.



Staff of the Inshore Fisheries Management Division, Offshore Fisheries Division and Divisional Compliance pictured with the Hon Minister for Fisheries Semi Koroilavesau, following completion of the first four-week compliance induction training. (Image: Fiji Ministry of Fisheries)

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Officers completing an audit of a large seafood wholesaler in Suva. (Image: Liliana Rabuku)

The OCS acknowledges that improved compliance is founded on extension and outreach activities undertaken by MoF officers. The roles of these activities are not generally viewed as traditional compliance roles but their contribution to increasing compliance has been of significant importance. These outreach activities are fundamental to increasing compliance by improving the awareness of fisheries rules and the reason for their implementation.

While extension and outreach are important, the OCS also recognises that there is a need to have real consequences for serious and repeat non-compliers. To target enforcement activities, the OCS focuses on developing a risk-based system that ensures that the response is informed by the seriousness of the non-compliance and other pertinent information, such as prior offences. Effective enforcement action requires consistent and complete records of interventions and some recorded or formal action being taken for all identified non-compliance. This requires capable officers to consistently deliver these important services.

To this end, the IFMD compliance team was established in 2019 with the recruitment of seven full-time inshore compliance officers. These officers are based throughout Fiji and work closely with the existing divisional staff to deliver effective compliance services consistent with the OCS.

The new staff completed a four-week intensive compliance induction training in Suva between 6 May 2019 and 31 May 2019. The IFMD officers were joined on this training by eight additional officers from each of the four geographic divisions and the Offshore Fisheries Division.

The training assessment was based on and included 10 modules that covered core compliance learning areas, from an introduction to the concept of compliance, legislation, compliance approaches and communication and species identification to note taking, statements, caution interviews, planning and conducting interventions, case file preparation and prosecutions.

The prosecution module included mock court processes where officers were required to present evidence from case files the officers had prepared during the training following live interventions. This prosecution module was well supported by the Fiji Environmental Law Society – which provided experienced lawyers, who collectively had more than 40 years of court room experience in Fiji – to fill the roles of prosecutor, defence and magistrate. The lawyers prepared and presented cases just as they had during their professional careers, and the experience the officers gained from this exercise was invaluable.



Officers confiscating illegal shells from a premise in the greater Suva area. (Image: Viniana Rasuaki)



Inshore Fisheries Management Division and Offshore Fisheries Division officers wearing the new compliance and data collector uniforms funded by New Zealand. Pictured with the Minister for Fisheries, Hon Semi Koroilavesau, and New Zealand's High Commissioner to Fiji, Jonathan Curr. (Image: Damian Johnson)

The new compliance officers have been active for almost three months and have achieved a substantial amount in the short time since the training. IFMD compliance officers, working with MoF divisional staff have:

- undertaken more than 325 inspections;
- issued 65 formal warnings;
- confiscated, seized or sealed more than 3500 individual fish that were caught or held illegally; and
- commenced prosecution action on several cases.

This represents a prominent increase in compliance activity by MoF, and prosecution action has included the issuance of a fixed penalty notice for FJD 20,000¹ for the possession of endangered or prohibited species.

These excellent results are due to the dedication of the officers, their commitment to ensuring effective processes are followed, and their understanding of good compliance and enforcement practice. They have also been well supported by MoF management who continue to encourage the work of these officers in delivering more effective and consistent compliance processes.

Operational compliance uniforms, supplied via the New Zealand government, were recently provided to all compliance officers in IFMD and OFD, and the trained authorised officers in each MoF division. The uniforms increase the officers' visibility and represent the excellent work they carry out.

Uniforms may seem a small matter, but their use supports improved team cohesiveness, increased perceptions of competence and professionalism, and increased pride from the officers themselves.

Under the new Permanent Secretary, Craig Strong, MoF is currently undergoing a service delivery realignment, which has included a redesign of its brand and logo. The logo reflects the ministry's focus areas in 'sustaining, managing and protecting' Fiji's fisheries resources, and food security at the national and community level. The new compliance officers are delivering important services that contribute to the achievement of these priorities, as well as reflecting core ministry values of excellence, integrity, innovation, inclusiveness, professionalism and accountability. With their continued hard work, dedication and commitment, there is no doubt they will continue to deliver excellent results for Fiji's inshore fisheries in the years to come.

For more information:

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² FJD 1.00 = USD 0.47 (September 2019)