

Outputs of the Third SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

The third SPC Heads of Fisheries (HoF) Meeting took place at SPC Headquarters in Noumea, from 18-23rd August 2003.

HoF is a regional meeting of Pacific Island countries and territories that covers the entire range of interests under the purview of national and territorial fisheries services. As such it plays a unique role in promoting dialogue and experience-sharing between island nations and territories, as well as guiding the work of the SPC's fisheries programmes. It complements the more sectorally-focussed, political role of the Forum Fisheries Committee, which has a primary emphasis on tuna fisheries management, whilst HoF covers aquaculture, coastal fisheries management and development and living marine resource science, and has a broad-ranging and relatively informal remit for discussion that can cover any arising issue of interest or significance to participants.

The following paragraphs constitute the points of consensus agreement of SPC member country and territory fisheries service heads on issues that arose during the meeting, and which the meeting felt necessary to document, either to help in the management of the SPC work-programme, to draw to the attention of a wider audience, or to signal agreement on issues that require attention by members themselves.

Institutional issues

- 1) SPC member country and territory representatives at HoF3 agreed that the Chair, with the assistance of the secretariat and advice from member countries and territories as necessary, should draft a set of Terms of Reference to guide the operation of future SPC Heads of Fisheries Meetings. This draft would be finalised for approval by the 4th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting and would include:
 - a) Definition of the scope and purpose of the meeting, but one that would not limit the potential for discussion, should HoF desire it, on any issue under the purview of national and territorial fisheries administrations;
 - b) The principle that presentations should be minimised and discussion time maximised, and a general guideline to keep most presentations to less than 20 minutes for maximum impact and effectiveness,
 - c) The authority of each HoF session to approve its own agenda and list of papers to be heard or considered; and
 - d) A requirement that working papers should be made available to representatives at least two weeks in advance of each meeting.
- 2) The meeting agreed that the Chair of HoF3 should provide a brief report on the main outcomes of the meeting, as expressed by this document, to the Chair of the next SPC governing council meeting.
- 3) The Marine Resources Division should inject more rigour into the process of handling requests by member governments and administrations, including immediate acknowledgement, the provision of feedback on the feasibility, particularly economic, of proposed projects, and the negotiation of definite agreements on inputs, outputs and timing. Completed activities should be the

subject of a report available (subject to approval of the document by the relevant SPC member) to an appropriate wider audience, and activities would be occasionally reviewed for long-term sustainability and lessons that might be learned;

- 4) The Marine Resources Division should report to the next HoF on progress in taking up the accepted recommendations of SPC institutional reviews, including the CFP, OFP & Fisheries Training Course reviews;
- 5) HoF valued the reports on the progress of various long-term multiagency initiatives, and asked that progress on these be formally, if briefly, reported at future HoF meetings. Existing initiatives in which SPC plays a focal role include the regional Aquaculture, Live Reef Fish and the new Coastal Fisheries Management initiatives;
- 6) In discussing the relationship between regional organisations, it was recognised that the CROP¹ process often required further definition through specific agreements and interagency discussion. The meeting welcomed the evidence of cooperation between the SPC Marine Resources Division and other CROP agencies, and in particular welcomed the intention of SPC and USP to develop a more formal understanding to facilitate co-operation on fisheries and aquaculture training and issues of national support.
- 7) It was emphasised that a basic principle of the SPC Marine Resources Division should continue to be to work towards reducing member dependency on regional programmes, and promoting the devolution of competencies to the national level wherever appropriate. It was recommended that the next HoF meeting should include a session on local capacity development in fisheries, including the development of a regional inventory of capacity in a range of issues from oceanic fishery assessment to coastal fisheries development and management, and aquaculture. HoF itself will work towards identifying what capacity should be developed or maintained at the regional level and what should be a priority for developing at national level in each country and territory;

Strategic Plans

- 8) The lack of specific mention of gender, or women in fisheries, in the *objectives* of the Coastal Fisheries Programme Strategic Plan was noted by the meeting. Although gender is included at the fundamental cross-cutting level of “basic principles and specific policies” in the Annex to the plan, the meeting felt that the issue should also be expressed as a specific strategy or objective at a high level within the plan the next time that this “living document” is published.

Oceanic Fisheries Programme Review

- 9) The meeting noted the very positive independent review of the Oceanic Fisheries Programme, and commended the Secretariat’s work in this particular area, and endorsed the Secretariat response to the recommendations of the review, particularly the processes that had been set in motion to further develop national capacity in oceanic fishery science and monitoring;
- 10) Heads of Fisheries emphasised the positive benefits that would accrue to the region from the comprehensive management regime implicit in the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the

¹ Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific

Western and Central Pacific Ocean, and strongly encouraged potential parties to accede to the Convention and to bring it into force as soon as possible;

Coastal Fisheries Programme Review

- 11) The meeting endorsed the main thrust of the Review report and its principal recommendations. The Secretariat response to the Coastal Fisheries Programme review recommendations was generally commended, and it was noted that a mechanism for the prioritisation of proposed actions to implement any recommendations with financial implications would need to be developed, through consultative processes involving Heads of Fisheries, for the benefit of decision-makers and donors. The meeting recognised that there would be opportunity for further comments from the membership after HoF3 before the secretariat response is finalised and there would be another opportunity for member country comment at CRGA in November 2003;
- 12) The meeting particularly highlighted its agreement with major recommendation #4 of the Review, which indicated that the re-establishment of the Coastal Fisheries Programme Manager post, unfunded since 1995, would be likely to lead to considerable improvement in the organisation of the programme, including project accountability, reporting, and the efficiency of services provided to member countries. The meeting urged the Director of Marine Resources to seek means of re-establishing this position, and suggested that, if SPC core funding were unavailable, that external funds be allocated, either from a levy on existing projects, through a new project, or through the realignment of the duty statement of an existing post or vacancy.

Coastal Fisheries Management Strategy

- 13) Heads of Fisheries recognised the problems that are faced at all levels in ensuring the continued sustainability of many Pacific Island coastal fisheries in the face of the changing pressures of commercialisation and population, and in rehabilitating or protecting already-overexploited or otherwise over-impacted coastal fisheries, and recognised SPC's efforts over the past 15 years to assist individual members in addressing these problems. The meeting warmly welcomed the more comprehensive regional strategic approach now being proposed, and endorsed the goals of the Coastal Fisheries Management Strategy as a multi-agency regional initiative, provided that capacity-building in analysis of information under goal 2 was clearly emphasised. The meeting recognised that the strategy would be a major long-term initiative benefitting all SPC members, and asked SPC to take the strategy forward: to maintain an inventory of capacity for coastal fishery management in each country, to identify existing regional and international capacity for participating in the framework of assistance to PICTs, and to develop action plans to implement priority areas of the strategy with timeframes and progress review mechanisms clearly identified;
- 14) The meeting asserted that SPC should be clearly identified as the regional "lead agency in coastal fisheries". SPC should move forward on the priority task of assisting in national and territorial fisheries sustainable development and management, and of making sure that sustainable fisheries management issues are included in broader coastal zone management initiatives;

Fisheries Training Course Review

- 15) After discussing the recommendations of an independent review, the Meeting endorsed the value of the 6-month SPC fisheries training course as an intensive programme of training in practical topical fisheries issues for serving Pacific Island fisheries officers. It endorsed the findings of the review and SPC's response, particularly the realignment of the curriculum, and asked SPC to investigate ways of establishing more formal certification of the course;
- 16) The meeting suggested that, given the uncertainty of funding and the need to maintain momentum, that SPC urgently investigate with the New Zealand School of Fisheries ways of ensuring delivery of the SPC Fisheries Officer training course for a further cycle, and that SPC investigate, with NZSF, USP and other institutions, mechanisms for articulating the components of the short course into longer-term diploma and degree courses, and of promoting capacity within the region itself to provide fisheries training;

Tuna fishery-associated Bycatch

- 17) Heads of Fisheries noted that bycatch is a growing concern of Pacific Island country and territory oceanic fisheries managers and agreed to be proactive in finding ways to mitigate negative impacts on the development of Pacific Island involvement in the region's tuna fisheries. The meeting noted the assessment work being carried out under the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish (SCTB) on the issue, and the discussions taking place at other regional fora, and requested SCTB and others to keep Heads of Fisheries informed on the progress being made towards addressing these issues at the regional level.
- 18) HoF3 commended the work of the SPC Coastal Fisheries programme in developing bycatch awareness materials and mitigation techniques as part of its practical fisheries training, information and enterprise development activities;
- 19) The meeting pointed out that it is the responsibility of national and territorial Heads of Fisheries to ensure that no species becomes endangered because of fishing. Whilst it is recognised that SPC is not the lead regional agency for endangered species conservation, the meeting encouraged the SPC Marine Resources Division to continue to take account of the interaction between fisheries and endangered species, and to develop capacity in assessing, and assisting in the rehabilitation of, populations of endangered species significantly affected by fishing

(Coastal Fixed) Fish Aggregation Devices

- 20) HoF3 appreciated the information that was beginning to emerge from the FAD experiments being carried out in Niue and Cook Islands with SPC assistance and New Zealand funding, and its value for future decision-making concerning the cost versus the benefits of national artisanal FAD programmes. The meeting suggested that the FAD experiments should continue over a reasonable and sufficient time frame to produce statistically robust results. Promising results were already beginning to emerge concerning the improvement of longevity of devices, and reducing costs, but would need to be extended to cover the average lifetime of FADs whilst the economic and environmental benefits required a longer timeframe to take account of changing fishery economic conditions at both sites. Changes in fishing patterns, particularly relating to sportfishing and tourism, will probably be significant;

- 21) The meeting urged the secretariat to continue to document mechanisms by which FAD user groups could be encouraged to play an active and sustainable role in the deployment, maintenance and user-management of FADs;

Aquaculture

- 22) HoF3 welcomed the preliminary review of aquaculture policy and legislation in the region and endorsed the future plan of action outlined in the review. The meeting suggested that more detailed analysis would be extremely useful to assist many members in making progress towards pro-active sustainable aquaculture management frameworks. It was recognised a better knowledge of the basic principles that might be commonly applied across the region would be useful to all. Several countries invited SPC to examine their legislation for guidance on the commonalities that might be included in a possible regional set of principles.
- 23) The Meeting welcomed and endorsed the ACIAR QDPI/Worldfish/SPC aquaculture project “Sustainable aquaculture development in Pacific Islands region” and encouraged its timely commencement. With regard to the initiative to develop techniques for the culture of postlarval fish, it was recognised that techniques for reducing natural mortality of pre-recruits could have potentially great benefits, both for culture and for rehabilitating wild stocks. The meeting pointed out that the project would need to clearly demonstrate the sustainability of the technique, in terms of its effect on natural recruitment, in order to address potential public concerns, and that pro-active mechanisms be considered for managing any future postlarval “fishery” that might develop.

Introduced species

- 24) The Meeting endorsed the draft regional guiding principles for introduction by the SPC/Worldfish/PNG working group, and proposed several followup actions including:
 - a) making sure that the guiding principles could be applicable to within-country and inter-island translocation as well as international translocation;
 - b) that capacity for quantifying the economic costs versus benefits of historical and potential translocations be identified and made available to SPC island members through the aquaculture initiative;
 - c) that a web or email-based discussion group be set up under the SPC aquaculture portal, if such is not yet in existence elsewhere, to provide linkages to quick and informal advice on different species that are commonly introduced;
 - d) that basic guidelines on the control or eradication of undesirable historical aquatic introductions, or invasive aquatic species, need to be developed and made available to Pacific Island governments;
 - e) that basic guidelines be developed, in the same manner as the giant clam guidelines approved by HoF/RTMF in the past, to cover several commonly translocated species;
 - f) in view of the existing capacity of many countries in terrestrial quarantine and introduced species control, that a programme of training in aquatic quarantine issues for agricultural quarantine officers needs to be developed, and that the region should work towards the building of specialist aquatic quarantine capacity;
 - g) the desirability of establishing a regional network and early-warning system, based on the experience within SPC of agricultural and human

epidemiological networks, to promote the exchange of information between Pacific Islands about outbreaks of aquatic diseases and parasites;

- 25) While discussing the “Regional guiding principles for introduction and translocation of aquatic organisms for aquaculture & fisheries” the meeting noted the urgency of the related need for the region to more effectively address vessel ballast water discharges as potential introducers of undesirable exotic species, and shipwrecks/groundings. The roles of the SPREP Pacific Pollution (PACPOL) and Invasive Species Programmes, the SPC Regional Maritime Programme and the International Maritime Organisation in this area were recognised, and the SPC Marine Resources Division was asked to encourage more assistance to members on these subjects, in view of the potential impact on coastal fisheries and aquaculture.

Live Reef Fisheries

- 26) The meeting noted with approval the progress made by the regional Live Reef Fish trade initiative since it was launched by Heads of Fisheries in 1999, and acknowledged the contributions made by several agencies, NGOs and organisations towards the joint goals of the initiative. HoF3 looked forward to the implementation of promising new avenues for achieving or maintaining sustainable management of, and maximum local benefit from, these fisheries, particularly trade certification mechanisms for marine ornamental fisheries, and industry “best practices” for the food-fish trade.
- 27) The meeting welcomed the update on the current status of these fisheries, and took note of the current stagnation of the market and the changing patterns of trade that are resulting from this.

Fisheries Assessment

- 28) Heads of Fisheries collectively endorsed the executive report of the Standing Committee on Tuna and Billfish, and drew particular attention to SCTB opinions concerning the status of yellowfin and bigeye tuna resources.
- 29) HoF expressed pride in the level of international respect given to SPC’s scientific work on fisheries, but urged the Secretariat to further improve the interface between science and the public, as well as the existing attention given to high-level decision-makers. The meeting endorsed the intention by the secretariat to produce easily-understood and widely-distributed, yet scientifically rigorous, explanations of the status of fisheries as soon as possible, particularly regional tuna fisheries. HoF strongly wished to redress the potential distorting effect on public perceptions resulting from certain recent high-profile publications that had not yet had the benefit of scientific debate, or the opportunity for equally widely-distributed reply.
- 30) Appreciative of the scientific tools being developed by the Oceanic Component of the SPC/EU PROCFish project for better understanding and predicting the broad distribution and prospects of regional tuna stocks and fisheries in relation to the ocean environment, the meeting urged the Secretariat to work towards the adaptation of these methodologies and computer software for use in oceanic fishery management decision-making at the national level, as appropriate.
- 31) The meeting pointed out the vital role of the Coastal Component of PROCFish in developing a rigorous scientific information-base for improving national and local management of reef fisheries, and several countries expressed great interest in obtaining the collaborative services of the project as soon as possible. The

integration of social/economic as well as resource assessment was particularly commended. From the experience of countries and territories that had already taken part in the project, and whilst it was clearly recognised that the project was still a work-in-progress that had not yet developed its final products, the following issues were brought up by the meeting:

- a) SPC should make the opinion of HoF known to the European Union, that the expansion of the Coastal component of PROCFish to the 6 new ACP/EU partner countries is strongly endorsed for implementation as soon as possible. HoF further hoped that rapid and efficient implementation of the new projects under the 9th EDF Pacific Regional Strategy fisheries focal sector (COFish and DEVFish, the latter jointly implemented between SPC and FFA) would strengthen the case for implementing a further Oceanic Fisheries scientific project under the reserved funding that is understood to become available after the mid-term review of the 9th EDF by the European Union. The regional work of the Oceanic Component of PROCFISH was beginning to show exciting results, particularly relevant to the establishment and operation of ecosystem-based management of oceanic fisheries, that would need to be increasingly implemented at the national level.
- b) The US Territories and Tokelau, who are the only remaining SPC members not directly eligible for PROCFish assistance, appreciated the opportunity to be included in discussion of the project, and hoped that SPC attempts to include them in the project work itself in future received favourable attention from potential funding sources, or from potential collaborators willing to use the same regionally-standard methodologies.
- c) The meeting felt that, as with all regional agency scientific and technical projects, the need to express applied research findings in ways that are comprehensible to the general public, as well as to decision-makers, can never be under-emphasised. HoF3 commended SPC's recent efforts to better address this area, and urged still further efforts;
- d) That however, SPC staff should be careful to discuss and clear national sub-project outputs with the relevant national or territorial fisheries Head before publication or public presentation, particularly where these involve recommendations or express opinions.
- e) That the Coastal component of the PROCFish project should push forward plans, through the regional coastal fisheries data repository, to integrate all relevant existing information available from previous local work into the comparative assessments, including any environmental and socio-economic survey data available. Heads of Fisheries recognised the potential value of both the ecosystem approach and the co-management approach to reef fisheries management, and the need for the firmest possible information-base on which to develop workable approaches, as well as the need for an accessible central repository to avoid potential duplication of effort by the various other agencies and NGOs starting to collect data in this field;
- f) That a small but significant gap in scientific fishery assessment services remained between the shallow reef fisheries and the oceanic fisheries work of SPC, in particular the assessment of slope and coastal seamount resources such as deepwater snapper. HoF urged SPC to bring this gap to wider attention at the forthcoming artisanal fisheries meeting associated with the Deepsea 2003 Conference in New Zealand in November.

- g) That, in addition to the video presentation made to HoF, it would help the Coastal component of PROCFish if it produces a short, clear, written explanation of project aims and activities for public information. This should also make clear that the different services previously provided on a small-scale by the former CFP Resource Assessment and Management Section are now separated and expanded into the Reef Fisheries Observatory and the Coastal Fisheries Management Section. HoF recognised that PROCFish/C, under the SPC Reef Fisheries Observatory, is not intended to provide direct advice to governments on coastal fishery management mechanisms like the SPC Coastal Fisheries Management Section, and not intended to carry out in-depth trials of community-based sustainable fishery management systems at pilot sites like the SPREP (Coastal component) of the GEF International Waters Project, but to provide objective, scientifically-based information for use by decision-makers in reef fishery management processes.

Other Issues

- 32) Improving the value and quality of fisheries sector exports remains a major and growing need for support at the regional level. SPC should work with FFA, the Forum Secretariat, USP and others to develop more comprehensive regional support services in this area;
- 33) Electronic (CD-ROM-based) libraries of information useful to Pacific Island fisheries departments should be developed and made available;
- 34) Heads of Fisheries requested that the next HoF meeting be provided with a report on safety at sea for artisanal fishers, based on the recommendations of the forthcoming FAO/SPC regional expert consultation on the same subject.
- 35) The Meeting appreciated the briefing on forthcoming meetings provided by IP12 and asked the Secretariat to expand its calendar of events and meetings of interest to HoF (www.spc.int/coastfish/meetings.htm). The calendar should provide more comprehensive coverage, should include short briefing notes on each event, and should be occasionally distributed to HoF representatives as well being maintained on the website.

In closing, a spokesman for the meeting highly commended the HoF Chair from Nauru, Anton Jimwereiy, assisted by Peter Jacob, for managing the deliberations and the outputs of the meeting so effectively, and thanked the Secretariat both for the presentations, and the opportunity to freely and collectively discuss fisheries issues of wide-ranging interest and relevance. The SPC Marine Resources Division was leading the region in “doing what it is supposed to do” within its area of competence, with foresight, dedication, and “a perspective on the real needs of the region”. Finally, it was strongly felt by all present that HoF needed to meet more often than has been the case in recent years, and hoped that the Secretariat would be able to collect together enough resources to enable the fourth HoF meeting to take place in 2004, particularly given the number of “burning issues” that had already been placed on the agenda.

Note: This list of recommendations is to signal points of consensus agreement of SPC member country and territory fisheries service heads on certain issues raised during the 3rd SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting, and identified by the Chair. These recommendations do not constitute a complete report of the meeting, nor do they constitute a complete work-programme for SPC (the SPC Strategic Programme Plans

should be consulted for this) but are intended for the guidance of all with a stake or an interest in Pacific Island fisheries. Some of these recommendations identify gaps in regional support, or identify newly-arising problems and priorities, or simply identify agreement on a course of action. Other agencies apart from SPC are invited to note these issues raised by Pacific Island countries and territories, and warmly invited to assist the region in addressing them, either in concert with SPC, or within their own capacity, as appropriate.