

Managing coastal fisheries resources in the Pacific Islands – “re-booting” approaches to data poor fisheries

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Key points for HOF11

In this session members and partners are invited to:

1. Note key points and issues raised in this paper
2. Provide feedback through breakout groups on:
 - a) Whether PICT's see the need for change in how coastal fisheries are being managed?
 - b) What approaches do they believe would be most effective in improving the current system?

Background

3. The Coastal Fisheries Programme (CFP), within the Division of Fisheries Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) at SPC, has long recognised the need to improve nearshore fisheries resource assessments in Pacific Islands, a priority that is becoming more urgent as population and fishing pressures increase.
4. Recently, FAME's strategic planning process re-emphasised the need to assist member countries in assessing and managing their coastal fisheries resources and to facilitate this through developing excellence in the field of assessment and management of coastal fisheries resources.
5. Clearly, given the diversity of coastal stocks and the geographical realities of the region, it is not possible for CFP to do this on their own, nor is it CFP's role to do so. FAME's primary role is to be a coordinating/facilitating agency, providing training and guidance to national fisheries staff in a way that builds capacity, thereby providing countries and territories with the tools and skills to do the work.
6. We define data-poor fisheries as not just those that lack data but also those where capacity is lacking to implement effective management, even if data exists. Despite the extensive efforts of many people and organisations this capacity is not showing significant improvement. There have been a multitude of 'programs' introduced across the fisheries departments of PICT's over the years. Yet many are failing to sustain themselves in any meaningful way. How to change this enduring reality is the focus of this exchange of ideas.
7. Rather than try to introduce yet another 'program' perhaps it is better to take a more pragmatic approach and accept that current capacity necessitates the simplest and least onerous approach. Any approach must still be scientifically robust, but will not be attempting to answer all questions. We suggest making a choice to favour sustainability (with quality) over breadth of investigative power. Here is where experts in 'data-poor fisheries' can help. What are the simplest and least onerous approaches to enable realisation of significant fisheries management outcomes?

8. Data collection and assessments remain key elements of any management and harvest strategies. Because the effectiveness of harvest strategies is closely linked to the quality of the data that is being collected, a lack of quality data undermines all processes derived from such data. Previous approaches have not been producing the desired outcomes, despite extensive resources being devoted to this. There are very few datasets available that provide the level of quality information required to make management decisions. Numerous reviews of coastal fishery departments' data collection processes, analyses and outcomes over the past five years have consistently highlighted the poor quality of the data and the consequent problems of interpreting and using such data.
9. Resource assessments, data analysis, interpretation, training, mentoring, and on-demand advice are some of the services provided by CFP staff. CFP also facilitates the provision of additional assistance to countries and territories by NGOs, universities, and other agencies such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). Stock assessment specialists from SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP) are another valuable resource who have not been utilised effectively for coastal fisheries. Internationally, CSIRO, NOAA, NGOs (e.g. TNC, WCS, WWF) and other institutions and agencies have also been active in developing management options for data poor fisheries in developing countries.
10. Recently, there have been a number of activities in the Pacific that are relevant to the issues at hand;
 - A First Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries involving all PICT's and focused on data collection and handling was held at SPC in Nov. 2017;
 - Work has been progressing in a number of countries on the use of the 'spawning potential surveys' (SPS) approach for assessing the spawning potential of coastal fisheries stocks, developed by Dr Jeremy Prince and colleagues.
 - Use of e-data collection capabilities. Taking advantage of the incredible uptake of internet access across the Pacific region. FAME's oceanic fisheries section has spent considerable time and resources developing the TAILS app, which is providing empirical proof of the effectiveness of such an approach.

Re-booting the approach to data-poor fisheries

11. The time is right to review and critique current coastal fisheries data collection approaches and examine the latest developments in assessing data-poor fisheries in the Pacific context. We suggest any outcome should provide a framework outlining
 - more effective approaches to obtaining appropriate data in a sustainable way for managing coastal fisheries and
 - more effective approaches to strengthening local capacity for fisheries management in the region.

12. The framework should explicitly address the failures of previous approaches and clearly articulate how it will provide more appropriate and relevant data upon which coastal fisheries management options can be reliably based.

Multi-step process

Step 1. Access support and input from recognised experts in data-poor fisheries issues

13. We organised a skype-based discussion with a number of people who are extremely experienced in issues surrounding data-poor fisheries. From these general discussions there was a consensus to develop a framework from which a revised and updated approach to data-poor fisheries could be agreed upon.

Step 2. Presentation of framework proposal at HoF 11.

14. Potential Key Components of Framework

- Collating existing nearshore fisheries stock assessments in the Pacific, by key species groups to better understand where knowledge is missing
- Identify International best practices and emerging methodologies, both in terms of data-poor assessment approaches, and support tools that can identify appropriate options given a fishery's specific circumstances.
- Clarification of what tools and/or approaches are most effective (and what tools are least effective) for collecting local, national and regional level data of interest, e.g. political leaders look at coastal fisheries in economic terms and this requires a national sampling program such as HIES, Agriculture & Fisheries Surveys, National Census. Local communities are more interested in the dynamics of their local fishing region.
- Minimum data requirements and standards explicitly connected to the scales of interest (see point above)
- Community engagement and capacity building.

Step 3. Is there a recognition of the shared issues surrounding coastal fisheries and the benefits that could flow from cooperation and collaboration across PICT's?

15. We seek advice and guidance from our PICT's on whether they see the raised issues and proposed framework as a worthwhile and timely approach to improving the ability of Pacific Island countries to better manage their coastal fisheries.

Step 4. If a general consensus exists then proceed to development of a more detailed proposal for funding and resourcing through collaboration and cooperation of donors, member countries and SPC.