

10th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

Noumea, New Caledonia, 14–17 March 2017

Working Paper 6

Original: English

PROP BDM project in 7 PICs

Ian Bertram, Coastal Fisheries Science and Management Adviser, SPC

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to:
 - Brief Heads of Fisheries on a new project within the Coastal Fisheries Science and Management Section of the Fisheries Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) Division of the Pacific Community (SPC);

Background

2. The Coastal Fisheries Science and Management Section of FAME has received financing from the World Bank through Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) for the Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program (PROP). The PROP's development objective is to strengthen the management of selected Pacific Island oceanic and coastal fisheries, and the critical habitats upon which they depend.
3. PROP comprises a series of projects, which includes separate but complementary national projects in the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Tuvalu and the Solomon Islands, and a separate but complementary regional project implemented by FFA.

4. FFA has overall responsibility for regional PROP activities and has engaged the SPC, through the Coastal Fisheries Programme, to coordinate implementation of specific activities under PROP Component 2: Sustainable Management of Coastal Fisheries.
5. A diverse range of coastal fishery value chains exist in the region. In some cases, exploitation pressure is low and the management goal is to encourage development of the fishery while protecting resource sustainability for the future. In others, especially where there is easy access to markets, over-fishing has already occurred and the fishery is performing sub-optimally.
6. The most notable example of a coastal fishery value chain in need of better resource management is the high-value beche-de-mer (BDM) fishery. BDM is a product that is harvested in many Pacific Island countries, almost exclusively for export to Asian markets and Asian communities elsewhere. The BDM fishery is similar in some ways to the purse seine tuna fishery, in that a handful of Pacific Island countries control a large share of a global commodity for which demand exceeds supply.
7. A 2013 study estimated the value of BDM exports from 5 Pacific Island countries (Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Fiji and Tonga) to average USD 17.4 million over the past 10 years, and that this value could have been at least doubled through improved management¹. An earlier study² estimated average annual BDM exports from Australia and the Central Western Pacific islands during 2004–2008 at about USD 52 million. That study notes that ‘many of these fisheries are suffering unsustainable levels of exploitation, to the point of local extinctions of some species and consequently impacting the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of fishers.

Project objectives and scope of work

8. The overall objective of PROP Component 2 is to support participating countries to sustainably manage defined coastal fisheries, focusing on those value chains with the greatest potential for increased benefits, i.e. coastal fisheries such as BDM that (i) can generate export earnings for the country, and/or (ii) support livelihoods, food security and dietary health.
9. This PROP objective is consistent with and complements the Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) Roadmap for Inshore Fisheries Management and Sustainable Development (RIFMASD) which has as its Objective 3 to: Manage, maintain and restore fisheries stocks (e.g. BDM) to secure long term economic and social benefits to coastal communities from the sustainable use of inshore resources in Fiji, Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands.

¹ Carleton C., Hambrey J., Govan H., Medley P., Kinch J. 2013. Effective management of sea cucumber fisheries and the beche-de-mer trade in Melanesia. SPC Fisheries Newsletter 140:24–42.

² Kinch J., Purcell S.W., Uthicke S. and Friedman K. 2008. Population status, fisheries and trade of sea cucumbers in the Western Central Pacific. p. 7–55. In: Toral-Granda V., Lovatelli A. and Vasconcellos M. (eds). Sea cucumbers. A global review of fisheries and trade. FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Technical Paper. No. 516. Rome, FAO

10. The PROP will work closely with the MSG secretariat to re-activate the Fisheries Technical Advisory Committee (FTAC) to guide this work for the MSG countries. The World Bank-member countries are key producers of BDM and any regional approach to improving the fishery could not proceed effectively without their participation. A regional work program has been designed that focuses on the principal BDM-producing Pacific Island countries, but includes work in countries with lower levels of production, including the other PROP-participating countries, Tuvalu, Federated States of Micronesia and Republic of Marshall Islands, which could also benefit from the bargaining power generated by the larger producers plus consistent management arrangements to those in MSG countries

11. There are two broad activities as indicated below with a range of specific tasks and inputs required. The project budget is USD500,000 over 3 years. The project will commence in the second quarter 2017 and will end in the fourth quarter of 2019. The SPC's coastal fisheries science and management adviser and Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and management specialist and a consultant will be involved in implementing project activities. SPC's coastal fisheries information and database manager will be tasked with developing or enhancing the necessary database for the project.

12. Broad activities to achieve the objectives include the following:
 - In parallel with national efforts to restore BDM fisheries, facilitate the formation of a regional or sub-regional BDM fishery grouping using the MSG structure for political support to advance the economic interests of participating Pacific island countries, through:
 - technical assistance and convening to harmonize economic and other management arrangements;
 - developing minimum terms and conditions of resource access;
 - establishing a regional register of responsible/ compliant BDM industry participants;
 - maximizing the leverage available through collective bargaining and action;
 - promoting exchange of technical information in support of national level management initiatives and
 - developing a workable structure and process using the MSG FTAC to gain political engagement and ownership to ensure sustainability of the work undertaken long-term.
 - Ongoing technical support to countries to assess potential biological, economic and fiscal management tools for BDM and other export-oriented coastal fishery products, (e.g. a 'BDM task force'), including:
 - periodically updated assessments of BDM production, price and market trends and other industry monitoring and intelligence; and
 - development of fishery monitoring tools that can be deployed at national level to enable performance assessment of fishery management and development activities, and training of national staff from participating countries in their use.

13. The proposed BDM arrangement may ultimately be extended to cover other coastal fishery resources, particularly trochus, and another high-value export product.

Expected outcomes

14. The expected outcomes include:

- Improved information and management of BDM stocks in Melanesian and other participating countries.
- Strong political support and engagement as champions for sustainable BDM management.
- BDM stocks in Melanesian and other participating countries under recovery or rebuilt.
- BDM harvests levels established in Melanesian and other participating countries at the national and subnational levels, where stocks have rebuilt or recovered.
- Updated value chain price list by species and product grade.
- Long term economic value for BDM established for Melanesian and other participating countries.

Recommendations

15. The Heads of Fisheries meeting is invited to:

- note this paper; and
- note that the project will be focused on 7 countries, from which FAME will seek support for the full implementation of the project.