

A photograph showing a diver in silhouette holding a large, dark fish underwater. The water is clear and blue, with light rays filtering through. The diver is positioned to the right of the fish, holding it by a line. The fish is oriented vertically, with its head pointing downwards.

Pacific coastal fishing communities

Position paper for the 2nd Small-Scale Fisheries Summit, Rome, Italy

A. Introduction

Pacific representatives of civil society, communities and other small-scale fishers have convened at three annual sessions of the Community Based Fisheries Dialogues (2021-2023)^{1,2}, policy consultations for the Noumea Strategy (2015)³, Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling-up Community-Based Fisheries Management (2021)⁴ and the recent Regional Workshop on Scaling up community-based fisheries management (2024). All aimed to ensure that the Pacific people continue to have healthy coastal fisheries and sustainable and resilient livelihoods which are critical to more than 10,000 local fishing communities in our Blue Pacific.

We acknowledge that the leaders of our 22 Pacific Island Countries and Territories in 2015 endorsed the roadmap for coastal fisheries management in our region recognising that sustainable fisheries are based on **communities driving local management regimes** and that governments would support this through⁵:

1. **Tenure rights:** providing clear user and management rights,
2. **Legislation and policy support:** developing and resourcing strong and appropriate institutions, legislation, policies and plans
3. **Enforcement:** strengthening enforcement by community authorised officers, fisheries and law enforcement officers and customs ensuring national controls on export commodities
4. **Information provision:** available of simple, timely, accurate and informative information to inform management
5. **Collaboration and coordination:** enhanced engagement with relevant non-government stakeholders, including fishers' group, local communities, faith-based and civil society, in the management of coastal fisheries

We would like to draw particular attention to the following priorities, reviewing nearly 10 years progress since the leaders' endorsement and the relevance of our experience in guiding not only our leaders but others around the world.

1 Outcomes Report from the 1st Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (2021). <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/phbx8>
Outcomes and Actions Report from the 2nd Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (2022). <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/go8zr>
Outcomes and actions report from the 3rd Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (2023). <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/izbx7>

2 More information about the Cbfd: <https://cbfm.spc.int/cbfd>

3 A new song for coastal fisheries pathways to change: the Noumea strategy (2015-25). <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b8hvs>

4 Pacific framework for action on scaling up community-based fisheries management: 2021-2025. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/yr5yv>

5 Future of fisheries: a regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/xnc9f>

1. Tenure and local community rights to fisheries

Some Pacific Islands preserve community rights over coastal fishing and areas amongst the strongest in the world while others have made considerable efforts to provide such rights. The vital importance to sustainable resource management of strong community rights has been demonstrated in our region and stands as an example to the world. But even in our region there is a need to ensure that these rights are strengthened, defended and supported by government legislation and actions⁶.

- We call on our governments to work with us to strengthen community rights for local fisheries management, clarify and define the legal basis if necessary and ensure resources are secured for implementation. Current provisions of exclusive rights of communities for their stewardship of inshore areas should be strengthened and extended further offshore⁷ thus serving as buffers to industrial fishing, securing community livelihoods and a major contribution to conservation commitments (e.g. 30% protection).
- Our leaders' commitment to closing inshore areas to industrial fishing and our experiences in leading rights-based coastal fisheries management should serve as encouragement and guidance to all governments globally in their renewed efforts to implement Sustainable Development Goal Target 14b as well as the Voluntary Guidelines on SSF. We call on all governments to extend their commitment to protecting our rights from other destructive and polluting activities including land-based development, destructive fishing and seabed mining⁸.
- Coordinate donor investments to ensure they strengthen and certainly not weaken tenure rights and that the money and efforts are spent in much-needed areas of coastal fisheries management, especially enforcement.
- Increase substantially operational budgets supporting coastal fisheries management within national and sub-national government agencies⁹, and develop appropriate financial mechanisms to directly support fishing communities to manage their coastal resources more effectively.

2. Strengthening compliance and enforcement in community-based fisheries management

Our joint progress with governments in community-based fisheries management (CBFM)¹⁰ has revealed that new and integrated approaches to compliance and enforcement require urgent attention.

We call on governments and other partners to discuss with us means to develop long-term support mechanisms, systems and initiatives to strengthen enforcement of coastal fisheries laws and rules. These include:

- Working to ensure that judicial systems prioritize fisheries rules violations as the serious threats to livelihoods that they are and penalize them accordingly.
- Ensure adequate information and messaging is provided for communities and the public to encourage a behavioural change and so they understand the need for enforcement, the existing rules and regulations, and that management is about sustainable use of fisheries resources rather than banning fishing.
- Coordinate donor investments to ensure funds and effort are invested in the priority areas of coastal fisheries management as outlined in regional, national and sub-national fisheries policies, especially enforcement.
- Integrate and strengthen community-based fisheries compliance and enforcement with appropriate powers including from national and traditional governance but supported by strengthened national and provincial government enforcement systems and resources where appropriate.

3. Traditional Knowledge and governance systems

*“No people on earth are more suited to be guardians of the world’s largest ocean than those whom it has been home for generations”*¹¹. Traditional and local knowledge derived from deep connections of place, environment and culture are some of the most important characteristics of Pacific Island communities. These communities have traditional governance systems which are deeply embedded in the long relationship between people and oceans. We call on governments and partners to:

- Encourage and recognise traditional decision making and systems at all levels and support the sharing of experiences from different countries on ways that traditional leadership may be strengthened, systems may be better integrated into fisheries management in different contexts, and recognised in legal systems.
- Value traditional knowledge and ensure that communities are encouraged and supported to preserve and use it where appropriate for sustainable fisheries management and livelihoods.
- Recognise, promote and resource local fishers and traditional knowledge bearers for their knowledge to be used in evidence-based management emphasising the time required to build trust.

6 CBFM workshop Nadi 2024 “ e.g. Cook Islands shared that the management style in ‘Pukapuka’, which is driven by local communities, is effective, however, it needs support from the government.”

7 E.g. 60 nautical miles from the shoreline by Cook Islands, Palau proposals for extending the artisanal fishing zone from 12 miles to 50 miles from the shoreline. This would reserve near-shore areas for low-impact fishing practices.

8 See CAOPA declaration and others e.g. «Taking SSF into account»: artisanal fishers have called for closing inshore areas to industrial fishing and to other destructive and polluting activities – such as offshore energy production, tourism, large-scale aquaculture and fishmeal factories.

9 Outcomes and actions report from the 2nd Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/go8zr>

10 <https://cbfm.spc.int/>

11 Epli Hau’ofa (1994) in Our Sea of Islands. <https://bit.ly/OurSeaIslands>



4. Improving dialogue and collaboration between Government and Fishers

Community-based fisheries management requires new ways of working together. Communities bear the burden of not only rights and responsibilities but also stand most to lose if management is not effective. To work together better we call for:

- Enable and implement meaningful participation (including platforms, forum, dialogues) of all fishers and fishing communities, including those who have not been involved in management and conservation efforts so far, in developing and reviewing national regulations and rules for fisheries and environmental management including marine protected areas both inshore and offshore. This should take into consideration the fishers' need to fish for income and food.
- Encourage national agencies (fisheries and environment) to develop and/or foster strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with civil society groups and networks, towards strengthening CBFM nationally.
- Recognize existing community level governance systems in national legal frameworks where appropriate.

5. Address emerging pressures on community-based fisheries management

Community-based fisheries management efforts account for almost all the coastal marine protected areas recorded across the Pacific region. Yet, the capacity of communities to manage their resources has limitations and where necessary we call on governments and partners to increase efforts to address country level and emerging destructive pressures on communities such as night fishing, destructive fishing gear, land-based development, logging, and mining (including potential deep-sea mining¹²) by:

- Building mechanisms for communities to lobby against external drivers which are beyond their control, such as tourism, mining, including deep seabed mining and its potential consequences for coastal fisheries.
- Stop allowing importation, sales and possession of illegal equipment such as small mesh nets.
- Increase awareness on the impact of destructive fishing methods and other external stressors to the fishery.
- New conservation efforts in the region must support what we know works, community-based fisheries management, and not distract or even undermine the global leadership we have set and has been agreed in regional public policy.
- Ensure that taxpayer, donor and philanthropic funding is directed to the right places (fishing communities) and regular operational budgets increased for relevant government agencies (e.g., fisheries) in order to measurably yield tangible environmental as well as societal benefits.
- Integrate community fisheries management, ecosystem approaches to fisheries and climate change discussions and investments, including at regional and relevant United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) bodies and mechanisms.
- Enhance participation of communities in data collection for monitoring the effects of climate change.

¹² The CBF2 requested HoF15 to recognise the emerging issue of deep seabed mining and its potential consequences for coastal fisheries, and requests governments to facilitate more independent research on deep sea ecosystems before consideration is given to commercial deep seabed mining.



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6. Gender and Social Inclusion

Coastal fisheries in the Pacific provide invaluable contributions to their nations in terms of food security, health, income and culture and the challenges these fisheries and communities face require whole-of-government support; from ministries of fisheries, environment, forestry, health, finance and leadership at the highest level.

Coastal fishing communities should be more effectively integrated into the major debates and decisions facing our small island nations such as climate change, disaster risk reduction and responses, social security, access to markets and benefits of international trade, occupational health and sea safety, access to complementary and alternative income generating opportunities, education, and social security protection¹³.

Women play vital yet under-recognised roles in fisheries management and advocacy, and play a crucial role as teachers in their families and communities, influencers in local women's groups, and leaders in the communities. In addition, youth, the disabled and other marginalized groups are not adequately included or considered in fisheries management, decision-making and livelihood development. We call on governments, partners and communities to:

- Promote gender and social inclusion, including disability and remote communities, particularly through women, youth, disability and other groups in hiring policies
- Include marginalised community groups in fisheries management committees, empower them to actively participate and to really contribute to decision-making processes.
- Include women enforcement officers to encourage reporting of offences committed by women and other marginalised groups.
- Conduct awareness and capacity development training on gender and social inclusion (GESI) in the communities including targeted empowerment initiatives for GESI advocates and champions in the communities.
- Support more women and youth champions to advocate for fisheries resource management.
- Provide programs in communities for livelihood diversification and supplementation that increase resilience and ensure equal benefit sharing among women, youths, and people with special needs and prioritize the reduction of poverty and hardship for people relying heavily on marine-based livelihoods.
- Ensuring adequate information provision, sensitive to GESI, that increases awareness in primary school education, knowledge of legal frameworks, rules and regulations and science information for fisheries management.
- Improve sea safety and occupational health as well as social security in the wake of disasters or emergencies such as occurred in the pandemic.
- Be strictly guided by the stated wishes and priorities of communities including food security

13 See Chapter 6 of the SSF Guidelines. <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en>

B. Guidance for Pacific SSF on the positions of SSF groups from other ACP countries

1. Global and Pacific regional government policy

FAO facilitated a global process that involved more than 4 000 representatives of governments (i.e. small-scale fishers, fish workers and their organizations, researchers, development partners and other relevant stakeholders) from more than 120 countries in meetings covering six regions, as well as in national consultative meetings including more than 20 CSOs. The outcomes of these consultations were endorsed at the 31st Session of COFI in June 2014 and represent the most significant globally endorsed position on SSF.

The SSF Guidelines were developed in parallel to the Pacific regional policies, and despite the unprecedented global participative process, relatively few Pacific Island governments, small-scale fishers, and regional and national civil-society organizations or representatives participated. Consequently, stakeholders in Pacific Island fisheries are far more familiar with the regionally developed policies which many of them participated in developing (e.g., MSG Roadmap, Noumea Strategy, Future of Fisheries Roadmap and Framework for Action) and exhibit stronger ownership over them¹⁴.

Pacific regional policies have focussed on practical priorities for implementation and provide short to medium term guidance to donors, governments, NGOs and SSF. The Framework for Action strengthens the relatively weaker elements in existing regional policy compared to the SSF Guidelines, including aspects of fisher representation mechanisms, inclusivity, and human rights and serves as the current framework for implementation and a number¹⁵ of countries have either completing or finalized national strategies for its implementation.

2. Global and regional civil society and SSF positions

The Pacific region has led the world in community-based management and conservation practices but has had challenges in ensuring that the experiences on the ground are adequately recognised globally and, to a lesser extent, regionally. Regionally, civil society networks such as the LMMA Network took the initiative to disseminate and share experiences across communities and governments at the regional as well as global scales.

By 2016 Pacific Island Leaders tasked the SPC to coordinate with National Fisheries Agencies, CROP agencies and regional and national community groups, to strengthen support and resourcing for coastal fisheries management. In response to this, the Fisheries Ministers endorsed a new mechanism for increasing the engagement of non-state actors: the Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue¹⁶ which has had three meetings the outcomes forming the basis for the present position paper.

Globally, SSF movements have strongly promoted the SSF Guidelines and encouraged countries to develop national plans for their implementation. However, recognising that the SSF Guidelines are very ambitious and hard to implement in their entirety by the fisheries sector, SSF groups from Africa, Caribbean, the Americas and the Pacific joint developed a list of priority actions which they call on governments to implement. This document has been widely endorsed (including by many groups attending the FAO SSF Summit) and is still open to endorsement:

The Call to Action sets the following priorities:

- Urgently secure preferential access and comanage 100% of coastal areas
- Guarantee the participation of women and support their role in innovation
- Protect SSF from competing blue economy sectors
- Be transparent and accountable in fisheries management
- Build resilient communities to face climate change and offer prospects to youth

NGOs and other potential partners proposed to support SSF but it became necessary to set out guidance on ways to work together in true partnership to save our ocean and our communities and avoid undermining the work of communities.

- “Always respect, never undermine our rights”
- “Nothing about us without us”
- “The right to our own voice”
- “Working with us also means funding us”



The Voluntary Guidelines on Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines). <https://www.fao.org/voluntary-guidelines-small-scale-fisheries/en>



Pacific framework for action on scaling up community-based fisheries management: 2021-2025. <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/yr5yv>



A Call to Action from small-scale fishers. <https://www.ssfcalltoaction.org/>



The Rules of Conduct – How to work with us are a set of guidelines addressed at organisations and partners that wish to work with small-scale fishers in the context of marine and coastal conservation. <https://www.ssfcalltoaction.org/rules-of-conduct>

¹⁴ Coastal Fisheries Governance in the Pacific Islands (2024). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56716-2_11

¹⁵ Link to best resource for listing national strategies: <https://www.spc.int/CoastalFisheries/Legislation/main>

¹⁶ Strengthening civil society organisations' and other non-state actors' engagement in regional community-based fisheries dialogue: <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/j7vej>

3. SSF position papers to the SSF Summit and COFI from other groups and regions

Some of the groups that made the above declarations (CAOPA, Afrifish, FBOA) or have supported the processes (CFFA, Solidar, Blueventures) are represented at the SSF summit and will be lobbying the COFI meeting as it has excluded sessions on SSF. The position statements developed by these actors for the SSF Summit and COFI are included in the supporting materials for this meeting and aim to address each of the COFI agenda items:

- Statement: Aquaculture
- Statement: Defining SSF
- Statement: Taking SSF into account in fisheries management
- Statement: IUU_Fishing
- Statement: Food security
- Statement: Fish trade
- Statement: Mainstreaming biodiversity
- Statement: Plastic pollution