

# SPC fisheries meeting plans marine resources development

The South Pacific Commission's Seventh Technical Meeting on Fisheries met in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, from 15 to 19 July. Participants from 11 Pacific countries and territories attended the meeting, and observers were present from the Australian Fisheries Division, the French National Centre for Scientific Research, the United Nations Development Programme, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the University of the South Pacific, and Tonga and Western Samoa.

Participants were officially welcomed to Tonga by His Royal Highness Prince Tu'ipelehake, Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries. The SPC Programme Director (Economic), A. Harris, responded to the welcome and read a message from the Honourable G. F. D. Betham, SPC Secretary-General. Tomasini Simiki, Tonga's Director of Agriculture, was elected Chairman of the meeting, and William Wilkinson, Fisheries Officer, Tonga, Vice-Chairman.

After hearing brief summaries of fisheries developments in each of the territories represented at the meeting, participants considered the report of an expert committee on Tropical Skipjack which met earlier in the year. They recommended that top priority be given to a skipjack-tagging programme, which would help in the management of skipjack fisheries and benefit those territories beginning to establish such fisheries. There was also strong support for research into the possibility of developing the culture of hardy live bait species, necessary for the development of this type of fishery.

Participants listened with interest to progress reports on the Commission's special projects on inshore and outer reef fisheries. The inshore fisheries project is to concentrate on research into storage and handling of lobsters, beche-de-mer fishing, and turtle farming. A volunteer will shortly be starting work in the Cook Islands on turtle-rearing, and the University of the South Pacific has already started some research on turtle food requirements.

The outer reef artisanal fisheries project is now beginning field operations: project staff have moved to Lamap in the New Hebrides, and the first boat will shortly become operational. A large number of territories represented at the meeting have shown interest in the project, which, after about six months in the New Hebrides, will move to Western Samoa. The aim of the project is to conduct economic feasibility studies in various countries and territories, and to demonstrate fishing techniques which will enable the region's demand for fish to be met from local sources. Eventually surplus catches may be exported. The meeting recommended that the project be expanded to enable its speedy completion, and that additional funds be made available for expert advice on specific problems such as fishing boat design and construction.

Aquaculture in the region was discussed and the meeting recommended that continued support be given to current research on culture methods and rearing with the aim of developing commercially viable projects. Participants asked that particular attention be given to the possible culturing of marine molluscs not at present used in the South Pacific region.

During detailed discussions on turtle farming, it was noted that the stock of marine turtles is diminishing in some areas of the Pacific, and that there is a need for protective measures to conserve stocks. It was therefore recommended that any experimental turtle farming should be on a small scale, and should be closely supervised by fisheries authorities.

If the Pacific region's fisheries potential is to be adequately developed, there is an urgent need for training of commercial fishermen, and of more specialised extension staff. The meeting recommended that territorial Administrations and Governments conduct a variety of fisheries training programmes, and strongly supported the recruitment to the Commission's staff of a full-time fisheries training officer.

The meeting agreed that in addition to expanding commercial fisheries, it was also important to develop and promote village-level fisheries activities. The areas where village production of fish is highest are frequently remote, and this leads to problems of uneconomical fish storage and transportation.

The meeting recommended that territorial Administrations consider providing fuel for fisheries free of tax and duty. Participants also asked that the boats and equipment at present used by the outer reef fisheries project be retained when the present project ends and be used for exploratory, experimental and demonstration fishing.

The Commission regularly issues a *Fisheries Newsletter* which is an excellent means of disseminating information on fisheries developments throughout the region: the need to continue and expand this service was stressed, as was the need for current information to be sent regularly to the Commission for inclusion in the Newsletter.

In conclusion, participants agreed that meetings such as this provided a valuable opportunity for fisheries personnel to meet and discuss common problems, and to exchange information: they recommended that meetings continue to be held annually. •

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