

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION
TWENTY-THIRD REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 5-9 August 1991)**

COUNTRY STATEMENT – SOLOMON ISLANDS

Introduction

The Solomon Islands is geographically located in the southwest Pacific between 5 and 13 degrees South and 155 and 158 degrees East, extending over 1,400 kilometers of ocean from Tikopia in the Temotu Province to the Shortland Islands of the Western Province.

The country consists of many small islands with six large, high elevated islands that run parallel south-easterly in a double chain formation and partially enclosing The Slot where most of the pole-and-line operations are taking place.

The total land mass area is 28,530 square kilometers (SPC 1982) and supporting a population of 286,000 (1986 census). On declaring its 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zone in 1978, the Solomon Islands laid claim to marine resources within a sea area of approximately 1.3 million square kilometers.

As in previous years, fisheries in the Solomon Islands continues to be dominated by the commercial tuna fisheries sector, with recent developments in the tuna industry at Noro, Western Province and Tulagi, Central Islands Province in addition to the large catches and volumes of fisheries exports from this sector alone.

In 1990, the total volume of fisheries export from the Solomon Islands was 21,134.845 MT, valued at SI\$82,322,994. This represented 35% of the country's total export earnings, a marked decrease from what was attained in the previous years. A substantive decrease in total exports by volume was also experienced for tuna and tuna-related products and other miscellaneous marine products during the year.

Much effort continues to be focussed on fisheries development in provincial sector with the aim of creating employment and income earning opportunities, encourage commercial fisheries developmental activities and to supply the increasing demand of the rural and urban centre markets. In fostering these commercial developments, five major government coordinated projects (with the sixth still to be implemented) have been put into operation and a lot of officers from the provinces have also been sent on training courses to upgrade their knowledge in the various aspects of fisheries to assist in the implementation of projects and the provision of services to the wider provincial rural sector. In addition, four local fish exporting companies have been granted licences to operate in the Solomon Islands as well.

In the interest of proper fisheries development and the sustainable utilisation of our fisheries resources, the Fisheries Division has undertaken several exploratory resources surveys and researches on its own and in association with other countries and regional organisations to give us a better understanding of these resources. Financial and manpower constraints have been our main obstacles in these areas.

Commercial Fisheries

Very poor catches were experienced by vessels of the Solomon Islands domestic surface tuna fishery during the 1990 fishing season. A total of 30,598.6 MT of tuna was taken by the whole fleet in 1990, of which 21,557 MT was from the pole-and-line operations. This was the lowest catch ever made by the pole-and-line fishery during the past eight years.

Tuna caught by foreign licensed vessels on the other hand amounted to a total of 7,540 MT, of which 663 MT was taken by the Taiwanese longline vessels, 4,934 MT and 1,872 MT by the Japanese longline and pole-and-line vessels respectively and 71 MT by the American Treaty purse seine vessels.

Most of the tuna caught by the domestic vessels are processed locally at the STL cannery at Noro into the various tuna products for export and domestic markets. It is anticipated that NFD may set up a cannery later at Tulagi and is currently trying to improve the catch by its fleet to the minimum level justifying the establishment of one.

The two domestic commercial tuna companies, Solomon Taiyo Ltd and the National Fisheries Development Ltd in 1990 operated 34 pole-and-line vessels (including four chartered vessels from Kiribati and one from Fiji), two group seiners and two single seiners. Unfortunately, STL lost one of their net boats in a tragic accident in June this year.

A new tuna joint venture company, the Makirabelle Ltd has just been formed recently between the Frabelle Fishing Corporation of the Philippines and the Makira/Ulawa Province, Solomon Islands. The Company has proposed to operate two payao group seiners later this year and has been given a quota of 35,000 MT.

Baitfishing Operations

A total catch of 863,313 buckets of bait, equivalent to 1,899 MT of baitfish was taken during the 1990 pole -and-line fishing season. This was the lowest for the last five years, with 76% of the total catch coming from the Western Province and Ysabel Province with 18%, the second highest. Fishing effort was evenly distributed over all baitgrounds including those from the Western Province, with Moili (22%) and Patutiva (17%) baitgrounds accounting for most of the baitfish catch from the Western Province.

Currently there are 94 official baitgrounds that are scattered around the islands of the Main Group Archipelago and negotiations have been made with local reef owners with the view of establishing more new baitgrounds closer to the main fishing grounds. This logistically will be in the interest of the companies operation strategies and at the same time is a conservation measure taken to avoid over fishing in one particular baitground.

A new Baitfish Agreement has been concluded in May this year between the Baitfish Owners Association and the two commercial tuna companies and under the Agreement, higher royalty payment has been awarded to the baitfish owners. This will remain in effect for the next three years.

Although the three year collaborative research project on bait between CSIRO of Australia and the Solomon Islands Fisheries Division came to an end in 1989, further stock assessment work will continue to be made in association with CSIRO and the Murdoch University of Australia. Close monitoring of baitfish catches by the pole-and-line vessels will continue to be carried out by the Fisheries Division as well.

Purse Seine Operations

A total catch of 9,043 MT was taken by the purse seine fleet in 1990, of which 6,830 was from the payao group purse seine operation. As very low catch rates were experienced by both the single seine and the group purse seine operations during the year, the group purse seine operations had to employ more sets to achieve the total catch obtained for the whole year.

Foreign Fishing Arrangements

Currently Solomon Islands has three agreements with foreign fishing nations, namely Japan, the United States of America and the Republic of China (Taiwan). Agreement with Korea has not been renewed since the early 1980s.

A total of 92 permits were issued to Japanese vessels last year (i.e 52 pole-and-line vessels and 41 longliners) and from these, a total of 76 trips were made by the longliners and 42 by the pole-and-line vessels.

Twenty Taiwanese longline vessels were also registered last year but only 14 vessels entered and fished during the year.

PROJECTS

Seaweed Farming

High growth rates have been obtained for *Eucheuma* seaweed trial grow-outs in the Western Province but like other provinces, grazing by herbivorous fish has been a major problem. In some instances trial farms have been completely destroyed through grazing.

Raruaamana with a large sandy reef area in the Western Province is the only area where seaweed farming has been carried out successfully to a semi-commercial level. Due to a very low buying price in addition to other domestic commitments, the farm sizes in the area have not expanded to the levels as originally anticipated.

Current trial grow-out in Malaita Province has shown no grazing during the six months it has been in place and if grazing problems do not occur, should prove to be of high potential for seaweed farming. The area is quite large with a lot of people in the surrounding area and with the socio-economic conditions in Malaita Province, a large number of people may become involved in seaweed farming. Reports of other similar large size reef areas in the Province tend to suggest that these areas are of high potential for seaweed farming as well.

Reliable markets in the region have been a major problem to seaweed farming. In addition, low seaweed production levels and price fluctuations experienced in past years have also made market projections and the setting of local buying prices difficult. The large shipment requirement of overseas markets have made it difficult at current production levels for Solomon Islands to tap these markets.

Funds for the project were exhausted early this year and submissions have been made for extra monies from the aid donor.

EEC Rural Fishing Enterprises Project

The objectives of the project are to develop commercial fishing enterprises at five of the existing provincial centres. The project will provide supporting facilities and equipment, ten boats per centre, a fish carrier vessel and management to run the centres. After consultations with Provincial authorities, fishermen and fisheries officers, it has been decided that the day-to-day management of the project would be done on a company style organisation. On this basis the EEC/SIG would make a permanent loan of equipment to the company.

So far 5 boats have been completed by the project and are now working at Tatamba, Ysabel Province in addition to 5 other boats which are owned by the local people and equipped by the project. A manager has been put in place and the project is currently producing 700 kg of fish per week which is sold through the Island Enterprises, a local company for export to Australia.

Work to upgrade the provincial centre at Tatamba has been done and the upgrading of the Marau centre, Guadalcanal Province will begin in September this year. Three boats for the Marau centre are also near completion and a total of 16 trainees from the Tatamba and Marau centres have completed fisheries training at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education.

Rural Fishing Groups Project

This project is funded by the Canadian agency ICOD and is based at Gizo, Western Province. The general objectives of the project are to improve cash incomes in the fisheries sector, increase fishing and fisheries related employment and to promote the participation of Solomon Island Nationals in commercial fishing and associated activities. The specific objectives are to establish four viable commercial fishing groups in Western Province, and to build and put into operation four inshore fishing boats to be utilised by these groups.

Three out of the established groups have been successful and are working towards commercial viability.

OFCE/SIG North Malaita Project

A total of seven fishing groups have been established under this project in the northern region of Malaita Province. Under the project, the fishermen are taught the various fishing techniques to catch deep bottom fish and are also given fishing gears, canoes, outboard motors, eskis, fish finders and small generators for recharging batteries. Fish from the project are sent directly to markets in Honiara.

Pearl Shell Survey Project

Four exploratory surveys to assess the status of our goldlip (*Pinctada maxima*) resources have been carried out by the Fisheries Division in the Western Ysabel and the Central Islands Provinces. It was found from the Surveys that the resource around the Wagina area has been overharvested through the use of hookah gears, not much was available at the Ysabel sites and that the areas of the Florida Islands, Central Province possessed suitable habitat for goldlip. Further surveys will be carried out in areas of the Western, Ysabel, Malaita, Guadalcanal and the Central Islands Provinces.

USAID Funded Solomon Islands Rural Fishing and Marketing Development Project

The project will involve seven Provinces and is aimed at developing artisanal fishery in the Provinces. Under the project, four new fisheries centres will be established and three existing ones upgraded. The Project documents have been signed by officials of SIG and the United States of America and tenders for the construction of five centres have been accepted.
