

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

TWENTY-FIRST REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Nouméa, New Caledonia, 7 - 11 August 1989)

Country Statement

Tuvalu

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1. General

The Fisheries Division is part of the Ministry of Commerce and Natural Resources in Tuvalu. The government is operating in the second year of the fourth, 5-year National Development Plan. Resource assessment, commercial fisheries development and the development of aquaculture are among the five major areas that have been identified by the Fisheries Division for special attention during the Plan period.

During 1988, a new headquarters building was completed and occupied. This was constructed with financial assistance from the United Kingdom. The Research and Statistical Section is located in this building. USAID provided funds for the renovation of the previous office which now houses the administrative, licensing and management sections.

The programmes conducted by the Research and Statistical Unit are directed by a research officer. He is supported by a statistical officer and one or two other support staff. The level of funding received from the government to support the activities of the Division and the research activities is not available.

Further improvements to the site will include the construction of a slipway and the provision of proper bunkering facilities. This component of modifications is to be provided by Australian and Japanese aid. Similar developments are planned on the islands of Nanumea, Vaitupu and Nukufetau.

The extension programme operated by the Division has made good progress since 1986. The share fishing scheme whereby local fishermen use the Division's vessels, appears to be working quite well. The catch is retailed through the Division's store.

The Division has evaluated a number of vessel designs and now advises on appropriate vessels for local fishermen. Although the Division lacks its own means of transportation, regular visits to the outer islands are conducted to promote the integration of new techniques with methods currently utilised by the fishing communities. To a large extent, outer island fishermen still use traditional methods.

The government owned and administered tuna pole-and-line vessel, MFV Te Tautai, operated in the Solomon Islands during 1988, and for the first time, showed a profit on operations.

The first phase of a Japanese bi-lateral assistance project to promote the development of coastal fisheries was completed in Funafuti in 1989. This project, aimed at significantly enhancing the government's ability to support the fisheries sector throughout the country, is due for completion in 1991. A request for similar assistance from Australia will complement this initiative.

It is likely that a large portion of the catch that will pass through the centres planned for three outer islands will be obtained from deepwater handlining operations. This conclusion was reached after a joint survey, undertaken by JICA in Fiji and Tuvalu waters between 1984 and 1986, identified a resource with

considerable [1,000 tonnes per year] fisheries potential in the deeper waters surrounding the Tuvalu atolls. The Division intends to explore the deepwater snapper resource associated with seamounts further with the assistance of USAID in the near future. Markets for by-catch, such as castor oil fish, will also be sought by the Division.

With the assistance of Australian aid, the Fisheries Division also intends to promote dried fish production for export to Fiji, Marshall Islands, Auckland. The Division intends to experiment with drying fish using solar and agri-waste fuels.

The Division has used a small, portable computer for most data compilation and report generation work to date. However, in mid-1989, the Division received assistance from USAID that will provide three desktop computers and associated peripherals over a period of one year. The first machine purchased through this programme arrived mid-year. Training is an essential component of the project if it is to succeed. Staff from the Division have been receiving training organised by regional organisations in preparation for the arrival of this equipment.

.2 Recent and Current Research Activities

Fisheries research in Tuvalu continues to be accorded a high level of importance within the Division. Due to limited financial resources, much of the work of the research staff is financially supported with foreign aid. Advice is also obtained from international organisations for the execution of some projects, although the amount of assistance that is available in the region is possibly not taken advantage of by the researchers in the Division.

.2.1 Trochus

Since the first transplant of trochus to Tuvalu in 1984, two major seedings have taken place, one in 1987 and one in 1988. These transplants have all been done with the assistance of the FAO/UNDP RFSP.

The Division monitors the transplanted populations, assessing the success of the transplant, discourages poaching, surveys for the appearance of new recruits indicating that the transplanted trochus have become successfully established. Future work will include attempts to establish trochus on other outer islands.

2.2 Tuna

The Division is interested in promoting the development of small-scale longlining for tuna and other pelagics but recognises that costs associated with expoting economically to foreign markets may be prohibitive.

.2.3 Subsistence and Artisanal Fisheries

On the basis of a longterm commitment of the Division to monitor production in local fisheries, the Division maintains a programme of sampling roadside sales on a regular basis. The estimated fisheries production for the entire country during 1988 was 296 tonnes which was a 25 percent increase on the estimated production in 1987. The share fishing scheme using the Division's vessels

resulted in a catch of 12 tonnes in 1987 which was a reduction from 15 tonnes taken in 1986. One hundred and eighteen private vessels operating at the same time landed an estimated 98 tonnes.

This programme, which received some design assistance from the SPC in 1984, is intended to provide the Division with information on the dynamics of the various fisheries operating in the vicinity of Funafuti. It also provides information on the subsistence harvest of fish from local stocks, which according to information available, are among the highest in the Pacific. Currently sampling occurs twice a day, 4-6 times each month.

The Division has recently outlined a programme to record vessel and gear types from all the outer islands and to estimate the level of subsistence fishing among them. This programme, commenced in 1988, will continue until all outer islands are surveyed. It hopes to utilise one of the vessels that will be provided under the Japanese aid agreement. It will employ inhabitants of the outer islands to record the required information.

2.4 Aquaculture

The FAO Regional Aquaculture Programme has assisted Tuvalu fisheries officials identify resources that may offer potential for aquaculture in Tuvalu. These resources include milkfish (Chanos) and clams.

2.4.1 Giant Clams

The Division plans to continue surveying throughout the islands to document the status of giant clam resources throughout the country. The first part of this programme was completed with the assistance of ACIAR in 1988 when three islands were surveyed. There are indications that the Division is also interested in establishing a hatchery and small nursery to stock local reefs. The Division received 1,000 juvenile clams from Palau in 1989, without mortality in transit. These clams may form the brood stock for the nursery.

2.4.2 Seaweed

In late 1987, seaweed culturing trials commenced at Funafuti with parent stock imported from Kiribati. Although strong seasonal winds have inhibited the trials, they are continuing.

2.5 Fish Aggregation Devices

With the assistance of funding from USAID and UNDP, the Division has successfully deployed fish aggregating rafts around Funafuti and on some of the outer islands. As a result, there has been a significant increase in the oceanic catch landed in Funafuti. This catch is monitored by the Division. Results of the analysis of that data provides the information necessary to support submissions for financial support for further FAD acquisitions. In addition, the Division is also interested in relating traditional knowledge of the aggregation of coastal tunas to the catch data that is received from vessels operating in the vicinity of FAD's.

2.6 Beche-de-mer

Beche-de-mer resources were surveyed in Tuvalu between 1976 and 1978. Despite the identification of a reasonable resource, no major commercial exploitation occurred in the country with the last recorded exports occurring in 1980. However, with a substantial increase in price and an increase in activity of Asian buyers in the region, the Tuvalu beche-de-mer resource is likely to be targeted in the future. The Division is planning a follow up to the survey work undertaken in the 1970's for this resource.