



Pacific  
Community  
Communauté  
du Pacifique

**SPC Headquarters**

95 Promenade Roger Laroque  
BP D5, 98848 Noumea Cedex  
New Caledonia

Email: [spc@spc.int](mailto:spc@spc.int)  
Phone: +687 26 20 00  
Fax: +687 26 38 18

**Siège de la CPS**

95 Promenade Roger Laroque  
BP D5, 98848 Nouméa Cedex  
Nouvelle-Calédonie

Email : [spc@spc.int](mailto:spc@spc.int)  
Tel : +687 26 20 00  
Fax : +687 26 38 18

## **2019 MAY PSMB MEETING**

### **DOCUMENT N° 1:**

# **TOWARDS A SERVICE OFFERING FOR THE PSMB**

Prepared by  
Mr Vince Galvin  
Chief Methodologist, Statistical Methods  
Statistics New Zealand

**May 2019**

Pacific Community (SPC) Headquarters: Noumea, New Caledonia. Regional Offices: Suva, Fiji;  
Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia; Port Vila, Vanuatu. Country Office: Honiara, Solomon Islands.  
[www.spc.int](http://www.spc.int) [spc@spc.int](mailto:spc@spc.int)

Siège de la Communauté du Pacifique (CPS) : Nouméa (Nouvelle-Calédonie). Antennes régionales : Suva (Fidji) ;  
Pohnpei (États fédérés de Micronésie) ; Port-Vila (Vanuatu). Bureau de pays : Honiara (Îles Salomon).  
[www.spc.int](http://www.spc.int) [spc@spc.int](mailto:spc@spc.int)

## DOCUMENT PURPOSE

This paper attempts to identify the range of statistical services to Pacific Nations that the Pacific Statistics Methods Board could help offer or establish.

The essential idea of the paper is to look over a range of possible needs that have been identified and explore what type of solutions could be considered.

## ROLE OF THE PSMB IN DELIVERY OF STATISTICAL SERVICES

The PSMB is not starting from scratch here – many statistical services are currently provided to PICT NSOs in various forms, by partner agencies – for example, by SPC-SDD, donors (WB, UN, DFAT, MFAT etc.), supporting NSOs (ABS, Stats NZ, other PICT NSOs) – and have been over many, many years. However, the PSMB can still add value to this service offering through:

- identifying what statistical services have or haven't worked well previously for PICT NSOs, along with any potential gaps in the existing service offering
- working with PICT NSOs, SPC-SDD, donors, and partner agencies to establish new services to fill the gaps identified, and – where needed - to improve the coordination, funding and delivery of statistical services offered across the Pacific
- helping ensure that all PICT NSOs are aware of the range of statistical services that are available, that they can easily access these services in a timely way, and that resulting deliverables and knowledge are centrally accessible
- advocating that methods and tools promoted and used across the Pacific as part of the statistical service offering are standardised, and both relevant to and applicable by PICT NSOs.

## THE SIGNIFICANT NEEDS THAT HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED

- The need for Quality Assurance in the context of releasing estimates

Several nations have raised the problem of how to provide re-assurance to a sceptical internal audience that estimates that are about to be released are fit for purpose. There appears to be a need to be able to provide evidence that appropriate methods have been applied to relevant data sources by people with adequate technical capability.

The types of solution that could be envisaged here are:

- Developing “annotated” versions of statistical guidance about how to simplify or modify standard measurement approaches so that they are appropriate to the Pacific
- A review process of an area of statistics across a range of agencies.
- A “rapid response” function to provide timely responses to specific questions that arise during production activity (possibly with some associated protocols for indicating involvement at time of release).
- The need for technical input into short term problems

The identified problem is that an issue arises that needs to be resolved relatively quickly, and for a number of reasons it would be very helpful to have some support provided in taking a decision. The point being that issues of this type can jeopardise timeframes or erode confidence in a team. It is envisioned that these decisions will be technical in nature and may even take the form of assurance for a decision already taken.

The solution envisaged here is some sort of “help desk” or “rapid response” service to provide feedback on such issues so that “small problems don't become big problems”. The key attributes of a good service in this context will be:

- Certainty of getting assistance
- Service provider with knowledge of the office being assisted, their context and their practices

- Timely response.
- The need to be able to resource more substantial statistical redevelopment work

The idea here being that small national statistics office will struggle to retain the capability to undertake more substantial work that re-occurs over a long time, like reweighting price indexes or rebasing National Accounts. With this work, while the above criteria will still apply, there may be more benefit in considering standardisation and planning the delivery of the service over a more extended timeframe.

The solution here can look less like a rapid response solution and more like some sort of knowledge brokering or capability sharing arrangement. The recent “Sampling Bootcamp” (Regional HIES Sampling Workshop hosted by SPC) appears to provide a possible model to deal with the situation where a range of countries have to undertake the same task at about the same time. The possibility of this situation being foreseen makes it reasonable to consider issues of standard tools and shared capability.

- The need to work together to “get ahead of the game”.

In a number of discussions, it has been highlighted that Pacific Statistics offices are facing many new demands, significant resource constraints and at least as much uncertainty as normal about what help they can expect to access. This environment effectively precludes any serious consideration being given to new data sources such as satellite data or new analysis methods

It would be highly desirable to have a mechanism to at least re-assure Pacific statisticians that no obvious possibilities are being missed, and that they can expect to get some sort of assessment of whether there are international improvements in data, methods and tools that might feasibly be deployed in the Pacific.

## ISSUES ASSUMED TO BE OUTSIDE THE SCOPE OF THIS PAPER

- Statistical Issue Resolution

In the sense that this is a process issue for the PSMB it will be the subject of a separate paper. The outputs from this process will feed into the quality assurance solutions.

- The Development of a Knowledge base

While the detail of how the knowledge base will be developed will be the subject of other papers, the knowledge base will serve as the repository of outputs from the statistical services discussed in this paper (e.g. annotated versions of statistical guidance, standard tools, workshop materials, responses to help desk queries). In addition, it is envisaged that the knowledge base will include a forum for more informal, on-going sharing of information and discussion about statistical methods in the Pacific, that all PICT NSOs and partner agencies can access and contribute to. Given their central role and existing document and Pacific data libraries, SPC-SDD seem best positioned to take the lead in developing and hosting the knowledge base.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTION MECHANISMS AND THEIR POSSIBLE SCOPE

It seems likely that there will be a “many to many” relationship between needs and solutions. In broad terms two needs are potentially more about immediate help and two are more future focussed. Everything will be helped by usable resource material and initiatives that increase individual staff member’s capability. With this in mind, the solutions are discussed here as a package.

### ***Endorsed set of Practices***

What exactly might be needed in the way of adaptations to international standards seems to be the main question. Already in PMSB discussions we have had examples of wider international standards that haven’t envisaged states as small as Pacific countries and of cases where the underpinning measurement assumptions do not align well with Pacific realities. So we look to make sensible modifications of internationally used guidelines, but we need to do so with some sort of framework and evidence base in mind.

I can see an argument for having two types of “approved practice or endorsed approach”.

- Endorsement of “reasonable adaptations”

The first would be to keep track of where we develop a “reasonable” accommodation to an existing standard. This is a relatively low bar it is simply a pragmatic decision to reflect local reality in a situation where blindly applying an international standard would lead to something that isn’t sensible. The point of this would be to provide re-assurance if it was sought to an agency that was concerned about PICT NSOs not being able to meet international guidelines.

- Modifications to international manuals

This is where we proactively seek to modify international standards to develop something that could be used across the Pacific as best practice. This may be – for example - an adaptation of national accounts, or a “condensed” version of an environmental measurement practice. The distinction is that this is something where more thought would go into constructing a re-usable solution that could be used across the Pacific.

### ***Help Desk or Rapid Response Service***

- How will the scope of the assistance offered by the help desk be defined?

Presumably in terms of the [generic statistical business process](#), but with the specific exclusion of IT assistance (MFAT, for one, are reluctant to fund IT assistance as part of Stats NZ’s Pacific Programme). There has been a lot of discussion about the need to deliver solutions and not just identify principles. The point has been made that for a certain proportion of this work the challenge is to have experienced operational people who are used to making things work well.

- How centralised does the help desk have to be?

There is an open question around whether donors specialise in providing statistical services around individual countries or by topics. There are obvious advantages in having one place to record all that is going on. There may be sensitivities about individual PICTs exposing their needs, but the idea of a database where needs can be identified, providers can see these, and arrangements can be made to meet them in a coordinated and efficient way seems desirable.

### ***Capability Brokering***

In either making skilled staff available, training staff or improving documentation or software, there is a broad category of getting knowledge in a usable form to where it is needed, when it is needed.

- SDD as a “clearing house”

In many of the discussions that we have had it has been apparent that a lot of assistance is received but that who gets what sort of assistance when, can depend on a complex mix of factors. A clear simple way of lodging and monitoring requests has the potential to improve efficiency in mobilising people and help focus the preparation of resource material. SDD seem well placed to play this role and this has been the focus of their restructuring.

- Resources created from Placements, Technical assistance, tertiary study and all our historically used mechanisms

There has been great work of this sort done of a long period of time, although much of it has been done in isolation and the resources associated with many of these activities have not always been widely available. However, even if it is only “going forward”, and only when there is the appropriate agreements, it would seem sensible to investigate how to create a searchable catalogue of all this material.

- Brokering “south-south” and other forms of collaboration.

Clearly this is desirable, and I am aware that there have been some significant successes. There are obstacles that need to be overcome but it is important that this is in the mix of solutions.

- Bootcamps and Workshops

The recent Regional HIES Sampling Workshop has received very positive feedback. Understanding the right problem to solve with this approach, and the other preconditions of success would be a valuable step forward.

### ***Getting our issues onto the “to do” list of the International Statistical Community***

- Lobbying to ensure “Pacific circumstances” are considered in formulating international practice

The circumstances of the Pacific are not completely unique. It may be worth trying to go to the sort of agencies that often end up holding the pen on authoring standards and asking them to try and get consideration given to small island micro states.

- Finding some way of partnering to see if a feasible way ahead can be found for approaches to using new data sources.

In New Zealand we have had interesting discussions with large companies who are looking to help achieve public good objectives. It is the sort of thing that might arise as an opportunity for PICT NSOs. It is a matter of whether this is worth spending time on, but it does seem a pity not even to pursue this if it could solve an identified problem.

## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- The desirability of solutions being re-usable

In an ideal world, solutions would be at least case studies for others. This is obviously restricted by how data is treated but there are likely to be considerable efficiencies from everyone seeing the sort of approaches that have been used (open by default).

- The desirability of solutions being well standardised.

With the interest that always surrounds making comparisons across the Pacific, it is clearly desirable to have best practice solutions that use relatable assumptions and compatible tools

- The need for partner agencies to fulfil mandates

Many international agencies have very specific mandates to progress solutions to individual problems throughout the world, so it is more or less unavoidable that from time to time they will be in the Pacific wanting to fund work that is valuable but currently low priority. The trick is to try and get as much planning time as possible to explore how content, methods and tools can be rationalised.

- The challenge of developing Sustainable Solutions

This has been an enduring problem. It is largely inherent given the sizes of the agencies involved and the sensitivities to losing individuals.

Clearly an important step is to try and get larger institutions making structural commitments to the mechanisms they put in place.

## **QUESTIONS TO HELP DESIGN THE NEXT STEPS**

Members of PSMB are invited to:

**Consider** the role of the PSMB in delivery of statistical services (section 1) – how can the PSMB best add value to the range of existing services offered?

**Consider** the needs identified in this paper (section 2)

- Are they a good enough description of key issues to provide a useful basis for discussion? If there is any clear guidance about that most pressing problems or the areas of greatest opportunity for PICT NSOs, then this would be particularly helpful.
- Is it useful or necessary to begin some sort of process to establish an evidence base around the statements of need? It may not need to be answered now but if we are going to seek funding then validating our sense of the potential benefits and costs will be an issue.

**Consider** the balance between support for immediate needs and support to try and build up approaches for future work. Arguably two of the identified needs are more about immediate problems and two are about the future.

**Discuss**, in light of their own experience, their sense of what a functional system of support might look like – do the possible solution mechanisms listed in section 4 seem sensible? What statistical services have / haven't worked well or been successful in the past? What were the defining characteristics of the services things worked most successfully?

**Agree** the process to follow on from here, and the initial priorities in terms of both the needs identified in section 2 and the possible solution mechanisms in section 4. I dread having another sub-group every time we discuss a paper, but we could look to get funding agencies involved in the discussion.