



Reef fishery workshop held in Fiji

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A conference and workshop entitled “Reef fisheries: Now and for the future” was held in Suva, Fiji, in July 2006, as a collaborative effort between the Fisheries Research Division of the Fiji Fisheries Department, and the Society for the Conservation of Reef Fish Aggregations (SCRFA). It was the first meeting to focus on coral reef fisheries ever held in Fiji. The objectives were to 1) gain an overview of the history, current status and issues of coral reef associated fisheries in the western Pacific region, including Fiji; 2) review management, development and other initiatives in place or planned in Fiji of relevance to coral reef associated fisheries; and 3) identify information and management gaps that must be addressed to better achieve sustainable exploitation of coral reef associated fisheries in Fiji.

More than 50 participants from a wide range of communities from throughout Fiji were invited to represent their respective institutions and communities, and to bring their experiences and concerns to the meeting. The workshop was opened by the Minister for Fisheries and Forests, followed by two days of presentations and workshop sessions, conducted in both Fijian and English. Following the workshop, a summary of the major outcomes was presented to the Acting CEO of the Ministry of Fisheries and Forests, Ms Alefina Vuki.

There was a broad consensus that there were widespread declines in Fiji’s reef fisheries, with negative consequences for poverty alleviation, social stability and food security in coastal areas. Urban drift was identified as one major potential negative effect of further reductions in reef fisheries: further declines in landings were expected under the status quo. A need for urgent and comprehensive action was clear to most participants. Concerns were expressed about several government development initiatives going ahead in a way that is not being linked to the sustainability of the underlying resource. One example is the introduction of ice plants into remote areas to increase sales opportunities (chilled fish can be stored to wait for

bulk shipments to markets) without reviewing whether the resource base can withstand the resulting increase in fishing pressure. Another is the development of the live reef fish trades (groupers for food and ornamental fish for aquaria, for example) without analysis of the underlying resource base in most areas of Fiji and without clear management plans.

Six major findings and recommendations were identified.

1. Assess the economic and social value of coral reef fisheries to Fiji

An assessment of the full value (i.e. including not only market value but also food and livelihood worth) of coral reef fisheries to Fijian society would better enable appropriate resources to be allocated to this critically important, but largely ignored, sector for management and enforcement.

2. Information and outreach

Participants identified a need for a much better understanding of the importance of balancing resource use with management. This need was clear throughout the discussions and presentations, and assistance in this area was repeatedly requested at many levels, from communities to government officials; education and outreach on existing fisheries regulation were acknowledged to be poor. Participants also recognized that more information is needed on threatened and vulnerable species, such as the humphead wrasse, *Cheilinus undulatus*, bumphead parrotfish, *Bolbometopon muricatum*, giant grouper, *Epinephelus lanceolatus*, and giant sweetlips, *Plectorhinchus obscurus*.

3. Management and enforcement

Enforcement of current fishery regulations for coral reef fisheries was been widely perceived to be weak to non-existent, but very much needed. The

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overriding perception by all sectors was that little is being done in respect of fishery management and controls. Community leaders wanted to know more about how the policies and practices for issuing fishing licences could be improved, and they expressed the need for assistance in management and to address poaching. Marine protected areas were identified as an important management tool, but one that, if used alone, is insufficient to adequately manage the inshore fishery sector.

4. Match the marine resource base with government development initiatives

There is currently little attempt to match new development initiatives, such as product development or export fisheries such as live reef food fish or jellyfish, with the capability of the resource base to sustain such development. This shows that the development and management “arms” of the fisheries department are not integrated or coordinated, and that development could even be counter-productive.

5. Nearshore development/reclamation

In many areas of Fiji, dumping and coastal developments are destroying coastal areas; based on studies from elsewhere, such activities almost certainly

have long-term negative impacts on reef fisheries. Development associated with tourism can sometimes be more of a threat than a blessing, if not carried out with proper planning and consultation.

6. Integration

Given the many initiatives already addressing or beginning to address marine coastal issues, a need was recognized for integration and coordination among these initiatives to avoid unnecessary overlap, and to ensure that significant gaps in information are filled.

Participants at the meeting found the presentations to be useful and constructive and requested follow-up meetings at the national and regional levels. A report on the meeting will soon be posted on <http://www.scrfa.org>. It was recommended that the next meeting be held in Fiji in mid-July, 2007.



Figure 1. Participants at the meeting, “Reef fisheries: Now and for the future”, in Suva, July 2006.