

# A review of Niue's Community-based Fisheries Management Programme

*FIELD REPORT*  
2006

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SPC  
Secretariat  
of the Pacific  
Community

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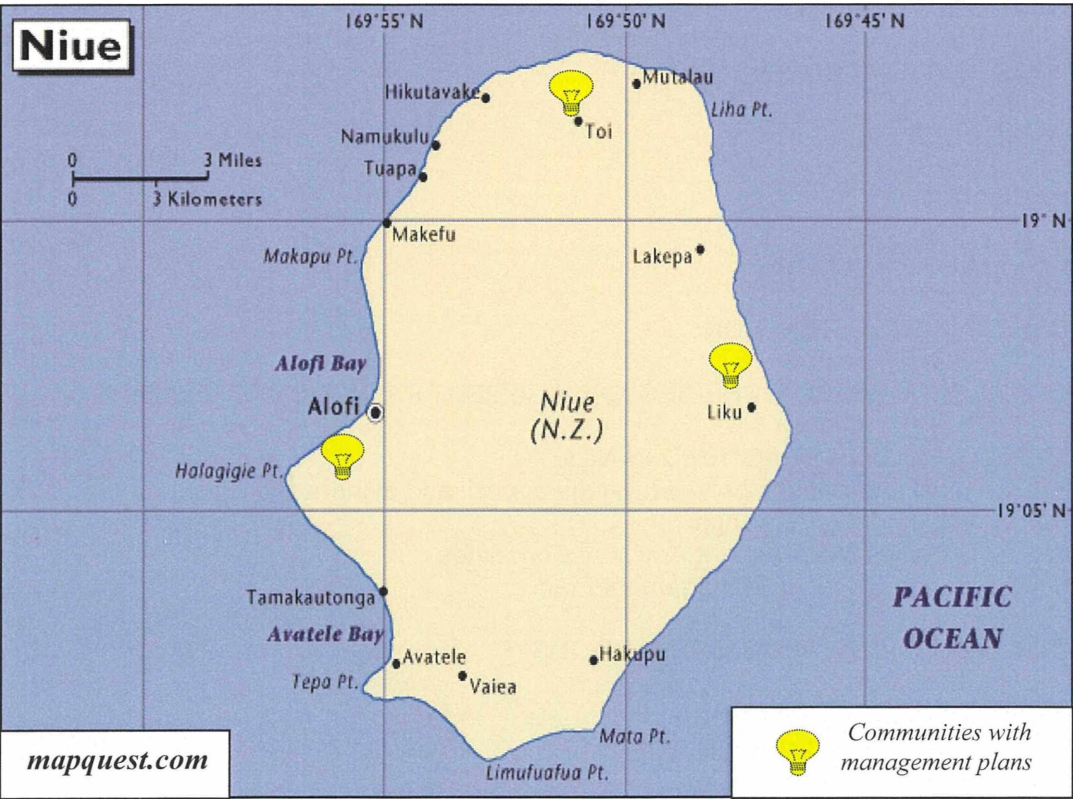
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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We would especially like to thank Ms Fiafia Rex and Ms Jamal Talagi for their contributions and for facilitating this assignment. Finally, we would like to acknowledge with gratitude the comments and guidance of the Community Fisheries Adviser during the course of the assignment and the production of this report.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the Fisheries Division recruits two new officers to be fully responsible for the management of coastal fisheries and implementation of activities related to the Community-based Fisheries Management (CBFM) Programme.
2. The Fisheries Division must work with other departments that are willing to share resources for the CBFM Programme and allow them to work with the Fisheries Division at the beginning of the programme process.
3. Community Fisheries Management Plans
  - a. It is recommended that the formulation of management plans be reviewed, as there is inconsistency in determining key problems, causes, solutions and related undertakings in the layout of the existing plans.
  - b. It has been noted that the Fisheries Division invites input from other government departments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) when a plan is prepared. It is therefore recommended that comments from invited departments and NGOs be incorporated into the final copy for the consideration of the community that owns the plan.
4. It is recommended that record keeping of all CBFMP activities be improved. Simple but important information, such as when initial contact, group meetings and management plan approval took place, must be well documented for reference and for progress reviews.
5. The Fisheries Division should give priority to finalising the Amendment Bill to allow village communities to take charge in the management of their marine environments. The Division should consult with village councils to secure their support for the amendments.

6. Requests from the community

- At least one programme staff from Fisheries should be present at village monthly meetings to ensure that both parties are well informed of their respective commitments and to update progress of the programme in the community.
- The Fisheries Division should coordinate quarterly workshops for FMACs to share experiences and lessons learned.
- The Fisheries Division should provide signboards for declared no-take zones, while the communities should be responsible for markers and for ensuring that the community at large is well aware of such undertakings.

7. The Division should focus on the facilitation of national awareness programmes through available media and to continue to produce information sheets on the significance of the role of communities in the management of fisheries and marine resources.

8. It is recommended that, given the common curiosity of the three communities already in the programme, the Fisheries Division should prioritise the documentation of traditional fisheries knowledge and practices.

9. It is recommended that the Division encourages the pursuit of fisheries studies through work experience activities, school career talks and possibly an annual Fisheries Division Open Day.

10. CBFMP staff should keep in regular contact with participating communities through monthly visits.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Coastal Fisheries Management (CFM) Section of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) was requested by the Fisheries Division of Niue to assist in setting up a community-based coastal fisheries management programme. Initial consultations and meetings with various government and community stakeholders were conducted by CFM in Niue in 2003 and 2004 respectively before a workshop for local facilitators was carried out in August 2004. The Fisheries Division of Samoa assisted SPC in setting up this programme.

Developing Niue's CFMP acknowledges initial groundwork done by the International Waters Project (IWP) – a GEF/UNDP project facilitated by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) under the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF); the village communities in Niue; the Department of Environment in its National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan (NBSAP) work; the Fisheries Division's Institutional Strengthening Project by SPC and the Commonwealth Secretariat; and the Coastal Fisheries Management Plan for Niue.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

The island of Niue, known as the 'Rock of the Pacific', is one of the world's largest uplifted coral atolls. The former reef and lagoon have been elevated to about 60 metres above sea level. A narrow fringing reef around most of the island is accessible for fishing activities, with women usually found there gleaning molluscs, seaweed and other reef resources for daily family meals. Niue has a total land area of about 260 square kilometres and a coastline estimated at 64 kilometres.

Niue is an independent island state in free association with New Zealand. Through this arrangement, Niuean people are New Zealand citizens. Niue has its own parliament in charge of internal affairs, while New Zealand has responsibility for external affairs and defence, which will only be exercised at the request of the Government of Niue. The current population is approximately 1800, with continual emigration at a high rate (in 2001 a rate of 14% was recorded).

The reef and its resources have provided sustenance for the people of Niue ever since the first settlers landed on the island. This dependency on the reef and coastal areas for fresh fish and shellfish has been upset due to the resources being overfished and degradation of marine habitats. Due to the limited reef area around the island and the continuous pressure on the coastal fishery over many years, the coastal reef area might have been harvested beyond its carrying capacity.

### **3. FISHERIES PROBLEMS**

In Niue's *State of the Environment Report* (Lane 1994), the seriousness of overexploitation of resources was highlighted. The report noted a 'serious lack of any systematic management of resources and few mechanisms to prevent overuse'. As an example, some inshore fish stocks had declined through unregulated harvesting methods and a lack of harvest limits. The *National Assessment of the Environmental Concerns of Niue* (Butler 2002) highlighted concerns related to the inshore area, such as the overexploitation of inshore and reef fisheries resources, a lack of baseline data, and pollution and silting as a result of land-based activities. The key issue identified in departmental consultations was the unsustainable use of inshore fish resources, coupled with the lack of baseline information on these. A more recent issue was that of ciguatera poisoning.



The *IWP Participatory Situation Analysis* (2003), which involved intensive consultation and information gathering with the 14 villages on the island in 2002, highlighted the many concerns and issues from the different villages. The four main problems identified through consultations in Alofi South were:

- a. declining marine resources;
- b. degradation of marine habitats;
- c. fish poisoning; and
- d. pollution of coastal waters through water pollution, toxic-waste pollution and solid-waste pollution.

#### **4. THE USE OF IWP INFORMATION**

From further consultations with the people of Niue and as an outcome of a training workshop for facilitators held by SPC in Niue from 9 to 13 August 2004, it was strongly felt by the people that information gathered through the IWP village consultations should be used as a starting point for discussions on the formulation of village management plans. This was to avoid gathering similar information again from the villages at certain meetings and duplicating what had already been done. This approach will be dealt with case by case in villages that have shown interest in developing fisheries management plans.

#### **5. COMMUNITY-BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME (CBFMP)**

The CBFM Programme (CBFMP) is a sub-programme of the Fisheries Division of DAFF. The primary goal of CBFMP is to achieve the objectives set out in the National Coastal Fisheries Management Plan (Adams 2003), which focuses entirely on coastal fisheries and the activities and issues directly associated with them.

CBFMP aims to assist those villages that have expressed interest in developing village fisheries management plans for the management of their marine environment and resources. Each management plan is unique due to the individual village's environment, problems, needs, issues, solutions and actions concerning its marine environment as the community sees it. With the development of village fisheries management plans, the Fisheries Division anticipates achieving the objectives set out in the National Coastal Fisheries Management Plan: better management and sustainable use of Niue's coastal marine resources to benefit the current population and future generations – that is, meeting the needs of the present without compromising those of future generations.

Alofi South was the first village community to have its management plan formulated and adopted by the village council. It was implemented through a request to the Fisheries Division during the facilitators' training workshop conducted by SPC's Coastal Fisheries Management Section in August 2004. As part of its commitment to the request by the Fisheries Division, SPC spearheaded the process for the Alofi South community in which a model was developed for CBFMP for Niue.

Three village communities – Alofi South, Liku and Toi – have now developed fisheries management plans and been granted the approval of their respective village councils. These communities are in the process of implementing the various undertakings specified in their management plans.

## **6. CBFMP PROCESS PRACTISED IN NIUE**

### ***6.1 Initial consultation between village council and Fisheries Division***

The initial consultation between a village council (VC) and Fisheries allows Fisheries to explain how it might help to develop a village fisheries management

plan (VFMP). The consultation also enables the VC to indicate its readiness for involvement in the programme. In the consultation, Fisheries programme staff explain to the VC the approach that will allow the programme to proceed. If the VC then wants to proceed, it is asked to arrange special meetings for different village groups.

## **6.2 *Village group meetings***

Village group meetings (VGMs) of women, men and other village groups, such as youth, may be held separately to analyse the condition of the marine environment and fish stocks, identify the various causes of the problems, consider solutions and plan remedial actions. These issues are outlined as a problem/solution tree. At a second meeting, the groups examine the most practical solutions to the problems in greater detail. Finally a Fisheries Management Advisory Committee (FMAC) is formed, with representatives nominated from the different groups.

## **6.3 *Fisheries Management Advisory Committee***

The village FMAC holds a series of meetings to further consider the problems and solutions identified by each group, and combines these into a single problem/solution tree. The committee then decides how the solutions can be trialled, what actions are required from the community and what type of support is required from the Fisheries Division. At the first or second FMAC meeting, committee members and Fisheries officers conduct a village 'stroll-through environmental assessment'. The purpose of the assessment is to prompt community discussion of environmentally critical areas and to prioritise time against unrealistic undertakings. The assessment analyses the likely success of the proposed community actions and is not meant to take the place of more detailed scientific assessments, which (if necessary) will be completed by Fisheries scientific staff or other relevant organisations.

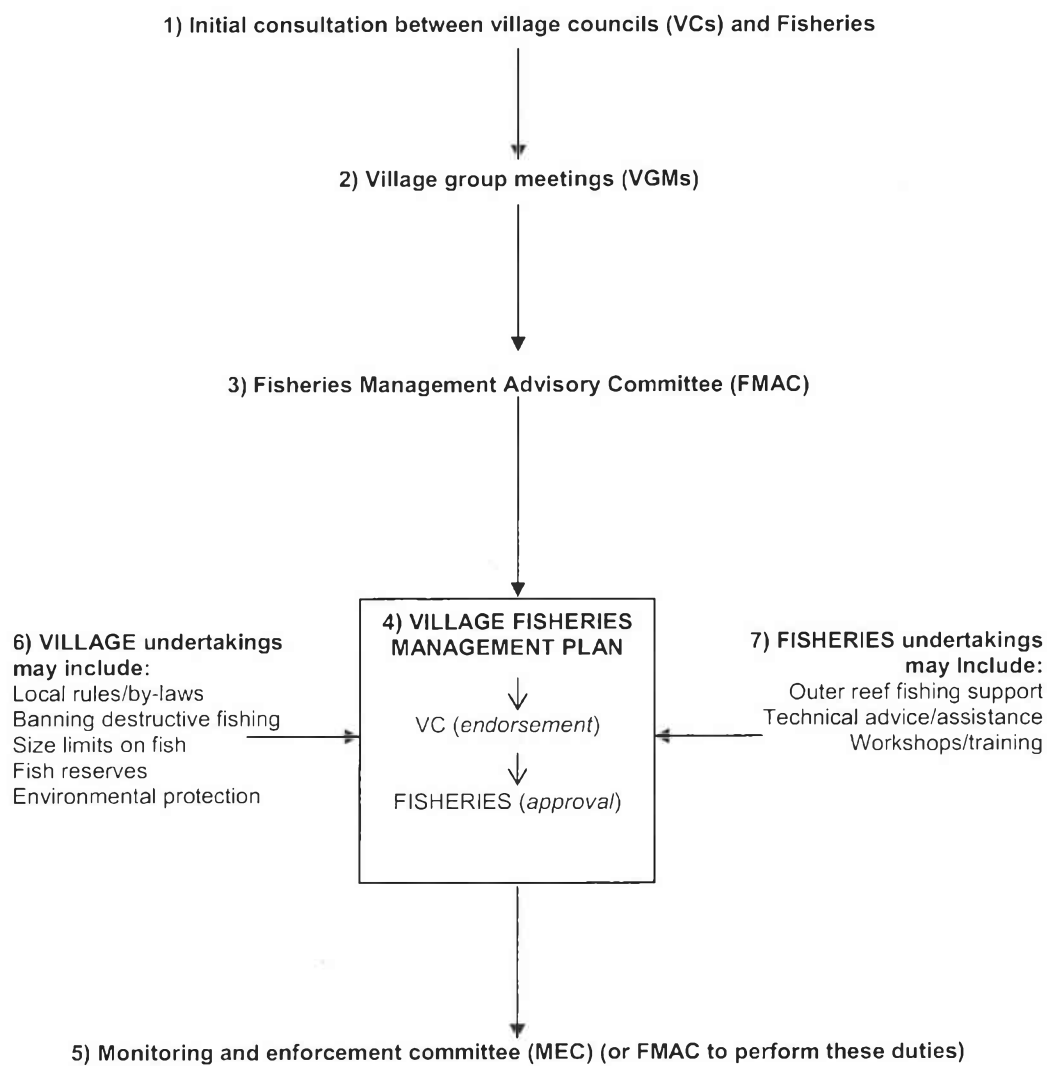
#### **6.4 Village Fisheries Management Plan**

The VFMP will be community-owned. It must be in the form of an agreement between the VC and Fisheries, listing the resource management and conservation undertakings of the village community, and the servicing and technical support undertakings required of the Fisheries Division. The plan must first be presented to the VC by the FMAC, in the presence of Fisheries programme staff. If the plan is endorsed by the VC, then a copy must be submitted to Fisheries so that the two parties to the VFMP are aware of their respective responsibilities. The approval of the plan by the VC and Fisheries signifies commitment by each party to serving its respective undertakings under the plan.

The VC may appoint a monitoring and enforcement committee (MEC) additional to the FMAC to administer the undertakings of the village community in terms of monitoring and enforcement. Otherwise, the FMAC can be assigned this task. Once the VFMP is officially approved, Fisheries staff maintain regular contact with the FMAC and provide the technical support agreed to under the plan.



**Figure 1:** Diagrammatic representation of the process employed by the Community-based Fisheries Management Programme in Niue



## **7. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Staff issues**

Since the inception of the CBFM Programme in August 2004, the Fisheries Division has had difficulty in fulfilling its obligations. This is mainly due to the limited number of staff within the Division. It has four staff members who are responsible for all fisheries-related work, including data collection, boat repair and outboard engine maintenance, inshore and offshore activities, and the CBFM Programme, which has not been given the high priority it deserves.

The SPC/ComSec Institutional Strengthening Project report of August 2005, under recommendations 4 and 5, sought the establishment of two sections (Inshore and Offshore) for the Division, and placement of a minimum of seven officers in each section. However, the recommendations could not proceed because of the shortage of qualified personnel on the island. In addition, working in fisheries is regarded as an unpleasant career and suitable only for men. Given the circumstances, the Fisheries Division is waiting for three new graduates from the University of the South Pacific (USP) at the end of 2005 and in mid-2006.

#### ***Recommendation 1***

It is recommended that the Fisheries Division recruits two new officers to be fully responsible for the management of coastal fisheries and the implementation of activities related to the CBFM Programme.

With staff shortage being the problem, the Division should consider cost-sharing arrangements with other departments. For example, the Department of Environment (DOE) is willing to commit its resources and staff to a joint effort (a likely initiative) provided it is allowed to be involved throughout the CBFM Programme process. Such an arrangement has the support of the DOE Director, who is willing to work with the Fisheries Division in the implementation of

programme activities (monitoring, conduct of surveys and research, etc.) requested by the various communities.

***Recommendation 2***

The Fisheries Division must work with other departments that are willing to share resources for the CBFM Programme and allow them to work with the Fisheries Division at the beginning of the programme process.

**7.2 *Management plans***

A management plan contains two sets of undertakings, one for the community and the other for the Fisheries Division, to be carried out in order to achieve the programme goals. These undertakings constitute a framework of planned activities that must be recognised by not only the Fisheries Division but the community itself. In examining the three management plans already produced by the programme, inconsistencies have been noted that are possibly due to variations in the format being used. This could have been caused by the different approaches employed during the community facilitation process, especially the use of problem/solution trees to gather information from the communities.

It was also noted that the Fisheries Division invites contributions from other departments and relevant NGOs after a management plan is finalised by a community. It is therefore advisable to involve these other departments and NGOs while the plan is being prepared. This allows transparency across the community on the kind of assistance that can be provided by these authorities when the management plan is implemented. It also allows the agencies to be part of the process, hence easing the burden of programme activities being the responsibility of a single department.

**Recommendation 3**

- a. It is recommended that the formulation of management plans be reviewed, as there is inconsistency in determining key problems, causes, solutions and related undertakings in the layout of the existing plans.
- b. It has been noted that the Fisheries Division invites inputs from other government departments and NGOs when a plan is prepared. It is therefore recommended that comments from invited departments and NGOs be incorporated into the final copy for the consideration of the community that owns the plan.

**7.3 Proper record keeping**

Due to the increased number of village communities participating in the programme, the need for proper record keeping is very important. It is advisable to have separate files for each participating community so that their respective activities, related information and raw data are kept for future reference and to facilitate determining the stages of progress during programme reviews. Proper record keeping provides baseline information that will help assess the performance of the programme for each participating community.

**Recommendation 4**

It is recommended that record keeping of all CBFMP activities be improved. Simple but important information, such as when initial contact, group meetings and management plan approval took place, must be well documented for reference and for progress reviews.

**7.4 Relevant legislation**

Current fisheries legislation (Domestic Fisheries Act 1995; Domestic Fisheries Regulations 1996) provides for the management of Niue's fishery waters. In relation to coastal fisheries activities, the legislation covers the prohibition of all illegal fishing activities, which range from explosives to fish poisoning; methods



that are destructive in nature, such as breaking coral; and the use of underwater breathing apparatus. The legislation also sets minimum size limits for nets, and provides for village councils to declare a *fono* or taboo on harvesting a particular species and on fishing in a declared area. Additionally, the Act allows for VCs to impose by-laws for resource management purposes.

Although the existing legislation allows for community by-laws, the Crown Counsel Office questions the ability within local communities to monitor and enforce such by-laws if they are put in place. This view is based on the fact that the FMAC is voluntary in nature and does not have legal recognition in the event of community rules being violated.

It was also revealed during the review that a bill to amend the Domestic Fisheries Act was submitted by IWP in 2004. The amendments are aimed at recognising the importance of CFMPs and empowering village councils to: declare marine protected areas; issue fishing permits for village fishing grounds with fees payable to the VC; impose restrictions, requirements and conditions consistent with the Act and any regulations made under the Act; and appoint fish wardens who would be responsible for enforcement. A penalty not exceeding \$500 to be paid to the VC was also proposed. The amendments are yet to be considered and processed by the Crown Counsel Office due to the Fisheries Division not supporting parts of them.

**Recommendation 5**

The Fisheries Division should give priority to finalising the Amendment Bill to allow village communities to take charge in the management of their marine environments. The Division should consult with village councils to secure their support for the amendments.

### **7.5 Community requests**

Responses from community representatives during the consultations revealed that there is a lack of understanding by communities of awareness programmes carried out by Fisheries on fisheries and marine-related matters, and of existing fisheries legislation.

During the consultations, communities requested the participation of Fisheries personnel in their monthly council meetings. The presence of an officer from the Fisheries Division would provide an opportunity to share information and resolve any issues of concern between the two parties to ensure that the community maintains a high level of interest in and understanding of all aspects of the programme and that it is transparent across all sectors of the community.

Another point of interest was the request by FMACs of participating communities for quarterly workshops to allow the members of the various FMACs to come together and share experiences of what they have learned from their respective programmes. The results of such workshops could be developed into establishing a national committee for the management of the coastal fisheries programme in Niue.

Declaration of marine protected areas was one of the common solutions suggested by the communities. The communities are held responsible for policing and enforcement, while the Division is tasked with carrying out scientific monitoring and providing support through relevant technical input. On the other hand, there is a need for declared areas to be publicised, and therefore signboards are required.

**Recommendation 6**

- At least one programme staff from Fisheries should be present at village monthly meetings to ensure that both parties are well informed of their respective commitments and to update progress of the programme in the community.
- The Fisheries Division should coordinate quarterly workshops for FMACs to share experiences and lessons learned.
- The Fisheries Division should provide signboards for declared no-take zones, while the communities should be responsible for markers and for ensuring that the community at large is well aware of such undertakings.

**7.6 Awareness programmes**

The review indicated that there is a need to prioritise awareness programmes, particularly on fisheries legislation. It appeared during the consultations that there is a limited understanding in communities on the existing fisheries legislation on size limits, species of concern and, most importantly, allowable catch quotas for important species. Other issues, such as the role of communities in the management of fisheries resources and the performance of activities that signify sustainability of coastal fisheries resources, are considerably worth addressing.

Eight information sheets in Niuean and English have been produced and are much appreciated by the communities. The Department of Environment, through its Biodiversity Project funds, has rendered assistance with the production of information sheets on the following topics:

- Community-based fisheries management programme
- Fish reserves
- Destructive fishing methods
- Crown of thorns starfish
- Koe uga (coconut crab)
- Coral reefs

- Marine pollution and dumping of rubbish
- Endangered species of the sea

***Recommendation 7***

The Division should focus on the facilitation of national awareness programmes through available media and continue to produce information sheets on the significance of the role of communities in the management of fisheries and marine resources.

***7.7 Documentation of traditional knowledge***

The use of modern and other efficient technology in fishing activities alarmed most of the communities, in particular the known fishers of each village. There was a claim that fishing had not been the same in the past 10 or 15 years, with noticeable changes in fish sizes, species and numbers caught, and in the marine habitat. It was also pointed out that fishing had diminished practically as a daily activity for sustenance, and that due to long hours spent on fishing with fewer catches, people consider it a waste of time.

A possible solution suggested by the communities was to ban the use of modern fishing techniques and reintroduce the use of traditional fishing that includes the application of local knowledge in terms of spawning seasons, open/closed seasons or areas, types of gear used and resource sharing, which are reminiscent of the past.

Although there was wide acceptance of the reintroduction of traditional fishing, the limited knowledge available and the fact that most of these activities have passed through generations without proper documentation rendered another problem.



**Recommendation 8**

It is recommended that, given the common curiosity of the three communities already in the programme, the Fisheries Division should prioritise the documentation of traditional fisheries knowledge and practices.

**7.8 Promotional activities**

One notable analysis was the descending level of interest by students in undertaking further studies in fisheries-related fields. A career in fisheries was considered a dirty job and a men-only work environment. This was confirmed by the USP Extension Programme Director, who confirmed that not a single student from Niue had enrolled in fisheries studies in the last two years except for those who were presently pursuing on-campus full-time studies.

**Recommendation 9**

It is recommended that the Division encourages the pursuit of fisheries studies through work experience activities, school career talks and possibly an annual Fisheries Division Open Day.

**7.9 Sustaining community interest**

Programme staff should maintain regular contact with the participating communities. Similar programmes around the region advise strongly of the importance of maintaining regular contact between the fisheries authority and the participating communities to ensure long-term commitment to the programme.

**Recommendation 10**

CBFMP staff should keep in regular contact with participating communities through monthly visits.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The introduction of the community-based fisheries management programme in Niue is definitely a positive step. The fact that there is a declining availability of marine resources in inshore areas and reef flats around the country, as experienced by the communities, cannot be denied. This view has been supported by various studies conducted previously on Niue. Obvious reasons for the decreasing number of coastal fisheries resources include overharvesting to meet local subsistence needs, lack of management practices, human-induced pollution and natural disasters. The other interesting factor stated by most people during the consultations was the lack of respect for customary laws and practices pertaining to the utilisation of coastal fishery resources.

The community fisheries management programme provides an opportunity for the Fisheries Division to work in partnership with village communities in the management of coastal fisheries resources. This is achieved through the implementation of the various undertakings stipulated in the villages' respective management plans.

Theoretically, the programme concept and objectives can be achieved. However, there are a few areas of concern, as pointed out by the review team. There are three villages with fisheries management plans since the inception of the programme in 2004. Regarding the three plans produced, the Fisheries Division has not accorded them priority in terms of their undertakings as specified in the plans. The review team understands the understaffed capabilities of the Division; however, programmes that are voluntary in nature require that appropriate actions be taken to maintain interest and maximum participation by all parties. Therefore, it is advisable at this stage, before introducing another community, for the Division to divert as much effort as possible into instigating the implementation of the Division's tasks as required by the three plans in place.

Fisheries management in the past has been a top-down approach, in which the Fisheries Division as the national authority is responsible for management of fisheries resources and formulates relevant legislation as management guidelines. However, this legislation is perceived by many as government law with not enough effort taken to ensure it works. With CBFMP, all sectors are involved and community members are willing to work with the government on the condition that the national authority spearheads the implementation of the undertakings and maintains contacts with the various communities they affiliate with. This should be the case for Niue, and the Fisheries Division should be more proactive in its approach.

It was also an opinion of the review team that there are cross-cutting issues that should be sorted out foremost, as in the case of village by-laws. Although the existing legislation is sufficient to cater for the needs of CBFMP as viewed by the Division, the matter should be discussed with appropriate agencies at the national level and with the communities concerned.

In conclusion, CBFMP staff and the Division should consider the application of the recommendations in the review report. The review team further recommends that the community-based fisheries management programme in Niue be reviewed on a six-monthly basis to allow for progressive results to identify the direction in which CBFMP in Niue is heading.

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## 10. PEOPLE CONSULTED

The following people were consulted in the course of the review and the research carried out on this report. The authors acknowledge with sincere appreciation their time and assistance throughout the review.

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| Ron Paulin           | IWP Consultant                                  |
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| Mana Talagi          | Community Representative, Alofi South           |
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| Toepenina Hekau      | Crown Counsel, Crown Law Office                 |
| Maru Talagi          | Director, USP Centre                            |
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