



16th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

22–26 April 2024



Original: English

Outcomes of the Sixteenth SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

FAME Secretariat

Background

1. The 16th Pacific Community (SPC) Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meeting was held in Noumea, New Caledonia, from the 22nd to 26th April 2024. It was a face-to-face (but live streamed) meeting, which allowed all members and observers to travel to SPC Headquarters and participate in person.
2. Twenty-three members participated in the meeting: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United States of America, Vanuatu and Wallis and Futuna.
3. The annual SPC HoF meeting covers a wide range of interests, for which national fisheries agencies have responsibility, and for which the SPC, in particular through its Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Marine Ecosystems (FAME), provides scientific and technical assistance, as well as capacity building support. The meeting plays a unique and critical role in providing strategic guidance to SPC FAME. Through sharing knowledge and best practices, and identifying sustainable management strategies, the SPC HoF meeting supports sustainable management of members fisheries and aquaculture resources in the Pacific region.
4. The meeting was chaired by Mr Archie Soliai, the Director of the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources in American Samoa.
5. Dr Stuart Minchin, SPC Director General, opened the meeting via a recorded message, as he was away from SPC Headquarters on a pre-arranged engagement with members.
6. The outcomes outlined here are the main points of consensus among delegates that the meeting felt necessary to document in order to: guide the resourcing and management of the SPC FAME work programmes; draw to the attention of other CROP agencies, development partners and donors; signal agreement on issues that require attention by members themselves; and inform the upcoming Regional Fisheries Ministers' Meeting (RFMM), SPC's Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations (CRGA), and the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meetings.

Progress on the outcomes of the 15th SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting

7. Heads of Fisheries:
 - a. *Reviewed and acknowledged* the progress on the outcomes of the 15th SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting.

SPC FAME results reporting against Business Plan 2022-2027

8. Heads of Fisheries:
 - a. *Reviewed and noted* the results achieved by SPC FAME (Working Paper 1).
 - b. *Noted* that while there had been some improvements in the rate of delivery of national requests in the last year, there is a significant multiyear backlog of national requests yet to be progressed and completed.

- c. *Tasked* SPC FAME to improve the annual reporting of national requests to HoF meetings by including a 5-year analysis of the status of progress against requests for each member. This should also include any issues that may hinder progress or require member consideration to improve completion rates.
- d. *Noted* the current level of active requests and *encouraged* SPC FAME to improve on the delivery and completion rate of national requests, including through the use of local or regional consultants.

SPC FAME Implementation Plan

9. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the development of the SPC FAME Implementation Plan, acknowledged New Zealand's funding of this approach, and encouraged other donors and partners to pursue a flexible funding mechanism under this Plan.
- b. *Highlighted* specific areas for SPC FAME to consider including in the next phase of the implementation plan development, including:
 - i. Monitoring of and resilience to climate change impacts on coastal fisheries resources and aquaculture/mariculture;
 - ii. Scientific advice and tools related to scientific assessments based on CITES listings, especially corals and marine fish species, including those of relevance for the aquarium trade, as well as sea cucumber and giant clam species;
 - iii. Environmental monitoring and scientific advice for lagoon and coral reef ecosystems on issues such as coral coverage and health, algal blooms, water quality, and crown of thorns starfish infestations to support specific marine resource sector stakeholders;
 - iv. Trade policy and advice for coastal fisheries commodities;
 - v. Building the capacity of national teams and sub-regional groups through the Pacific Fisheries Leadership Programme; and
 - vi. Development and implementation of data-limited stock assessments for coastal fisheries.

SPC FAME Priorities and emerging work areas

10. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Reviewed* and *endorsed* the SPC FAME priority work areas for 2024 and the emerging work areas outlined (Working Paper 3).
- b. *Noted* the need to work with donors to significantly increase the funding support for the Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme (CFAP), particularly for areas where resources are limited such as marine science and fisheries development.

- c. *Requested* SPC FAME to consider the additional priorities identified during the meeting. In particular, the following areas and issues were emphasised:
- i. Further harnessing the latest innovations and technological developments to enhance data collection and monitoring, control and surveillance within coastal fisheries.
 - ii. Evaluation of wider regional resources and expertise to support the delivery of coastal fisheries and aquaculture science and advice.
 - iii. Continuing to support the fisheries information and knowledge section's role in delivery of national products in local languages to maximise their utility and impact.
 - iv. Enhancing the focus on food security and food safety of fish and fish products originating from oceanic and coastal fisheries and aquaculture.
 - v. Increasing collaboration between OFP and CFAP in the development and use of electronic reporting, tools and monitoring, with a particular focus on the collection of data for use in assessment and the development of management advice.
 - vi. Continuing the development and transfer of knowledge of climate change impacts on oceanic and coastal fisheries and aquaculture.
 - vii. Addressing the priorities highlighted by members in their respective statements.

Implementing the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific

11. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the presentation by the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat on the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.

Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme: Future focus

12. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Recognised* the critical challenges faced by CFAP in terms of funding, staffing and the level of national requests and regional priorities.
- b. *Noted* the diversity of needs within and between different members in the area of coastal fisheries and aquaculture and hence the need for a range of approaches by CFAP to deliver assistance to address national needs.
- c. *Highlighted* that peer-to-peer exchanges (through agreed protocols) and train-the-trainer approaches could act as mechanisms to assist PICTs in specific technical areas of coastal fisheries and aquaculture, with SPC support.

- d. *Encouraged* members to co-fund requests to SPC FAME CFAP, where possible.
- e. *Tasked* SPC to investigate new funding sources and to leverage opportunities through, *inter alia*, climate change, food systems and food security initiatives.
- f. *Tasked* SPC to implement the broad criteria for the prioritisation of national requests as presented in Annex A, noting this is an iterative process.

Members updates and key priorities

13. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Highlighted* their current and emerging priorities and gaps in fisheries and aquaculture, including specific comments on the availability, access and utilisation of data.

Update on the Pacific Regional Aquaculture Strategy/Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity

14. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update on the development of the Pacific Regional Aquaculture Strategy (PRAS) through three consultative sub-regional workshops and a final regional workshop.
- b. *Noted* the update on the mid-term review of the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity being undertaken as a part of the consultative PRAS workshops.
- c. *Noted* the need for national, private sector and civil society representatives to be nominated for the last two sub-regional workshops for Micronesia and Melanesia, with the possibility for those in Polynesia to be consulted by other means, and for the final regional workshop.

Tuna fisheries monitoring, national observer programme capacity support, E-reporting and E-monitoring developments

15. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update on the latest work being undertaken in the field of regional tuna fisheries monitoring, and in particular the implementation of electronic reporting across all monitoring programmes.
- b. *Highlighted* the potential presented by land-based e-monitoring analysis to increase employment opportunities for women.
- c. *Stressed* the need for ongoing technical support from SPC FAME for certification and training of national oceanic fisheries observers, and the important role observer programmes play in contributing to employment opportunities and career development for the Pacific Islands.

- d. *Directed* SPC FAME to work with the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) to:
 - i. develop a longer-term arrangement to ensure efficient administration of the Regional Observer Cost-Recovery (ROCR) mechanism as endorsed by the 94th and the 130th Forum Fisheries Committees, to ensure that SPC FAME activities that support national observer programmes are adequately funded;
 - ii. provide regular reporting of progress on the development of the agreement to HoF through e-mail, the first report being by 30th August 2024.

Update on SPC FAME Member Request Management System

16. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* with appreciation the progress made with the implementation and refinement of the Member Request Management System.
- b. *Requested* SPC FAME to provide more detailed annual updates to HoF on the status of requests and any developments to the process for prioritisation (see also paragraphs 8.c. and 12.f.).

Climate change activity report / Update from the Climate Awareness Workshop (CLAW)

17. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the climate change activity update report (Working Paper 9) and *commended* the efforts of SPC over the last year.
- b. *Encouraged* the continuation of the training workshops detailed within the report.
- c. *Highlighted* the need to further extend the focus on the impacts of climate change on coastal resources, including the corresponding involvement in training and awareness workshops of appropriate personnel.

Update on Climate Change initiatives at the regional and global levels

18. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the information presented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) on the United Nations 28th Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP28), including the one-day 'Oceans and Climate Change Dialogue', and the build-up to COP29 focused on finance.
- b. *Noted* the information provided by SPC's Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Programme (CCES) on the SPC Climate Change Flagship Programme.
- c. *Noted* the description provided by FFA of their climate change strategy.

- d. *Noted* that where adaptation strategies are unable to fully address the impacts of climate change, any shortfalls could be addressed through loss and damage mechanisms and future arrangements to pursue climate justice.
- e. *Stressed* the need to document the impacts of climate change on fisheries, with a particular emphasis on those in coastal and nearshore areas, to support the development of evidence-based adaptation strategies.
- f. *Tasked* SPC FAME to prepare a coastal fisheries and aquaculture climate change plan for consideration by HoF17.

Pacific regional climate change vulnerability assessment

19. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the presentation on the progress toward the updated Pacific regional climate change vulnerability assessment.

Outcomes from 6th Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and the 3rd Community-based Fisheries Dialogue

20. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* with appreciation the Outcomes and Actions Report from the 6th Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCFA6), provided as Background Paper 2a and outlined in Working Paper 8.
- b. *Noted* with appreciation the Outcomes and Actions Report from the 3rd Community-Based Fisheries Dialogue (CBFD3), provided as Background Paper 2b and outlined in Working Paper 8.
- c. *Considered* and *endorsed* RTMCFA6 recommendations to HoF16 22(a), 22(b), 27(b), 30(a), 30(b), 33(a), 33(b), 33(c), 37(a), 37(b) and 45(a) in the context of the ongoing prioritisation exercise for member requests to SPC FAME.
- d. *Endorsed* RTMCFA6 recommendation 27(a) for a feasibility study for a regional mariculture hatchery, as detailed in the RTMCFA6 Outcomes and Actions report, and *recommended* that SPC FAME consider the utility of partnering with existing national hatcheries within that study.
- e. *Endorsed* RTMCFA6 recommendation 40(a), however recognised the current funding limitations for fisheries development and fish aggregating device (FAD) related work, and as such *directed* SPC FAME to seek funding support from donors and partners to enable the delivery of this work.
- f. *Recommended* that SPC FAME partner with relevant existing activities underway within the region and related regional analyses in the delivery of HoF16's decisions on the RTMCFA6 recommendations detailed above, where appropriate, and again *urged* SPC FAME to talk with donors and partners to enable the delivery of this work.

- g. *Considered and endorsed* Cbfd3 recommendations to HoF16 49(a), 49(b), 49(c) and 49(d), and *encouraged* the Cbfd3 Convenor and Cbfd Advisory Group to review these recommendations for clarity with regard to process.
- h. *Noted* that the next RTMCFA meeting (November 2024) is scheduled to be held via video conference, due to budget limitations, however the 4th Cbfd meeting will be held in person (November 2024).

Update on regional data - recent developments, data gaps and challenges

21. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update by the SPC Statistics for Development Division (SDD) on activities and products of relevance to fisheries and aquaculture, highlighting the critical role of the region's national statistics offices.
- b. *Noted* the update on the SPC Pacific Data Hub, an integrated platform for sharing data and related resources, and the overview of SPC's data governance policies.
- c. *Highlighted* the confidential nature of much of the fisheries data gathered at the national level, as captured within the SPC FAME data governance policy.
- d. *Noted* the challenges in capturing the contribution of fisheries and aquaculture within standard calculations of national accounts and *urged* SPC SDD to consider these critical resource areas when performing wider evaluations of national economies.

Case study – Regional fisheries data integration: Tuna Fisheries Data Management System (TUFMAN2)

22. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* with appreciation the case study presented on the evolution of the tuna data management systems, lessons learnt and future of TUFMAN2.

Case study – Coastal fisheries data: IKASAVEA

23. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* with appreciation the case study on the evolution of coastal fisheries data collection, the increasing utility of the IKASAVEA tool and its ongoing development.
- b. *Noted and affirmed* the importance and timeliness of the upcoming coastal fisheries workshops—the 'Sea cucumber Pacific stocktake and eNDF workshop' followed by the 'Fishery dependent data analysis workshop' (both in July) and the 'IKASAVEA peer-to-peer training workshop' (in September).

Integrated fisheries and aquaculture data

24. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update on national coastal and oceanic data curation, access and visualisation.
- b. *Endorsed* the proposed development strategy for a unified TAILS/IKASAVEA e-application and provided feedback to guide these developments.
- c. *Noted* the update on the SPC FAME data policy and *endorsed* the addition of the three data fields (FAD sonar, cannery receipts, and transshipment data), classified as high risk and non-public domain, within Appendix A of the SPC FAME data policy (Working Paper 7).
- d. *Endorsed* the approach to provide training for members upon launching the updated country webpages in the second half of 2024.

Update on the review of the Regional Roadmap and the New Song for Coastal Fisheries

25. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update on the review of the ‘Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries’ and the ‘New song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea strategy’ (Working Paper 5).
- b. *Expressed* significant concern over the lack of progress, given the clear directive from Ministers.
- c. *Directed* SPC, in collaboration with FFA, to assign this work the highest priority.
- d. *Highlighted* that the review needs to ensure these policies implement the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and consider important sub-regional issues.

Digital Earth Pacific

26. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* with appreciation the presentation on the Digital Earth Pacific initiative.
- b. *Highlighted* the potential benefits of this tool, including:
 - i. resource and ecosystem monitoring of relevance to coastal and oceanic fisheries and aquaculture;
 - ii. assessment, development and management of marine and coastal resources; and
 - iii. tracking the impacts of climate change.

Gender and social inclusion in fisheries

27. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the presentations on gender and social inclusion (GESI), highlighting:
 - i. the SPC Gender Equality Flagship and the recent FFA/SPC Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Forum in Solomon Islands;
 - ii. the publication of the ‘Pacific handbook for human rights, gender equity and social inclusion in tuna industries’; and
 - iii. the update on the gender and fisheries research on coastal fisheries and aquaculture in Kiribati (Information Paper 6).
- b. *Highlighted* the importance of these initiatives and *encouraged* continued work in these areas.

Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS) and SPC Oceans Flagship update

28. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update on the activities of the Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science and the SPC Oceans Flagship.

Update on Unlocking Blue Pacific Prosperity

29. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the update presentation on the Unlocking the Blue Pacific Prosperity (UBPP) initiative, including the shift from the concept to co-design phase.

Observer updates

30. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Noted* the presentation by the World Bank on the proposed content of the SPC PROP concept and *endorsed* the proposed content and preparation approach in support of members’ priorities.

Specific Outcomes from HoF16 to the 5th Regional Fisheries Ministers’ Meeting

31. Heads of Fisheries:

- a. *Tasked* SPC FAME to develop a concise brief on key outcomes from the 16th SPC Heads of Fisheries meeting for presentation to officials at the 5th Regional Fisheries Ministers’ Meeting.

Closing

32. The Heads of Fisheries adopted the 16th SPC Heads of Fisheries Outcomes document.

33. HoF16 noted with extreme sadness the passing of Mr Poasi Ngaluafe from Tonga during the meeting. HoF16 wished to highlight his tireless contribution to Tongan and regional fisheries and extended their sympathies to all his family and colleagues.
34. The meeting was closed by Dr Paula Vivili, Deputy Director General, SPC.

Annex 1

To be added.