

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

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**Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy**

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# Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy

## History of the policy

1. In 1999 the Forum Leaders (PIFS 1999) endorsed a list of recommendations emerging from a Forum Secretariat workshop on further implementing the provisions of the international law of the sea in the region. Although most of these recommendations could only be implemented by national governments, one of the recommendations – that a regional ocean policy be produced – was adopted at the regional level.
2. This task was taken up by the Marine Sector Working Group of the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP). CROP, formerly known as the South Pacific Organisations Coordinating Committee (SPOCC), is an annual meeting of the heads of regional intergovernmental organisations, chaired by the Forum Secretariat, which promotes harmonious working relationships between regional agencies. Various inter-agency sectoral groups have been set up within the last 5 years to work together on more specific issues of broad scope. A regional ocean policy would cover part of the work-programme of at least 5 CROP agencies.
3. The Forum Secretariat engaged a consultant, who had previously worked with the Forum Fisheries Agency and on the Australian national Oceans Policy, to produce a scoping document for the exercise (Tsamenyi, 2000). This was considered at the CROP meeting in 2000 and it was decided that a draft Pacific Regional Ocean Policy could be produced at comparatively low cost if it took a different path from the national oceans policies developed by several metropolitan countries.
4. The fundamental difference was the decision not to develop a regional ocean policy from first principles, through bottom-up consultation and negotiation as would have to be the case in developing a national ocean policy, since sovereignty over most of the water in the region lies firmly at the national level and the task of *establishing* new principles is the responsibility of governments in consultation with their people. Instead the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy would be based on common principles evident in existing agreements involving Pacific Island states, and from the results of previous regional negotiations. CROP was mindful of the need to avoid the convention of a series of international consultations that might dwarf even MHLC in scope and cost.
5. Late in 2000, the SPC Committee of Representatives of Governments and Administrations considered the idea of the policy, and agreed that its scope should include Pacific Community territories as well as Pacific Islands Forum member states.
6. The Forum Secretariat, University of the South Pacific and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community then jointly supported a consultancy to produce a more comprehensive background paper, compiling various issues and summarising existing regional and international agreements concerning the Pacific Ocean (Tuqiri, 2001).
7. At various occasions in 2001, the CROP Marine Sector Working Group has met, in the margins of other meetings (including just before this meeting), to consider this background material and to develop recommended wording for a first draft of the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy.

## Current task

8. The first draft of the policy was not finished at the time of writing this working paper, but will be completed in time for circulation at this Heads of Fisheries Meeting as Information Paper 6. Because the text is so new, this meeting is the first opportunity for representatives of member countries and territories to consider the emerging wording of the policy and to offer guidance to CROP in developing it further.

## The Future

9. The policy itself is much broader than the fisheries sector, and will require consideration in various other member-country fora before the wording is finalised. It is planned to seek high-level endorsement of a final document at a Ministerial meeting.
10. The overall aims of this draft of the policy are:
  - a) *"To recognise common principles underlying existing intergovernmental agreements that apply to the Pacific Ocean, and establish evident principles that may not have already been captured in agreements.*
  - b) *To assist, confirm and apply consistency in future agreements amongst Pacific Islands and between Pacific Islands and the rest of the world; to assure consistency in the oceanic work of regional organisations; and to provide a common set of principles, agreed by Pacific Island States and Territories, that can be later included in any national or territorial policies that are developed to assure the application of principles of sovereign and local ocean stewardship.*
  - c) *To emphasise principles of social equity, and the maintenance or improvement of Pacific Island livelihoods, in all regional activities and agreements relating to the Ocean; and to guide future intergovernmental agreements concerning the Pacific Ocean along a socially and environmentally sustainable path towards regional economic integration."*
11. Essentially, the policy should encapsulate Pacific Island *attitudes* towards the Pacific Ocean. Or at least those attitudes that are shared by a consensus of all.
12. However, one immediate application of the policy would also be to provide the fundamental framework of the Pacific Islands regional position on ocean issues to the forthcoming Earth Summit in Johannesburg in September 2002.
13. This will probably be the first regional Ocean Policy to be finalised anywhere in the world. Apart from a subregional policy in Africa that may take some time to conclude, all of the policies developed to date are national oceans policies. Interestingly, whilst these have each involved only one country they have usually involved more than one ocean.

14. Ultimately, SPC island member countries and territories may decide to develop their own ocean policies, and this regional policy would provide a first set of ideas on which to elaborate national attitudes and governance principles within EEZ and territorial waters. In the meantime, this regional policy will also serve as a "checklist" of principles against which future regional projects and agreements, particularly those involving external intervention, should be measured.

## Conclusion

15. Participants at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Heads of Fisheries meeting are invited to consider the draft Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy that was produced recently by the CROP Marine Sector Working Group (see Information Paper 6), and to offer guidance, with particular reference to fisheries issues, to the group in the task of further developing the draft.

## References

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