



PACIFIC ISLANDS
FORUM SECRETARIAT



Pacific
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SPREP
Secretariat of the Pacific Regional
Environment Programme



FFA

REGIONAL FISHERIES MINISTERIAL MEETING

Virtual
25 – 27 August 2020

Agenda Item	4 ii
Paper No:	RFMM.WP02
Title:	Update from Heads of Fisheries 12: Regional framework on Aquatic Biosecurity, and scaling-up community-based fisheries management in a COVID-19 context

Summary:

The 12th SPC Heads of Fisheries (HoF12) Meeting was held online from 12-14 May 2020. Outcomes are briefly highlighted and two items from the meeting are addressed in further detail.

SPC was tasked to develop a regional strategy for aquatic biosecurity. Through member input, the Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF) and HOF meetings, this work has been completed. The purpose of the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity is not to create any obligations for members, but to provide regional guidance on the harmonisation, development and implementation of coherent aquatic biosecurity policies at regional and national levels on this important development topic.

The impacts of COVID-19 have been felt broadly across the region. Initial impacts identified during HoF12 were on fish production, the increased importance of fish for food and nutrition security, economic impacts, as well as the impact on fishery observer placements and Monitoring, Control and Surveillance. Coastal fisheries in particular are under greater pressure than ever.

Members, SPC, other CROP agencies and development partners identified the need for further understanding on the impacts of COVID-19 among members and resulting member needs, including resources and capabilities within Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) to respond, while continuing longer-term strategies for sustainable resource management. Our efforts have adapted to deliver activities through novel approaches and tools, including a focus on strategic digital transformation, and preparing for the recovery phase. Scaling-up community-based fisheries management will be critical for recovery.

Recommendations:

Ministers are invited to:

- 1) **Note** the [Outcomes](#) of 12th Heads of Fisheries meeting;
- 2) **Note** the [Policy Brief #34: The importance of aquatic biosecurity for the Pacific Islands region](#) on the need for a regional framework on aquatic biosecurity;
- 3) **Endorse** the [Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity](#) developed by SPC and officials through the RTMCF and HoF;

- 4) **Note** the broad and deep impacts of COVID-19 mitigation strategies on coastal fisheries, and the increased importance of sustainable CBFM for the long-term recovery; and
- 5) **Support** the need for further understanding on the impacts of COVID-19 among members and resulting member needs, including resources and capabilities within PICTs to respond, and longer-term strategies for resource management.

Introduction/Background:

The 12th SPC Heads of Fisheries (HoF12) Meeting was held online utilising the 'Zoom' platform, from the 12th to the 14th May 2020, chaired by Mr Fakavae Taomia, Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Trade, Tuvalu. HoF is a regional meeting of the heads of SPC member country and territory fishery agencies, or their appointed deputies, covering the entire range of interests for which they have responsibility and on which the SPC Division of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) provides advice and assistance. The HoF meeting plays a unique role in providing strategic guidance to FAME.

Heads of Fisheries Outcomes

The HoF12 meeting considered several items, as described in the [Outcomes document](#), in brief:

- SPC FAME Division 2019 results reporting, including new online tools for accessing and exploring results;
- SPC FAME priorities and direction in 2020 and beyond;
- The review of the Coastal Fisheries Working Group and options and recommendations for increasing the engagement of non-state actors in Pacific Islands' regional coastal fisheries governance as described in RFMM.WP01;
- The regional technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF3) Actions, including the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity as expanded on below;
- COVID-19 impacts on fisheries and in particular scaling-up sustainable community-based fisheries management in a COVID-19 context as expanded on below; and
- The success and utility of the virtual meeting approach.

Members noted that the virtual meeting was a genuine success and was able to make the best use of available means to allow for meaningful discussion. Further, members recognised the benefits of the virtual format for future SPC meetings and activities, including the potential to increase diversity and participation in shorter, more focused sessions with reduced financial and environmental implications.

This paper briefly highlights overall outcomes of HoF12 and explores two specific issues in more detail. Other key issues are addressed under other agenda items.

Key issues to be considered:

Regional framework on Aquatic Biosecurity

Aquatic biosecurity is a crucial consideration as aquaculture continues to develop. The approach aims at maintaining healthy aquatic organisms, reducing the risks posed by pathogens and invasive species, and meeting food safety standards in seafood products. Attention to aquatic biosecurity improves animal production, safeguards human health, and assists countries and territories to meet their international obligations in terms of trade and access to markets.

The 11th Heads of Fisheries (March 2019) tasked SPC to develop a regional strategy for aquatic biosecurity. The Third SPC Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries (RTMCF3; November 2019) reviewed and endorsed the [Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity](#), and referred the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity the associated [Policy Brief #34: The importance of aquatic biosecurity for the Pacific Islands region](#) to HoF12 for endorsement. The purpose of the Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity is to provide a regional framework for the harmonisation, development and implementation of coherent aquatic biosecurity policies at regional and national levels. The framework provides guidance and enhances aquaculture development in the region. It

does not create any obligations for members, but does provide essential guidance on this important development topic. The HoF12 noted and endorsed the recommendations of the RTMCF3.

With the guidance of a Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity, six PICTs have developed national aquatic biosecurity plans, 14 PICTs are up to date with their national aquatic disease reporting to the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), a total of 12 training attachments have been provided to five PICTs, and seven PICTs have received technical assistance reviewing national regulatory frameworks on aquatic biosecurity.

COVID-19 Impacts and Scaling-up community-based fisheries management in a COVID-19 context

The impacts of COVID-19 mitigation strategies have been felt broadly across the region. The key initial impacts identified during HoF12 for coastal fisheries were fish production, the increased importance of fish for food and nutrition security, and MCS and verification of reported fishing activities.

The likely increased pressure on coastal fisheries resources meant that scaling-up community-based fisheries management in a COVID-19 context was a key discussion during HoF12. Members identified immediate impacts and challenges faced including:

- Food and nutrition security - increased demand for local food supply, increased price of imported food and increased dependence on coastal fisheries resources;
- Economic impacts including domestic market access, limited exports and employment;
- Limited government and partner capacity to support communities due to restrictions on travel and other activities; and
- Increased fishing of coastal fisheries resources and FADs.

HoF12 also identified the need for further understanding on the impacts of COVID-19 among members and resulting member needs, including resources and capabilities within PICTs to respond to those impacts, and longer-term strategies for sustainable resource management.

In response to discussions at HoF12, ongoing work is being undertaken across the region to adapt and be responsive to needs arising due to COVID-19. Members, SPC across its Divisions, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and other development partners have collaborated to implement a range of activities to better understand COVID-19 impacts and avoid duplication of effort. Work programmes have been adapted to the COVID-19 context and new delivery pathways such as online training have been used to support members. Key donors have been flexible in supporting adapting activities and in timing of work. Additional impacts have emerged around collapsed export pathways and non-economic impacts such as the social and psychological effects of national COVID-19 mitigation strategies. All identified impacts are compounded by the downturn in other sectors that have increasing reliance on fisheries resources. Coastal fisheries in particular are under greater pressure than ever. One explicit example is that the amount of tuna and related bycatch required to be diverted to compensate for predicted declines in coastal fisheries production – estimated to be around 88,000 tonnes of tuna and bycatch per annum by 2035 - will clearly be bought forward in time, or, increase in volume.

Ministers are invited to note the need for further understanding of COVID-19 impacts among members and resulting member needs, and, longer-term strategies for resource management and novel approaches for the recovery phase including a focus on strategic digital transformation. Scaling-up effective community-based fisheries management will be a critical pivot for recovery.

Recommendations:

Ministers are invited to:

- 1) **Note** the [Outcomes](#) of 12th Heads of Fisheries meeting;
- 2) **Note** the [Policy Brief #34: The importance of aquatic biosecurity for the Pacific Islands region](#) on the need for a regional framework on aquatic biosecurity;
- 3) **Endorse** the [Regional Framework on Aquatic Biosecurity](#) developed by SPC and officials through the RTMCF and HoF;
- 4) **Note** the broad and deep impacts of COVID-19 mitigation strategies on coastal fisheries, and the increased importance of sustainable CBFM for the long-term recovery; and
- 5) **Support** the need for further understanding on the impacts of COVID-19 among members and resulting member needs, including resources and capabilities within PICTs to respond, and longer-term strategies for resource management.