

Australia's Country Statement
delivered by
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Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries

I'm pleased to be a part of this second Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting, focused on the importance of coastal fisheries and healthy ecosystems in our region.

Maintaining viable coastal fisheries is crucial for social protection, food security, and livelihoods. Well managed coastal fisheries can help to reduce poverty and vulnerability, support good health through balanced nutrition, and enhance people's capacity to manage economic and social risks, such as unemployment.

As many of us discussed a few weeks ago at the Forum Fisheries Committee Ministerial Meeting, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens our economies, our livelihoods, and our security. Fisheries, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, are an important part of food security in the Pacific, which are under increased pressure due to COVID-19. Of particular note is the growing local demand following the return of many people back to their village homes and in response to broader economic impacts across the region.

These and other impacts of COVID-19 must be having profound consequences on communities across the Pacific and they seem likely to continue for some time.

The impacts of COVID-19 make this forum even more important as it strengthens regional cooperation and coordination, which is crucial for managing disasters and shocks.

Australia is committed to continuing to work closely with our Pacific family through this forum and in many other ways as we work to recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

Australia has a long history of working to help ensure coastal fisheries remain viable and are sustainably managed in the Pacific.

We have long supported SPC FAME division, which has a crucial role supporting members with scientific and technical expertise to improve coastal fisheries management.

And for the past seven years we have worked with many partners to support community-based fisheries management in Kiribati, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.

For these, and other reasons, we understand the importance of coastal fisheries to the region and have been a strong supporter of the Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting since it was first discussed at FFCMIN in Rarotonga in 2018.

I was pleased to participate in the first meeting last year and I'm very happy to be back for this important second meeting.