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TOKELAU COUNTRY STATEMENT

by

Department of Natural
Resources & Development
Tokelau

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SPC/FFA INSHORE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

Introduction:

Tokelau is made up of three low lying atolls namely Fakaofu, Nukunono and Atafu. Each atoll is made of a number of reef bound islets encircling the lagoon. These islets vary in length from 90 metres to 6 kilometres and in width from a few metres to 200 metres. At no point do they rise more than 5 metres above sea level.

The people of Tokelau have always been highly dependent on the marine environment for food, and therefore the inshore fishery resources of Tokelau are of great importance to the residents. A study conducted on Fakaofu in 1986 showed that 55% of all animal protein consumed originated from lagoon and shallow reef areas.

Responsible Bodies:

The implementation of management controls in Tokelau is straight forward; the Council of Elders on each atoll has absolute control over such matter.

The role that the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (formerly known as the Department of Agriculture & Fisheries) plays in managing the inshore fisheries of Tokelau is just providing information and advice to the Council of Elders on each island, and the final decision comes from the Council. The manpower and the budget for the managing of the inshore fishery of Tokelau is very limited.

Laws and Regulations:

Historically, there have been few, if any, traditional controls such as closed seasons, size limit, fisheries licensing and gear restrictions on the taking of marine animals. The relatively small population, dietary preferences, absence of means of exporting fish, and seasonal occurrence of the most desired species tended to regulate the fisheries.

In the early 1970's, concern over the use of modern technologies such as gill nets and spear guns, led into the establishment of traditional laws and regulations which manage the use of these technologies. Each respective island council have got their own regulation such as mesh size and the duration of soaking time in gill nets, and the prohibited species could be caught by spearguns. These traditional laws and regulations are treated as being legal.

Also in the 1970s there were concerns over the exporting of clams (*T. maxima*) to Western Samoa and Tokelau now have regulations regarding the clams fishery.

Policies:

In Tokelau, the overall view of the administration on coastal marine resources management remains as it is. The information and advice comes from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to the Council of Elders on each island, and the implementation of management controls is the responsibilities of each councils.

Problems:

The inshore fishery of Tokelau have always been a major contribution to the diet of Tokelauan for years. As proved in the study in 1986, 55% of all animal protein consumes in Fakaofu originated from the inshore fishery. The problem that Tokelau is facing is the lack of a computerised data base to monitor this fishery.

There is also a need to conduct a reef fish stock assessment in Tokelau so as to help us with our regulations.

Another problem faced by Tokelau is the fishermen's lack of awareness on the importance of data. Although it has been addressed a few times, this hasn't been improved since then, thus collection of data is a problem taking into account the limited manpower.

Future Plans:

Tokelau have forwarded a request through its Department of Natural Resources and Environment to the Integrated Coastal Fisheries Management Project for assistance in carrying out a Reef Fish Stock Assessment on all the three atolls of Tokelau, and if possible, set up a computerised data base, to enable us to monitor the harvest of this fishery. Tokelau is hoping to receive this very much needed assistance.

Tokelau will continue to strengthen its FAD Programme so to help ease the burden on the heavily exploited inshore species.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment will continue to provide information and advice to each Council of Elders for their laws and regulation in managing our Inshore Fisheries.

HAPPY WORKSHOP

