

Fish for healthy diets: A new report provides practical tips on boosting nutrition

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Why is this report important?

People living in the Pacific Islands region are vulnerable to the negative impacts of “broken” food systems on their livelihoods and health. Pacific Island nations are on the frontlines of climate change and the triple-burden of malnutrition. To address these problems, the Pacific Islands region has called for a report to help achieve the goals laid out in the:

- UN Decade of Action on Nutrition (2016–2025)
- UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030)
- UN Food Systems Summit (2021)
- International Year of Artisanal Fisheries and Aquaculture (2022).

The result is a report by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, entitled “Pacific food systems: The role of fish and other aquatic foods for nutrition and health”.

Who is the report for?

It is for people and organisations working to build sustainable fisheries in Pacific food systems that deliver healthy diets for all Pacific Islanders – women, men, youth and children.

How was this report developed?

This report was developed based on the extensive collaboration and breadth of experience of over 19 experts from Pacific Island development organisations and partners, including the Pacific Community, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Samoa), WorldFish (Solomon Islands), Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Development (Kiribati), Tonga Health, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation, Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (University of Wollongong), ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies (James Cook University), Australian Centre for Pacific Islands Research (University of the Sunshine Coast), Wildlife Conservation Society, and Island Elements. A literature review was also conducted.

What is in the report?

This report provides seven recommendations on how to leverage fisheries to build more sustainable, equitable, and nutritious Pacific food systems (Fig. 1). It also provides evidence for the following questions.

Why are fish and aquatic foods important for nutrition and health?

Women, children and babies have high nutrient needs compared to men and other age groups, especially when women are pregnant or breastfeeding and babies are very young. Fish and aquatic foods in the region are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, iron and iodine – nutrients that are important for women's health and for the growth of the baby's brain.

Why are fish and aquatic foods important for sustainable Pacific food systems?

For years, the ocean has been central to the cultures, livelihoods, and food of the Pacific Island peoples. Compared with land-based animals such as beef, fish and aquatic foods have a low environmental footprint.

Why are low trophic-level fish and aquatic foods important?

Small, low trophic-level aquatic foods like such as bivalves, pelagic fish (eaten whole, including the head and bones), crabs, prawns and seaweeds are important because they have a low environmental footprint, and 2) are more nutrient-dense than high trophic-level fish such as tuna.

Women fishers often glean these small, low trophic-level aquatic foods. This means that investing in low trophic aquatic foods would have a triple positive effect on providing more nutritious food for Pacific Islanders, while also boosting their livelihoods and incomes in a way that is environmentally sustainable.

Link to the report:
<https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc5796en>

Link to the video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zb_-AEJNW4Y&handle/20.500.12348/5269

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Figure 1. Seven recommended actions to improve the contribution that fish and aquatic foods make toward more equitable, sustainable, and nutritious Pacific food systems.

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