

Script of presentation by Dr Tim Adams, (tima@spc.int), Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Marine Resources Division Director, in the UNICPOLOS panel session on “International cooperation to implement ecosystem approaches at the regional and global levels”, Wednesday 14th June 3-6pm.

Pacific Islands Regional Approaches

The main purpose of this presentation is to inform you of some of the things being done by intergovernmental agencies in the Pacific Islands region to assist countries to implement the ecosystem approach, particularly to fisheries management.

We’re just starting down this path in the region so this will not be a technical presentation about plans implemented and lessons learned but about what is starting to get under way. One advantage that we do perhaps have is that there aren’t too many entrenched systems to “unlearn”, and there is a definite political will to make it happen.

CROP system

First of all, if we are talking about regional approaches, I should explain the intergovernmental agency system in the region. We have a network of IGOs working together as the Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific, or CROP, and each agency takes the lead for a different set of sectoral responsibilities.

- The Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) plays an overall role as regional coordinator serving the independent Pacific Island states at the political level and also has specialist responsibility for economic development planning and trade.
- The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is the most diverse sectoral specialist agency, and serves not only the independent Pacific Islands Forum States but also the island territories of France, New Zealand, UK and USA. We cover agriculture, health, forestry, national statistics and social issues, and SPC’s ocean-related work includes assistance to its members in the management and development of coastal fisheries and aquaculture, in fisheries science, and in implementing international standards in maritime shipping and ports.

As far as work on the Pacific Ocean is concerned, other CROP regional agencies are involved as follows:

- The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) specialises in assisting Forum countries in the management and development of tuna fisheries, and also assists Forum countries in playing a full part in the implementation of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention through the new WCPF Commission;
- The South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) specialises in non-living aspects of marine and freshwater ecosystems, including oceanographic and geospatially-oriented work, maritime boundary definition and charting;

- The Pacific Islands Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is the regional environmental watchdog, and also plays a specialised role in relation to endangered marine species and ecosystems, and promoting protected areas;
- The University of the South Pacific (USP) is of course specialised in higher education and academic research, although I should note that each of the CROP agencies has a strong vocational training role within their own areas of specialisation.

All of these intergovernmental agencies liaise both bilaterally, and through the CROP Marine Sector Working Group, which is currently convened by SPC and which will be the main driver for the development of national work under the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy.

Apart from the big environmental agencies, NGOs have not played a particularly prominent role in the Pacific Islands region to date, but they are now starting to proliferate, along with private sector representative organisations, and we are currently working on a more formal mechanism for engaging civil society representatives in regional IGO activities.

Pacific Plan

Apart from the institutional linkages within the CROP system, the main mechanism of linkage between our work programmes is going to be the Pacific Plan. This was developed by Forum Heads of Government last year. It is not a comprehensive plan for guiding development in all sectors, but picks out certain areas needing additional effort – areas that are critical for strengthening regional integration between countries, and promoting socially and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

Because the Pacific Plan is targeted in this way, there are certain sectors which are not included in the Plan itself – areas which are already considered to be as well-addressed as possible at the regional level, or which are best pursued at the national level: Areas such as agriculture and forestry. And at the earlier stages, fisheries was not going to be included in the Plan. However, the ecosystem approach to fisheries management made it into the Plan at the last minute when its long-term role in sustainable economic development was recognised.

The Pacific Plan thus now provides the overall reporting platform for our regional work on the ecosystem approach, at least in fisheries, and we are currently in the process of working out indicators for measuring progress in this regional work-area.

Regional approach to EAFM

SPC – my own agency – has been working on the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management for some time, but mainly with a watching brief as it was unclear at first just how the ecosystem approach should be implemented at the practical level. One of our main linkages has been with the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council of the USA, and we have assisted in the development of their coral reef ecosystem fisheries management plan on behalf of the US territories that are members of SPC.

However, together with the Forum Fisheries Agency and others, we are now starting to move into the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management in the rest of the insular Pacific. This year we will be developing a regional framework for the application of the principles of the ecosystem approach to coastal fisheries management, building upon the tuna fisheries ecosystem approach framework already starting to be implemented through FFA, which draws particularly on the Australian experience. The Pacific Islands Forum statement on Monday already mentioned the formal commitments that both FFA and SPC have made, and it is now forms the majority of both our work-programmes in fisheries.

Much of this commitment will be implemented at the national level, but the new Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission will play a part at the regional level, with input from FFA and from SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme.

Other activities

That was a snapshot of the current regional framework for implementing the Ecosystem Approach to fisheries in the Pacific Islands. I have concentrated on fisheries management because this is currently the major issue with ocean use in the islands, and this is where the most formal implementation of the ecosystem approach is occurring. However, CROP agencies are also providing assistance to Pacific Islands to implement ecosystem approaches in broader areas, and it will all come together under an ocean policy framework.

SPREP's continuing work on integrated coastal management is notable, and indeed all of SPREP's work is compatible with an ecosystem approach. SOPAC is providing vital input, particularly in marine mapping, marine scientific research coordination, marine boundary delimitation, freshwater issues and seabed minerals, whilst USP is helping build future human resource capacity in these areas.

There are also several other, what might be called "ad-hoc" ongoing, activities in fisheries that contribute towards the ecosystem approach.

In tuna fisheries, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission is one of the few RFMOs to be developed entirely on the basis of the UN Fish Stocks Agreement and the first substantive meeting of the WCPF Commission made resolutions last December to cap the regional catch of tuna and to implement measures concerning turtles, seabirds and IUU fishing. This is notable because this is the first time that it has been possible to develop measures affecting pelagic fisheries on the *high seas* in the Pacific Islands region.

Regarding deepsea trawl fisheries – this has not been a pressing issue for the Pacific Islands, where deepsea trawl fisheries are not economically active in the tropical area – but the region is committed to the development of an effective precautionary management regime for these extremely fragile resources and benthic ecosystems. The region is just at the point of deciding whether it is better to include the western tropical Pacific insular area within the developing South Pacific arrangement, where fishing is already occurring, or to have a separate, pre-emptive arrangement for the tropical area, where there is no declared commercial deepsea trawling. The Forum Fisheries Committee has just recommended wording for a regional statement on this

issue to be made by Pacific Islands Forum Heads of Government at their next meeting. We also expect that this meeting will agree to some definite measures concerning implementation, including interim measures.

I would note that cost-effectiveness will be a major factor in deciding how much developing country resources can be put into implementing these arrangements, and the absence of commercial trawl fisheries in the region means that there is not much hope of the fishing industry subsidising the costs of enforcement.

There are also major efforts within the region to limit bycatch, particularly of endangered species, and the region is expending considerable effort – with good results – not only to limit the catch of turtles by longliners but to protect nesting beaches. We've already satisfied ourselves that seabird bycatch is not an issue in the Pacific Islands Forum work-area. Tuna longlining is currently of critical economic importance to the region, particularly the smaller islands of Polynesia and Micronesia, and is one of the few viable economic development options available, apart from selling access to foreign fishing vessels and, for a few islands, tourism. Pacific Island fishermen are anxious to ensure that the countries that import their fish do not perceive their activities as being environmentally unsustainable, and are making great efforts in this regard.

Ecosystem indicators

At the technical level, we are spending a considerable proportion of our resources trying to understand oceanic and reef ecosystems, and we note that the fundamental basis of the ecosystem approach to management is to control human impacts on the ecosystem in relation to the status of whole ecosystems, not just in relation to the status of the exploited resource. With oceanic fisheries it is likely that the tuna species themselves are the best indicators of the state of the pelagic ecosystem, but in coastal fisheries ecosystems we have a great deal of work to do before we can develop reliable ways of assessing ecosystem status.

Although we are making progress here, we can't even reliably monitor coastal fishing itself in most Pacific Islands, let alone ecosystems. Very few small Pacific Island countries have the capacity to collect data from their largely artisanal fisheries, and even less capacity for monitoring non-fisheries aspects. We will have to rely on occasional comprehensive surveys assisted by regional agencies, coupled with the continuous monitoring of certain indicators, and we are just in the process of identifying these.

In passing, since it has already been stated at least once in this meeting that 90% of the large ocean predators have been wiped out by fishing, I might note that this opinion has been discredited when it comes to the main large ocean predators fished in the tropical Pacific – the tunas. And I also see that a paper has recently been published in Marine Policy which questions this opinion in relation to Indian Ocean tropical tunas. This does not mean that we are recommending that no management action be taken. SPC has just strengthened its warning about the need to reduce fishing mortality of yellowfin and bigeye tuna if stocks if overfishing is to be avoided, and it looks like the WCPFC has kicked into operation just in time to include the high

seas in those controls. But we are definitely not looking at the doomsday scenario asserted in the popular press, at least not with tropical pacific tuna fisheries.

Social background

Applying the ecosystem approach in the region will be a major challenge, given the material and human constraints of developing countries, particularly small-island countries. However, we do not think it is an insuperable challenge. For tuna fisheries – our most economically important ocean sector – the islands are already making headway, and for coastal fisheries we are committed to making it happen. The formal application of the ecosystem approach in other ocean sectors is being considered.

In the Pacific Islands region we are assisted by two things:-

- One is a relatively cohesive regional system through which countries can help each other and pool access to external resources - a system where the ecosystem approach is already accepted as the way forward, and the “best practice” for natural resource management.
- Another is that across the region there are traditional and ancestral systems of resource ownership and area tenure that already recognise the land and sea as a continuum. This will be particularly important in recognising and controlling land-based impacts on coastal ecosystems. At the traditional level at least, the societal basis for the ecosystem approach is already there – and in some Pacific Islands these systems are already formally recognised by the state.

Regional commitment

The Pacific Islands Forum statement at the start of this meeting made it clear that the Pacific Islands fully intend to fulfil the commitment that they made at the World Summit on Sustainable Development to implement the ecosystem approach by 2010.

Of course this depends on how the EAF is actually defined, and I understand that this UN process will have a major influence on that definition. If it requires a full scientific understanding of the inter-relationship of every ecosystem component, to the level where whole-ecosystem models can be built, and can reliably guide management decisions, then we probably won't get there, at least with coastal fisheries. But if the aim is to develop or empower the institutional systems necessary to make decisions on the basis of certain indicators of whole ecosystem state, rather than just managing on the basis of indicators of target species state, then I believe we can do this by the deadline.

Ocean Policy

One final point. At a higher level, Pacific Island societies also need to make decisions about what state they need ecosystems to be in, and for this social understanding to be regularly reviewed. Nature itself does not often maintain steady-state ecosystems, and when it comes to maintaining human populations some compromises between different stakeholders will be necessary. But they need to be informed compromises, with a clear idea of the path that is being taken, and the reasons for it. Under the Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy our overall aim is a healthy ocean, but an

ocean that can support and maintain Pacific Island human populations in perpetuity. Informed balances must be struck between fishing, tourism, heritage uses, ocean farming, transport, mineral extraction, energy, and all sorts of other uses.

Developing the scientific basis, and the social mechanism, for enabling these informed choices is the next major challenge, and is something that we envisage occurring under the framework of the regional ocean policy, and forthcoming Pacific Island national ocean policies. We will shortly be setting up a regional ocean policy coordination office to act as a nucleus for these processes.