SPC
Secretariat
of the Pacific
Community

COASTAL FISHERY REPORT CARD 2015

Photo: Quentin Hanich

Introduction

This Coastal Fishery Report Card provides high-level advice on the current status of Pacific coastal fisheries in relation to the goals, indicators and strategies adopted by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders in ***the Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries***. Not every fishery issue is covered here, but the Report Card provides a snapshot that fisheries stakeholders and political leaders can use as a benchmark to gauge future progress on implementing the roadmap.

The roadmap anticipates a 10 year timeframe for all Pacific Island countries to have put in place policies and legislation that provide for the involvement of coastal communities in the management of their fisheries resources. Communities will drive local management regimes with clear user rights, supported by national controls on export commodities.

Adequate and relevant information to inform management and policy

Goal 1 – Empowerment

The number of well-managed coastal fisheries in the Pacific islands is surprisingly small. Ineffective coastal fisheries management is a real threat to the sustainability of Pacific fisheries, as it is these fisheries that currently provide Pacific islanders with most of their nutrition and employment from the fisheries sector. Governments need to establish policies and legislation that protect fisheries resources and facilitate the ongoing supply of marine foods to coastal communities. Healthy marine and coastal environments are fundamental to the long-term sustainability of island societies, and provide the basis for both their livelihoods and economic development. Small pockets of effective coastal fisheries management will not be adequate to address the deficit of well-managed fisheries. It will be necessary to build on successes and to expand them to cover substantial areas of the coastal environment. The process of scaling up actions will start with a widespread appreciation and understanding of the process and benefits of a community-based ecosystem approach to fisheries management (CEAFM). This must be followed by increased support from national governments, sub-regional and regional organisations and non-governmental organisations, in areas such as legislation and national polices. Intermediate outcomes against the following main result areas will be annually updated and reported to Forum Leaders:

i. Informed, empowered coastal communities with clearly defined user rights.

ii. Adequate and relevant information to inform management and policy.

iii. Recognition of, and strong political commitment and support for, coastal fisheries management on a national and sub-national scale.

iv. Re-focused fisheries agencies that are transparent, accountable and adequately resourced, supporting coastal fisheries management and sustainable development, underpinned by CEAFM.

The focus for achieving the empowerment goal will be on preserving existing benefits (especially related to food security) through better management policies, backed up by legal frameworks, and supported by community engagement and empowerment.

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Goal 2 – Resilience

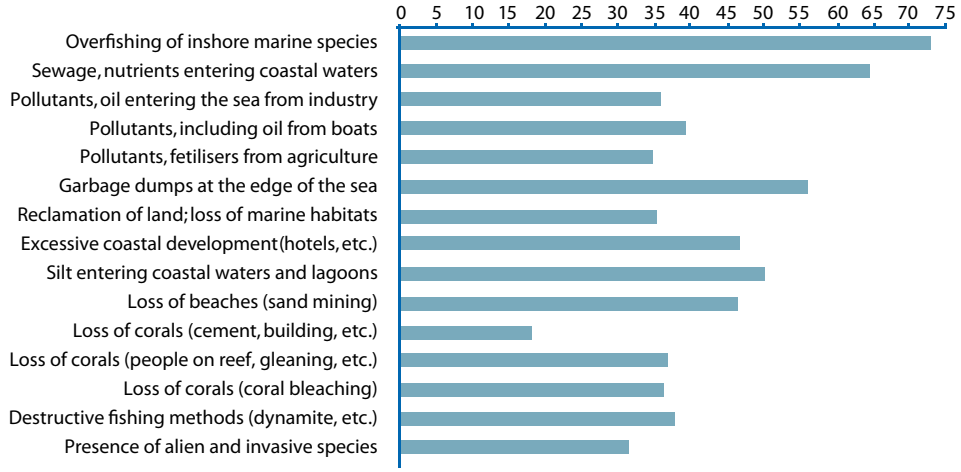
Within 10 years all Forum Island Countries (FICs) will be implementing strategies to manage the various threats to coastal ecosystems. Only by conserving fisheries habitats, controlling pollution and addressing damage from outside the fishing sector can we develop resilience to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

Warmer air and sea surface temperatures, ocean acidification, rising sea levels and greater rainfall are expected to cause significant losses of coral reefs, mangroves, seagrasses and intertidal habitats, which provide shelter and food for coastal fish and shellfish. This is expected to cause reductions in the productivity of coastal fisheries. Entire islands and communities influence, or are influenced by, the biophysical characteristics, human activities and ecological processes that occur in coastal catchments, coastal lands and coastal waters. Viewed from an ecosystem perspective, the coastal zone can be regarded as the transition zone between land and sea. It is influenced by activities that affect water systems upstream and consequent runoff effects, as well as by forces within the marine environment itself. The coastal zones of tropical island countries include physical features such as river deltas, coastal plains, wetlands, beaches, reefs, mangrove forests, seagrass beds and lagoons. It is counterproductive to address the problem of depleted coastal fish stocks by reducing fishing effort, restricting catches and imposing size limits, if the key threats to their recovery are degraded ecosystems. Intermediate outcomes against the following main result areas will be annually updated and reported to Forum Leaders:

i. Strong and up-to-date management policy, legislation and planning.

ii. Effective collaboration and coordination among stakeholders and key sectors of influence.

iii. More equitable access to benefits and decision-making within communities, including for women, youth and marginalised groups.



Environmental impacts identified by fisheries managers in PICTs (from 0% = no effect, through to 100% = severe effect; based on questionnaires completed by heads of fisheries agencies)

Goal 3 – Livelihoods

In most cases overfishing occurs because coastal communities have no viable economic alternatives. Aquaculture, water-based tourism and small-scale fishing for tuna provide options, but many alternative sources of livelihoods will lie outside of the fisheries sector. The Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries envisages that, within 10 years, all FICs will have adopted policies to develop alternative livelihoods for coastal communities that are impacted by declining fisheries resources.

Fish is high in protein and rich in essential fatty acids and vitamins, and minerals such as iodine. The importance of fish in the Pacific diet, particularly for children, is widely recognised. The Public Health Programme of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) advises that up to 50 per cent of the daily protein intake recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) for good nutrition will need to come from fish for people in the Pacific. This means that, on average, each person in the region should eat about 35 kilograms of fish per year. The challenge is to ensure that growing rural and urban populations continue to have access to fish for food.

Policy actions and strategies that are to be reported on annually to Forum Leaders will include:

i. Maintaining the contribution of coastal fisheries to food security – monitoring catches to keep harvests within sustainable limits and to ensure coastal developments do not damage fish habitats.

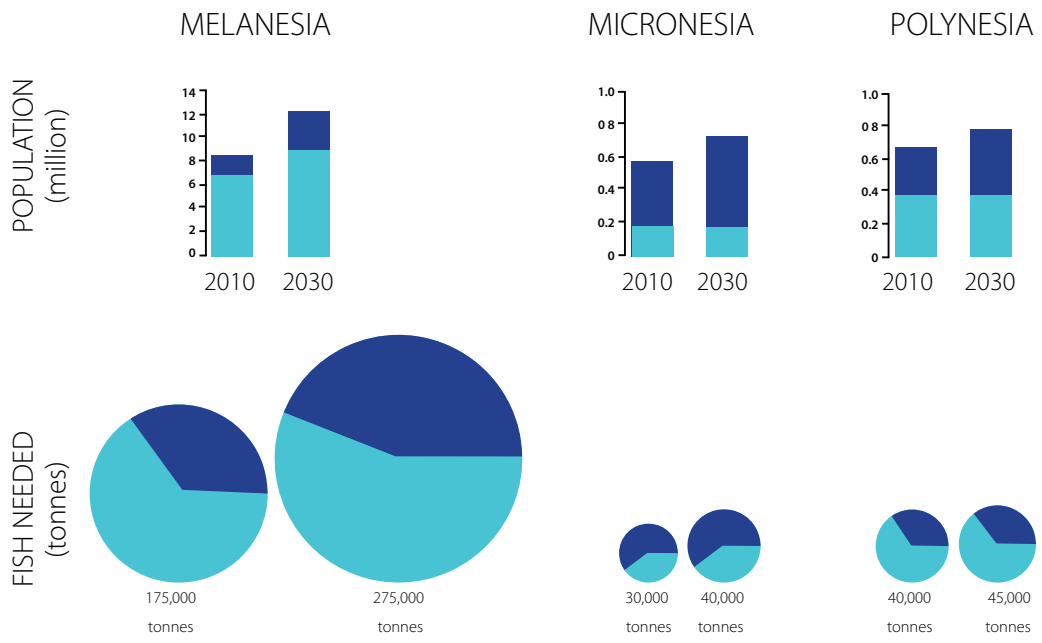
ii. Using more of the national tuna catch to supplement coastal fisheries production for food security.

iii. Expanding the national infrastructure for food security by installing low-cost inshore fish aggregating devices (FADs) to assist rural subsistence fishers to catch inshore pelagic fish.

iv. iIntroducing regulations for landing 'discards' and 'bycatch' from commercial tuna vessels at urban centres to provide low-cost fish in good condition/ quality for local sales.

v. Diversifying the supply of fish in rural and urban areas by developing sustainable small-pond aquaculture for freshwater fish such as Nile tilapia and milkfish.

This is the first report card for coastal fisheries, which sets the scene and direction for future annual reporting against the identified outcomes to Forum Leaders.



Forecasts of population growth and quantity of fish needed for good nutrition in rural ( ) and urban ( ) areas of the Pacific

Produced by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

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