

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.

- 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 li

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

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

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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.