

Contribution to concept papers for UN Ocean Conference Partnership Dialogues

Theme 2: Managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems (14.2 and 14.5)

Prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

Preamble:

In our Pacific Islands Region, the ocean unites and divides, connects and separates, sustains and threatens our very survival. Our Ocean faces many present-day and longer-term challenges. In recognising this, Leaders have developed robust regional ocean policy including the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape and the Framework for Pacific Regionalism. Leaders have also established effective coordination arrangements including a Pacific Ocean Commissioner. There is strong alignment and resonance between SDG14 and national and regional policies, including sector-based policies.

Decades of previous effort, investment and learning in integrated ocean management in the region must be combined with innovation to optimise the benefits to be gained from implementing and achieving SDG14.

Partnerships are vital for progress toward SDG14 targets, but they need to be functional and proactive. Prior experience shows that they need to be country-owned and -driven, must be durable, must be sustainable and must be held accountable. Partnerships should be an integral part of national and regional planning and implementation processes.

This input reflects our interpretation of the outcomes from the Pacific Regional Preparatory Meeting, which included a 2 day senior officials meeting and a 1 day leaders meeting, held 15–17 March 2017, and the contributions of the regional technical working groups to these meetings.

Managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems. (14.2 and 14.5)

Status and trends

It is widely acknowledged that marine ecosystems in many areas of the Pacific islands are under stress from a number of sources, including:

- Over-exploitation (especially of coastal marine resources);
- Changes in trophic structures due to over-harvesting, especially of key predators of crown of thorns starfish;
- Loss of critical habitat such as mangroves and seagrass;
- Inappropriate or poorly-designed coastal developments;

- Thermal stress and ocean acidification.

Many Pacific island peoples are dependent on healthy and productive coral reefs for their subsistence, and marine-based tourism is a critical component of many Pacific island economies. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) can be a vital element in a comprehensive strategy to restore the health of Pacific marine ecosystems, and several countries and territories have declared large MPAs with a view to promoting a restoration of perturbed ecosystems and improving resilience.

The Pacific islands is an acknowledged global leader in large MPAs, with several million sq km of ocean fully protected in Kiribati, Palau, the Cook Islands, New Caledonia, and a number of sites under the management of the United States through the Pacific Remote Monument. Additionally, there are many more small coastal MPAs that are under direct community control and management. Furthermore, the Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMA) network, involving many more communities, also espouses to achieve similar goals through improved community management.

The establishment of these MPAs has, however, raised significant issues around monitoring, control and surveillance of the activities of vessels within MPAs that may be engaged in IUU fishing. Additionally, there is a need to continually assess the effectiveness of MPAs to achieve the desired goals of restoring ecosystem balance and improving resilience.

Finally, although most of the waters of the Pacific islands region lie within the EEZs of sovereign states and territories, there are a number of small high-seas pockets where fishing activities are not subject to the same level of scrutiny and oversight as EEZs, and therefore PICTs are especially interested in the negotiations on BBNJ and the establishment of MPAs in international waters.

Challenges and opportunities

Recognizing the limited human and fiscal capacity of the region, we need to:

- Embrace integrated ocean governance and management, by taking holistic, multi-sector, whole-of-government, whole-of-country, whole-of-region approach, from highlands to high seas.
- Use management tools, such as Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), Locally Managed Marine Areas (LMMAs), zone-based management measures, where appropriate.
- Empower community-driven partnerships at national and sub-national scales, for stewardship of their natural resources.
- Advocate best practice for sustainable shipping, deep-sea mining and high seas fishing activities, including areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- Improve baselines, data collection, monitoring and assessment of marine ecosystems to enable informed and integrated ocean management.

Existing partnerships

- Pacific Ocean Alliance
- World Bank partnership looking at financing opportunities for Blue Carbon
- International Partnership for Blue Carbon

- MACBIO project providing support to Pacific Island Countries on data compilation and MSP
- Climate and Oceans Support Programme in the Pacific (COSPPac): Supported by Australia DFAT in partnership with SPC, SPREP, Partner countries (x14), Australian BOM, and Geoscience Australia
- Roundtable for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas
- LMMA regional network and various national level networks
- New Zealand Pacific Partnership on Ocean Acidification (PPOA)
- CSIRO partnering with OPOC and Pacific Ocean Alliance to provide support to Pacific Island governments on data (e.g. sharing, analysis)
- Partnerships between countries and regional agencies with external partners, such as:
 - UNESCO and IOC
 - NOAA
 - US Coastguard
 - Pew Charitable Trusts
 - IUCN
 - Oceans 5
 - RARE
 - Waitt Foundation
 - WWF
 - Conservation International
 - Big Ocean Network

• Are many existing partnerships covering the theme of the dialogue? Are there identified gaps in coverage?

• Who are the main actors involved in existing partnerships?

• Do we know how well existing partnerships are performing? What have been success factors? What are the main challenges identified with existing partnerships?

• Have successful partnerships on the theme been narrowly focused in scope, or more holistic, encompassing several related areas?

Holistic approaches dominate in the Pacific due to capacity limitation and need for efficient programmatic methods.

Possible areas for new partnerships

We propose a partnership between UN Environment and SPREP to promote Marine Protected Areas in the Pacific islands region to restore ecological balance, improve the livelihoods of Pacific islands people, combat IUU fishing and increase the resilience of Pacific ecosystems to the impacts of ocean acidification and rising sea temperatures.

Objectives:

- Improved awareness of the Pacific islands' achievements in establishing both large and small MPAs;
- Increased collaboration between countries with large MPAs to exchange lessons learned and scientific information;

- Increased collaboration between countries and stakeholders to promote better monitoring of the effectiveness of MPAs (both large and small) and control and surveillance;
 - Promote the establishment of MPAs in the high seas pockets in the Pacific islands region.
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- Given challenges, opportunities and gaps, how could new partnerships help with implementation?
 - What actors would need to be involved for new partnerships to succeed?
 - What would be critical success factors?

Guiding questions for the dialogue

- How will partnerships create engagement across sectors that traditionally function as separate entities?
- How will partnerships strengthen coordination, rather than increasing the reporting obligations of partners or countries?
- How will partnerships introduce new non-state actors or amplify the role of current actors?