

# Coastal marine resource management in the Pacific region

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THE inaugural issue of *Pacific Conservation Biology* — *A journal devoted to conservation and land management in the Pacific region* contained some discussion of conflict between indigenous and Eurocentric attitudes to conservation. Ironically, a major conflict between indigenous and Eurocentric attitudes is illustrated by the secondary title of the journal itself. This conflict is not so much in the concept of conservation which, to the subsistence-level human components of the species-poor ecosystems of the insular Pacific, is a matter of pragmatic commonsense, but in the concept of “land” management. For most small-island peoples, there is no sharp dividing line between the land and the sea and “land” management is but a facet of “marine” management, and *vice-versa*. On the borderline between Melanesia and Polynesia, they have an appropriate word for this concept, the *vanua*, which labels the totality of terrestrial/marine space and resources available to a given sub-unit of the human population.

Although scientific studies of *vanua* management would be most appropriate to the island Pacific the reality is, necessarily, somewhat more compartmentalized. Whilst integrated coastal zone management is still taking its first tottering steps as a Pacific science, the separate sub-disciplines of terrestrial and marine resource management are more developed. It may not be common knowledge amongst terrestrial resource managers, but the Western Tropical Pacific has become a global trendsetter in the management of highly migratory fishes. The declaration of 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones in the late 1970s and early 1980s took a large proportion of the world's fish resources out of the domain of the commons and put them under national sovereign control. This new ownership regime under the Law of the Sea was conceptually difficult for many developed nations to accept but, after centuries or millennia of *vanua* management, was immediately comprehensible by small island countries.

Today, the two main regional organizations which serve the cause of living marine resources management for the Pacific Islands are the South Pacific Commission (SPC) and the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), which work on different facets of the subject. The FFA co-ordinates regional legal and economic policy regarding the management of regional stocks of highly migratory fishes, and has been fundamental in drawing the small island nations together and marshalling their combined, conservative, influence to balance the large, more exploitative, Pacific rim fishing nations. The SPC Fisheries Programme is equivalent in size to the FFA, but with a slightly broader membership, and deals with scientific and technical aspects of living marine resources. It has two sub-programmes: the Oceanic Fisheries Programme (also known as the Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme) looking at highly migratory species, and the Coastal Fisheries Programme, advising member countries on marine resources of more limited scope.

Unfortunately, from the point of view of attempts to integrate the terrestrial and marine sides of the management of coastal zones, management of inshore marine resources is much less advanced than that of highly migratory species. Although highly migratory fishes range over vast areas far from land, there are relatively few such species and in total, they form a considerably larger (and more immediately lucrative) biomass than the highly diverse totality of comparatively nutrient-poor coral reef ecosystems. In addition, highly-migratory species tend to be pursued by large, similar fleets of vessels from industrialized nations, landing at a few major ports, whilst coastal fisheries involve thousands of small-scale fisherfolk landing dozens of species at hundreds of landing points.

The Resource Assessment Section (RAS) of SPC's Coastal Fisheries programme is an expression of the attempt

by the region's small island nations to better understand these coastal organisms. Projects have included such diverse subjects as an assessment of the resource status of sea-cucumbers in the Kingdom of Tonga, the ongoing compilation of a regional database of ciguatera fish-poisoning, and the development of an inshore fishery management plan for the Republic of Palau. The RAS is currently working on a preliminary overview of the coastal fisheries production of the Pacific Islands and expects this to develop into a comprehensive regional database of coastal marine resource productivity as time goes on.

Other current regional initiatives covering aspects of research leading towards improvements in management include the Forum Fisheries Agency's Research Co-ordination Unit in Solomon Islands, the Institute of Marine Resources under the University of South Pacific in Fiji, and the Coastal Aquaculture Centre of the International Centre for Living Aquatic Resource Management (ICLARM) in the Solomon Islands. Non-living marine resources assessment and management is covered by the South Pacific Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC), based in Fiji.

A new development will provide a framework within which certain specialist projects under these organizations can work towards a common goal and link terrestrial with marine management issues. This is the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Project of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), based in Apia, Western Samoa. A detailed strategy for this Project was developed during two regional workshops in 1993 and a proposal for funding is presently under consideration.

For the first time there is likely to be a regional approach to integrating the terrestrial and marine sides of the coastal interface.