

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

Seventh Heads of Fisheries Meeting

(28 Feb.–4 March 2011, Noumea, New Caledonia)

Information Paper 4

Original: English

**Strengthening aquatic animal health management capabilities
in Pacific Island Countries and Territories**

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Strengthening aquatic animal health management capabilities in Pacific Island Countries and Territories

Need

Fisheries and aquaculture resources are important for food security and to provide economic opportunities in Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs). In particular, Aquaculture is being targeted as a source of opportunities for economic and socio-economic development, with new activities being pursued throughout the region. Aquatic animal diseases are a significant threat to the sustainability and productivity of aquaculture. By not being able to meet international sanitary standards and the specific requirements of some importing countries, trade opportunities may be lost. These threats are increasing with the diversification of aquaculture, emergence of new diseases, and the risk of transboundary diseases spreading.

Pacific Islands face significant challenges in implementing effective aquatic animal disease management arrangements because resources and expertise is lacking and fragmented. Key program elements such as diagnostic capability, surveillance, disease reporting, risk analysis and contingency planning are either under-developed or totally absent. Guidance to develop programs is not available or not provided in a coordinated manner to meet the common needs of PICTs.

Arrangements for identifying, monitoring and managing aquatic animal diseases on Pacific islands are clearly insufficient to meet current and future needs. The region was first introduced to the basics of risk analysis and its application to aquaculture in 2007 during the Regional Workshop on Implementing the Ecosystem Approach to Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture and Aquatic Biosecurity organized by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) and supported by FAO. During the Sixth Heads of Fisheries (HOF6) in 2008, Leaders were invited to endorse a regional aquatic biosecurity program (WP6). Since then, several national workshops were held in 2008 (TCP/MAS/3101), 2009 (TCP/RAS/3101), and 2010 (TCP/MIC/3201)¹. In June 2010, SPC organised a regional workshop to train appropriate fisheries, quarantine and animal health staff in using the OIE information system and animal health reporting procedures including non-detrimental findings. However, previous efforts to improve capabilities have been on an ad hoc basis and at an insufficient scale to make lasting and significant impacts regionally. Recently, PICTs have expressed interest for biosecurity at the 5th FAO COFI Sub-Committee on Aquaculture, COFI/AQ² and the Tahiti Aquaculture Conference co-hosted by the SPC. PICTs will be incapable of managing aquatic animal health effectively and supporting sustainable aquaculture development without a coordinated regional approach to aquatic animal health management. Lost development opportunities and potentially devastating social and economic consequences are possible consequences of inaction.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/al363e/al363e09.pdf>

² <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/019/k7580e.pdf>

Approach

PICTs are often geographically isolated, have limited availability of specialist expertise and resources, and have limited prospects to develop specialist capability across multiple disciplines. These circumstances require a regional approach to aquatic animal health that would assist PICTs to build their aquatic animal health management capabilities and equipment requirements in a coordinated and efficient manner.

A first step in developing a regional program would aim at evaluating biosecurity performance and needs of each individual country in the context of its national aquaculture profile. A regional workshop could be used to provide more clarity and better understanding of key biosecurity concepts, used to build consensus on key priority elements for a regional program, and develop a demand driven regional proposal to be submitted to a potential donor.

Objectives

This project will enhance the capability of PICTs to manage the risks to the biosecurity of fisheries and aquaculture industries, particularly those related to trade and impacting on the poor. This will be achieved through the following objectives:

1. Undertake a scoping study/assessment to establish what capacities in terms of – qualified personnel, surveillance systems, diagnostic capacities, equipments, etc exists in the PICTs.
2. Development of a regional framework addressing the gaps identified from the scoping study that will be required to build regional capability in aquatic animal health management. The framework will outline the strategic approach to capability development, and guide individual PICT efforts to improve capability in a staged manner that is appropriate to their individual needs within a regional framework.
3. Development of an ongoing regional aquatic animal health program that will assist PICTs to implement components of the regional framework. The program will coordinate capacity building activities and drive networking of expertise and resources. The program should be permanently staffed and responsible for continuing coordination and networking activities following conclusion of the project.
4. Provision of a series of training activities for regional personnel to build technical knowledge and expertise for specific capabilities identified within the regional framework. The capabilities would be agreed through the regional framework but are likely to include elements such as diagnostics, surveillance, epidemiology, disease reporting, and risk analysis.
5. Establishing mechanisms to enable networking of fragmented resources and expertise and to provide access to information. Internet based technologies would be established to allow better access to, and utilisation of, specialist resources within the region.

Consultation

This Paper is provided to HOF7 as Information Paper for noting on the progress made so far since HOF6 and on the proposed way forward in developing the aquatic biosecurity framework for the SPC.