

SciFish Mid-Term Review, October - November 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The field mission was undertaken between 18 October and 18 November 2010 in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and French Polynesia. A total of 79 persons from concerned stakeholder and beneficiary institutions were interviewed. The overall design of the project is appropriate for enhancing the provision of high quality, accurate and reliable scientific data and information on regional tuna fisheries for formulation of policy and management at both regional and national levels. The strategy that has been employed follows that successfully used in previous EU funded interventions.

The **Overall Objective** is fully consistent with the Fisheries Focal Sector stated in the 9th EDF PRIP. It has promoted regional cooperation between Pacific Island States in policy formulation, and coordinating effective policy delivery through the implementation appropriate management measures through the aegis of the Tuna Commission. The design of the Project also contributes directly to the attainment of MDG's no.1 (poverty alleviation, employment creation) and 7 (environmental sustainability, resource stewardship) by PIC's.

The **Project Purpose** responds directly to the Pacific Regional Indicative Programme (PRIP) para 144, which calls for the improvements in scientific information on oceanic marine resources and their ecosystem. The three results and activity focus has been well designed to enhance the effectiveness of the WCPFC, in line with PRIP para 145. The Project Purpose has also helped PICs to meet certain obligations to FAO in regard to realisation of the Code of Conduct (National and Regional Plans of Action (e.g. on IUU fishing, sharks, vessel overcapacity).

The **results** and their respective activities are specific, relevant and ultimately achievable, albeit in some cases not within the lifespan of SciFish. The three result areas logically flow one to the other.

The **logical framework** provides a sufficient indication of broad intent. However, the lack of SMART OVI's in the SciFish log-frame, and the poor quality of the descriptive text of the Annual Work Plan and Budget (AWPs) documents, as well as the 6-monthly and annual reports, presents difficulties for effective monitoring and evaluation of SciFish achievements.

SciFish's **assumptions** and pre-conditions have all proved to hold true and have had no negative impact on Project implementation. This is fortunate, given that no regular appraisal and reassessment of assumptions was undertaken.

Relevance

SciFish is a highly relevant Project, widely appreciated by senior PIC officials. However, the visibility of the project in terms of its name is not high. The ability of PIC nationals to make meaningful contributions to the many and varied sub-regional meetings of the SPC, FFA and WCPFC continues to develop. Experience, understanding and consequently confidence levels are rising. The „ownership“ by PIC national of such meetings, their outcomes and the processes by which they feed into conservation and management measures that level of the Commission is clearly apparent at the recent set of FFA meetings attended during the MTR.

Recommendations

1. The AWP should include a revised logical framework, with target SMART objectively verifiable indicators for results and target indicators for activities.
2. The PSC should thoroughly examine the validity of the logical framework and provide real feed-back during the annual PSC meeting.
3. The assumptions and preconditions given in the logical framework should be subject to regular appraisal and reassessment by the PSC, to ensure that such factors that impact on Project success are given adequate consideration in work plan formulation, and necessary amendments made.
4. To increase project visibility, SPC should consider developing specific information on SciFish on the SPC OFP website.
5. Given that a number of activities will be concluded between before the programmed end of the Project in mid-2011, it is recommended that a final evaluation of SciFish be undertaken as part of the SciCOFish Mid-Term Review (presumably mid-2012).

6. Dedicated support staff should be considered for funding support, whose role it would be to ensure that progress reports are comprehensive and adequately report on developments against the OVIs and targets.

Efficiency

SPC's OFP has been highly efficient in its role as Lead Agency for SciFish. The organisation and management of SciFish closely follows similar arrangements for previous EDF funded projects executed through OFP. OFP senior personnel have long experience of EDF/EU terms, conditions and procedures. This has resulted in efficient, even exemplary implementation. SciFish funding has created significant synergies with other complementary activities being implemented through the OFP's Strategic Plan.

FFA has been an effective technical partner organisation, responsible for control and surveillance activities (including high tech development such as VMS). However, implementation of FFA-driven activities under SciFish has been hampered by four changes of incumbent in the key post of FFA Director of Operations (the position is currently vacant).

Annual Workplan and Budget documents have not conformed to standard log-frame theory. For 2008 and 2009, they lacked SMART OVIs for Project results. No specific target reference points have been given for activities planned during the course of the year. The format and content of the AWP has not been consistent over the past three years. The budget has however been consistently well documented.

The format and substance of the 6-monthly and annual progress reports has also varied, with the financial aspects being the only consistently well documented aspect of the report. These shortcomings of the AWP have not, however, appeared to inconvenience the stakeholders and beneficiaries, or the efficiency of project implementation.

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) has, as a monitoring body, played a minimal role in ensuring the efficiency of implementation. The FA provides no specific Terms of Reference for the PSC, which may have diminished its effectiveness.

Financial management of SciFish has been undertaken by OFP as part of its core activity. SPC's long and successful track record in financial management of regional projects and programmes and EU rules and procedures has resulted in very efficient spend rates, within budget and in compliance with EU requirement. Financial reporting has been good. Necessary derogations have been applied for an approved in accordance with EC rules. Spend rates have been excellent: 99% committed and 77% spent overall.

Implementation of activities has been efficient and, in the case of OFP, most results have been achieved, or will be by the end of the Project. For MCS-related activities falling under FFA's responsibility, results have been partially achieved, primarily due to a lack of continuity in the key post of Director of Operations.

Flexibility and the ability to respond to changing circumstances has been displayed, e.g. the extra effort placed on observer training order to meet the Commission's requirement for 100% observer coverage on purse-seiners. Recruitment of long-term technical assistance staff funded under the Project was achieved the first year, resulting in an efficient start-up phase. Recruitment followed the standard SPC staff recruitment practices and procedures.

The long experience in the Region and deep understanding of the fisheries sector of senior OFP managers has been a major contributory factor in the efficient management of the Project. The experience of the financial staff within the organisation of EU rules and procedures has resulted in very efficient spend rates, within budget and in compliance with EU requirements

Recommendations

1. Develop specific Terms of Reference for the Project Steering Committee (probably not useful for SciFish, but more for successor projects), to ensure effective on-going monitoring and evaluation as well as oversight of the direction of the project.
2. Increase visibility of project achievements by developing specific information on SciFish on the SPC OFP website.
3. Include dedicated administration support budget line into future projects.

Effectiveness

Progress reports provide inadequate levels of detail for the technical activities undertaken and results generated. Only the financial aspects of the Project are reported on in depth. The lack of well-defined OVIs and specific targets for the different activities set forth in the AWP's contributed to this situation. Reference to scientific papers within the reports without providing a summary of what such contain is not instructive.

Notable successes under Result 1: Enhanced Oceanic Fishery Monitoring include: (a) training of 456 observers, increasing the pool of national observers available for deployment under the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme from around 180 to over 600 during the course of the project; (b) Training of observer trainers, leading to the creation of a cadre of national teachers and further capacity building of national observer programmes; (c) Training attachments for fisheries officials for skills development in regard to data handling, database management, data analysis and statistical report writing; (d) provision of operational support for observer/port sampling programmes (personnel and recurrent costs), resulting in expanded existing national observer schemes and increased contribution to regional research initiatives; (e) Trials of grab and spill catch sampling methodologies to quantify the degree of bias inherent in grab sampling; (f) development of a Regional MCS Strategy; and (g) further development of the OFP Tuna Fisheries Management (TUFMAN) database system.

Recommendations

1. For each PIC (ACPs and OCTs) assess the level of support for continued data collection (human resources, operational costs) and identify appropriate measures for continued support (SciCOFish, WCPFC, donors). This could be conducted as part of the annual Tuna Data Workshop.
2. Include tag seeding training in recognised observer training courses.
3. Direct donor funding of national posts and running costs is contrary to the Paris Declaration and should gradually be phased out and these costs incorporated into national establishments. Future project design should consider the „use-pays“ principle and move towards cost recovery from the industry.
4. In the meantime, given the very real constraints facing New Caledonia and French Polynesia, fishery monitoring support should be extended into 2011 as far as funding allows, at least until June 2011.
5. National Sampling Coordinators and the National Observer Coordinators in New Caledonia and French Polynesia will not be supported after June 2011. The OCTs have opted not to be part of SciCOFish, and thus the OCTs should be encouraged to institutionalise these posts and their associated recurrent costs as soon as is practicable.
6. In the meantime, extend National Sampling Coordinators in New Caledonia and French Polynesia as far into 2011 as possible.
7. Increase cooperation with Indonesia and Philippines on fisheries monitoring, particularly in regard to catch and effort, due to the impact of those fisheries on yellowfin and bigeye.
8. To improve local sustainability for the initiatives supported by SciFish, the data collected from the various activities should be used locally for rapid reporting and decision-making by increased emphasis on developing local capacity for conducting analysis.
9. Develop a regional standard for spill sampling, for the guidance of on-board observers, and include in observer training curriculum.

Notable successes under Result 2:

Enhanced stock assessments include: (a) highly successful large-scale tagging / biological studies on tropical tunas (skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye tuna), successfully conducted across a wide area of the tropical western Pacific, as well as associated activities such as measures to aid return of recaptured tags. Over 260,000 tagged fish and a tag return rate of around 15% makes this the most successful tagging experiment in the world; (b) tagging and biological research on South Pacific albacore, which forms the basis of OCT domestic tuna fisheries; (c) incorporation of tagging data and/or analytical results into the MULTIFAN-CL stock assessment model and input of results to inform the decision making processes leading to elaboration of Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) of the WCPFC.

Recommendations

1. Identify ways to fund the establishment of national and/or sub-regional Tag Return Officers in all unloading/processing points, especially in regard to transshipment and long-line.
2. Continue Tag Recovery Officer position within OFP for as long as possible into 2011. With considerable numbers of tags still being received, and important tag seeding work on-going, support for this position is critical and there is no equivalent position funded by SciCOFish. In the longer term (beyond 2011) SPC should locate other resources to support this position.

Notable successes under Result 3:

Enhanced understanding of the pelagic ecosystem include: (a) further development of the SEAPODYM model: SEAPODYM code clean-up and documentation (100% completed); Development of supporting software to implement new standard formats for input and output files (90% completed); Revision of some

aspects of the population dynamics of the model (100% completed); and Development of a version of SEAPODYM that can estimate parameters from fisheries data and the application of parameter estimation to various data sets (100% completed); (b) on-going work that is investigating: (i) the correlation between environmental factors and tuna recruitment for use in tropical tuna and albacore stock assessments; (ii) the impact of closing areas of ocean to fishing as a fisheries conservation measure; and (iii) the inter-relationship between variation in oceanographic variation on locally-based fishery performance in specific EEZs.

Recommendations

1. Extend Fisheries Oceanographer position as far into 2011 as possible.
2. Support targeted additional in-port biological sampling of albacore otoliths/gonads in French Polynesia and Cook Islands (where observer sampling has proved difficult), for micro-chemistry analysis.
3. Contract out laboratory analysis of gonads and otoliths (for specific things that OFP is not equipped to do).
4. Support further diet and muscle isotope analysis.
5. Support a tagging cruise of short duration (1-2 weeks) to deploy additional PSAT tags on albacore.
6. Publish national-level tagging reports on OFP website (password controlled).
7. Publish results of tagging cruises/data analysis in peer-reviewed journals to ensure international recognition and validity.
8. Ensure all scientific publications also translate to readily identified policy/management actions for consideration at Science Committee and Commission level.
9. Publish results of SEAPODYM model development in peer reviewed journals, to ensure international recognition and validity.
10. A non-technical summary of project outputs should be included in reports for wider distribution to fishery managers. Efforts should be focused on how to ensure that national fishery managers can best understand how to translate the scientific results into practical use for formulating policy and management options.

Activities and results in the context of the Project Purpose

SciFish has already certainly achieved its Project Purpose: the provision of a scientific basis for regional and national regional and national oceanic fisheries management. SciFish has clearly assisted in building competencies at national level. Monitoring of tuna fishing vessels has improved, data collected is of higher quality and the tools to store, analyse and share it have been expanded and improved.

Result 1 has already yielded improved information that has been used effectively in the formulation of Commission CMMs. Data analyses and report generation that are currently on-going will further inform the process before the end of SciFish. Significant national capacity building has been achieved. Monitoring of tuna fishing vessels has improved, data collected is of higher quality and the tools to store, analyse and share it have been expanded and improved.

The tagging experiments undertaken under Result 2 have yielded valuable information and have significantly contributed to the understanding of the major tuna stocks in the region. SEAPODYM development has progressed significantly under Result 3, and this paves the way for practical application at both the national and regional levels for predicting likely future scenarios of fishery/environment interaction.

The numerous technical meetings held at FFA to formulate management options and positions prior to the conduct of annual meetings of the Tuna Commission and its sub-committees are instrumental in ensuring the engagement of PIC officials in interpretation of the results emanating from the science, and consequent input in the process leading to formulation of tuna management options. The meetings attended during this review of the FFC sub-committee on South Pacific Tuna and Billfish, the PNA Long-line Vessel Day Scheme Technical Working Group, and the FFA Management Options Consultation (preparation for the next session of the Tuna Commission) are some examples where OFP, FFA and PIC personnel freely explore the results emanating from the science and use it as the basis for identifying policy and management options.

Unforeseen beneficiaries and consequences

The main stakeholders and beneficiaries have been the WCPFC, and the Pacific ACP and OCT Governmental departments involved in tuna fisheries management at national level. The ACP and OCT states are now more able to effect their data reporting obligations to the Commission as a result of SciFish support. Other organisations have also benefited through capacity enhancement of staff involvement with SciFish, particularly FFA and the PNA group.

Incidental beneficiaries have included private sector actors involved in, for example, chartering arrangements for tuna tagging vessels and the associated economic activities (provisioning, wharf fees, etc.). The observer training activities have also assisted to some degree PNG to further enhance the potential for Kavieng Maritime College to develop as a competent regional centre for observer training at basic and higher levels.

Realisation of project assumptions

Project effectiveness has not been negatively impacted by the validity of the project assumptions, which have been met. Even the most potentially problematic assumption (ACP and OCT governments will commit to implementing fishery monitoring methods as recommended by the project) appears to be holding true.

Use of Project resources

It is evident from audit reports and interviews that all human, financial and material resources provided under SciFish (Technical Assistance and other personnel, equipment, training, research, etc.) have been procured in accordance with the agreed procedures, and fully employed in pursuit of Project activities and result.

Technical Assistance posts have been filled through open competition, in line with SCP standard procedures. They are without exception of high calibre and well able to achieve their respective tasks.

The high calibre of management provided by TA staff has been instrumental to the success to date of SciFish.

Impact

The impact of the monitoring and scientific research aspects of SciFish (OFP responsibilities) has been high. The impact of MCS activities (FFA responsibilities) has been low.

Improved fisheries monitoring has been the largest single impact, resulting in improved data and other forms of biological and operational information for the use of national administrations as well as feeding into the regional process to inform policy and management decision making.

Considerable human resource development has been achieved. Operational support (funding for staff and equipment) has had major beneficial impact on monitoring systems at national level throughout the region.

Many more PIC nationals are now available for deployment in the regional fisheries observer programme than was previously the case. The adoption of the PIRFO Standards provides a career structure (from cadet through to Observer Manager) which was lacking previously.

Further development of database systems (TUFMAN) will have a major lasting impact on the ability of national authorities to meet their reporting obligations to WCPFC.

Improvements made to stock assessments through data generation (tagging) and model development (MULTIFAN-CL) are set to have an impact on establishing scientifically-based CMMs for tuna resources.

Writing up and publication of this work is continuing. Peer review and further consideration of results at Commission level is certain to increase the impact.

Regional coordination between the Commission, SPC, FFA and the national administrations has been further strengthened in support of controlling in-zone fishing and the wider regional control dimension.

The MCS strategy developed under the FFA component has had less immediate impact, but sets an appropriate framework for improved integrated MCS in the future.

The impact of national tuna management plans developed by FFA with OFP input is hard to judge at this stage. These plans form a useful framework for planning the sustainable development and management of national tuna resources, as well as meeting regional obligations for submission of tuna fishery data.

Donor coordination and support for monitoring, tagging and model development is good and likely to continue, given successes to date.

It is not possible to determine the extent to which SciFish alone has contributed to these impacts, but it certainly has had a positive synergistic effect.

There have been no negative impacts.

Sustainability

SciFish will not be extended *per se*. Many of its activities are included in the design of the SciCOFish Project. As noted in section 3.4 of the Financing Agreement, the OFP is itself the main mechanism that will provide continuous follow-up of project results beyond SciFish, and will be in a position to follow up on and realize the value of SciFish results. Follow-up on the results of SciFish are already being pursued through SciCOFish, which has been designed to complement and continue many of the activities supported under SciFish.

The EU is a major consumer of the tuna products exported from the region. EU flag vessels are already enjoying the benefit of fishing in the region. It is therefore in the EU's interests to continue to support regional

programmes that aim to ensure the long-term sustainability of the fisheries. The EU should therefore continue to support programmes that strengthen national and regional cooperative efforts to improve monitoring of fishing as the basis of good planning, policy and management.

The relationships between national administrations and regional agencies have been strengthened, and prospects are good for sustained regional coordination and cooperation at all levels. It should be noted though that there is considerable discrepancy between the PICs in terms of their economic ability to sustain the quality of their national monitoring systems. For states where fisheries management is well supported (e.g. PNG) continued support for monitoring, tagging, modelling and associated activities, in support of PNA and the wider Commission mandate can be expected. For some other states, institutionalising the costs of staff and their running costs will be more problematic. This is particularly the case for OCTs, which face problems in absorbing the currently SPC-contracted staff and their associated operational costs into their establishments. Donor commitment to the Paris Declaration (including the EU) requires the phasing out of donor support for „parallel structures“ within national administrations, including project-funded national observers, de-briefers etc., in preference to building more on institutionalised staff, systems and procedures to effect project delivery.

Recommendations

1. Although most of the Project's activities will continue under SciFish, the PICs ultimately need to ensure institutionalisation key positions such as on-board observers and observer de-briefers. PICs need to make provision for adequate human, financial and material resources by PICs in national establishments and recurrent budgets for long-term sustainability of the monitoring programmes.
2. In the longer term, such costs need to be passed on to the resource users (fishing industry) and the „user-pays“ principle applied.