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The Pacific environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.

Thirteenth Meeting of the Noumea Convention

Thirtieth Ordinary meeting the Contracting of Parties (COP) to the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region and related Protocols (Noumea Convention)

Apia, Samoa
Thursday 17 September 2015

Agenda Item 7.1: Utilizing existing databases to undertake regional environmental and biodiversity analysis to enhance national and regional ocean governance through Marine Spatial Planning to promote the objectives of the Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape

Purpose

1. This paper seeks endorsement from Parties to access Regional Observer Program data held within SPC databases and undertake an unprecedented analysis of biodiversity distribution and trends on non-target by-catch species and species of special interest.
2. This activity is in line with the continued efforts by SPREP to assist countries using Marine Spatial Planning as a primary tool to better manage and govern their ocean and to support key priorities in the Pacific Oceanscape Framework.

Background

3. In 2015, SPREP analysed 10 years of marine pollution incidents from independent observers' reports collated in databases at SPC as part of the SPC/FFA Regional Fishing Vessel Observer Programme. The Regional Observer Programme was established to gain information about fishing activities in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, and has helped to fill important information gaps across the region. The cooperation of SPC in providing this information is acknowledged with appreciation.
4. Over 8000 observer-recorded pollution incidents (from SPC/FFA Observer Pollution Report Form GEN-6) were spatially analysed by SPREP, establishing distributions and trends within Economic Exclusion Zones, High Seas Pockets and Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction across the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. For more information please see Annex 1.

5. Building on the achievement of 10 years of marine pollution incident analysis from data in existing SPC/FFA Regional Observer Program databases, SPREP now seeks to review additional data held in observer databases to help fill important data gaps, particularly on the catch of non-target species (by-catch) and provide new information on biodiversity distribution and trends.

6. Databases of non-target by-catch species and species of special interest are found in forms PS-2, PS-3 and Gen-2 (excluding tuna information) in the Observer Programme. These data are held by SPC and are mostly owned by Pacific Island Countries and Territories within whose waters the fishing activities were conducted. Each individual government would therefore be required to agree to the release to SPREP of Form PS-2, PS-3 and Gen-2 data completed by observers for reports within their EEZs (Please see Appendix 2). It is suggested that seeking this consent is best undertaken by the national SPREP focal point or their representative.

7. Knowledge of the distribution of non-target by-catch species and species of special interest is lacking in the Pacific region because of the lack of reliable data. Accessing the data on by-catch in SPREP Members' EEZs will significantly improve our knowledge of the abundance, distribution and trends over time of key species such as sharks, rays, turtles and whales. It will furthermore support SPREP with biodiversity assessments and planning to assist countries to manage and govern their marine biota through Marine Spatial Planning at national, trans-national and regional scales.

Recommendation

8. The Meeting is invited to:

- **endorse** the access for the provision to SPREP of all non-target by-catch species and species of special interest held in SPC/FFA Regional Observer Programme databases at SPC (Forms PS-2, PS-3 and Gen-2, excluding tuna information)
- **support** efforts which coordinate, resource and align regional mechanisms and investment strategies for Marine Spatial Planning, to assist countries address strategic priorities in the Pacific Oceanscape Framework.