

# Synthesis of National Capacity Self-Assessment Reports in the Pacific Region

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## Executive summary

This review summarizes the vulnerabilities and challenges identified in the National Capacity Self-Assessment reports (NCSAs) of ten (10) member countries of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP). It then identifies two strategies for addressing them: a) a set of questions to help stakeholders prioritize among various environmental problems and b) guidelines for designing better environmental policies. The report concludes by proposing five specific tasks that national governments might request SPREP to assist them with, as follows:

- Identify “no regrets” policies that generate non-environmental co-benefits while also fostering environmental progress.
- Develop a “citizen science” program to simultaneously collect and organize data, promote education, raise awareness, and prompt more environmentally-friendly behavior.
- Further develop “regional expert networks” to promote “learning exchanges” among SPREP countries.
- Develop new and enhance existing “traditional knowledge and the environment” programs.
- Enhance SPREP’s policy coordination and facilitation among member states.



# Introduction to the report

**UNEP** established the NCSA program with the goal of identifying “country level priorities and needs for capacity building to address global environmental issues, in particular biological diversity, climate change, and land degradation, with the aim of catalyzing domestic and/or externally assisted action to meet those needs in a coordinated and planned manner” (<http://www.unep.org/dgef/NCSAs/tabid/1900/language/en-US/Default.aspx>). This report synthesizes NCSAs written between 2007 and 2010 from the following 10 governments: the Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu (see Appendix I; NCSAs were not available for other SPREP countries). The report’s first section identifies the major themes that these NCSAs document with respect to vulnerabilities, sources of threats, and incapacities. The report’s second section builds on this information to identify strategies that would assist national governments and SPREP in more effectively addressing the gaps that the NCSAs document. These strategies are intended to help SPREP use its unique institutional position and resources to facilitate member state efforts to remedy their incapacities, address their vulnerabilities, and enhance their ability to achieve their commitments under the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the Convention on Desertification. The strategies are intended to help SPREP, at the request of and in collaboration with national governments, develop policies and programs that can be usefully applied in all countries while respecting and reflecting the diverse situations of each.

The author has expertise in international environmental policy development and implementation, particularly with respect to climate change. The author’s limited substantive knowledge of SPREP or member country efforts in these areas may lead to some of these ideas “missing the mark” or suggesting programs that are already underway, have been tried and failed, or would be non-starters for economic, political, or cultural reasons.

This report consciously adopts a perspective that differs from that implied in UNEP’s “Capacity Building related to MEAs in ACP Countries” project (<http://www.sprep.org/Projects/acp-meas-project>) UNEP’s “specific objective” for that project is for SPREP to enhance the capacities of regional countries to implement MEAs by fostering “project writing skills, negotiations training, drafting and information management and exchange.” I adopt the view that SPREP efforts should focus on helping Pacific Island countries mitigate their contributions to – and position themselves to better adapt to and prepare for the environmental impacts of – climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation. Although fostering these latter goals often will coincide with better implementation of the relevant MEAs, when doing so does not, I assume that better implementation of MEAs should appropriately be the subordinate goal.



## Overview of NCSAs

Each NCSA documents considerable variation in the environmental threats each country faces, the sources and nature of these threats, the “shape” of each country’s vulnerabilities, the capacities and incapacities of each country to address and adapt to these threats, and the status of existing and planned efforts to address these threats.

These countries vary considerably in their environmental situations, in ways that have important implications for their vulnerability to environmental change. Sea level rise constitutes a much larger and different threat to countries composed primarily of atolls than those composed primarily of high islands. Biodiversity varies from over 15,000 native plant species in Papua New Guinea to relatively few in Niue and Kiribati. Papua New Guinea must protect and manage 450,000 square kilometers while Niue and the Cook Islands must do so for only 250 square kilometers. Population growth, agriculture, and tourism vary in both how and how much each contributes to biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation. Each country’s economic structure and dependence on particular sectors varies, generating corresponding variation in its impact on environmental resources and in the most effective policies for mitigating and adapting to those impacts. All 10 countries have extremely limited resources but Papua New Guinea, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands have far larger populations and economies than Palau, the Cook Islands, and Niue. By contrast, the latter states have higher GDP per capita. Papua New Guinea’s population of 6 million is growing while Niue’s population of 1600 is shrinking. Local behaviors, admittedly often reflecting external pressures, are the primary drivers of biodiversity loss and land degradation in all these countries whereas local behaviors contribute only a minute fraction to climate change, with regional emissions less than 3 hundredths of a percent of global fossil fuel emissions.

Despite these significant differences, a cross-country perspective highlights common themes. And even where problems and vulnerabilities differ, there is value in identifying general and generalizable responses at the SPREP level that can be refined, fine-tuned, and adapted to local national conditions in ways that promote faster and more effective progress than would be achieved by treating each country as unique. The major themes that emerge in an effort to synthesize the 10 NCSAs are as follows:

- All NCSAs identified a lack of environmental awareness and concern at both the individual and governmental level.
- Most NCSAs document that climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation are merely elements of much larger challenges they face in managing and protecting the environment. As Vanuatu’s NCSA notes, its capacity to fulfill “its obligations under the Rio Conventions is very limited. In fact, the capacity of Vanuatu to adequately protect and manage its environment in general, is very limited.”
- Although the NCSAs focus on the global concerns of climate change, biodiversity loss, and land degradation, most countries face more pressing local environmental problems related to the quality and quantity of freshwater resources, declines in fish stocks and other natural resources, flooding and coastal inundation, and the like. To be sure, these problems reflect and will be exacerbated by global problems but, in many cases, would exist even absent those larger-scale threats.

- Many reports highlight the need for new policies and regulations even as many of them document that many of the problems they face stem from poor implementation of good existing policies that do exist.
- A lack of resources hobbles efforts to address environmental problems in all countries. Yet, that same lack of resources suggests there may be many “low-hanging fruit” policies and projects that would generate environmental benefits well above their costs, if a source for those costs were identified.
- The NCSAs all discuss “mainstreaming environment” into non-environmental government agencies and note the challenges that doing so poses. This suggests an alternative approach: identifying individual’s and government agencies’ existing concerns and helping them address those concerns in ways that also generate environmental benefits.
  - Freshwater resources provide a clear example. Most NCSAs document considerable concern about freshwater resource problems. But these high levels of concern have little to do with the ways that declines in the quality and quantity of freshwater resources contribute to biodiversity loss and land degradation or are likely to become worse as climate change causes salinization of local water tables. Rather, existing concern reflects the quite-immediate freshwater needs of households and agriculture. Not surprisingly, people are more likely to welcome programs that improve and sustain human (indeed, their) access to adequate, high-quality freshwater resources than programs designed primarily to enhance the environmental benefits of improving freshwater resources. Programs that promote individual’s and governments’ existing goals in environmentally-friendly ways seem more likely to succeed than those that focus only on promoting environmental concerns.
  - Put differently, mainstreaming the environment may be best achieved, at least initially, by identifying “natural allies” of environmental causes, such as the water managers, farmers, and individuals who all would benefit quite immediately from improved water management.
- Several NCSAs identify areas in which existing government policies are making matters worse, such as subsidizing or failing to sanction environmentally-harmful behaviors, and other areas in which new policies could make matters significantly better at relatively low cost, e.g., reducing the loss of freshwater resources from canals. A more systematic effort to identify such low-cost, high-payoff, readily-supported opportunities in each country, and the reasons they have not yet been addressed, would seem likely to yield significant rewards.



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# Summary of problems and vulnerabilities

Most if not all NCSAs noted several common problems and vulnerabilities:

- Specific environmental problems that include:
  - Water issues related to having adequate quantities and quality for local populations, including but not limited to problems of salinization;
  - Precipitation changes including both flooding and drought;
  - Extreme events, particularly cyclones;
  - Sea level rise and larger storm surges, with their effects being exacerbated by inadequate or inappropriate coastal zone management;
  - Loss of habitats to agriculture and deforestation as well as degradation of soils on agricultural land; and
  - Local environmental problems including inappropriate corporate and individual dumping of medical and other wastes, beach-sand mining, and over-harvesting of native species for subsistence or export.
  - These problems are driven, to varying extents in each country, by population growth, urban shifts, and economic shifts from subsistence to market economies.
- Limited knowledge of the magnitude and nature of *some* (though not all) problems that include:
  - A lack of historical and current evidence of the status of various environmental resources, the trends in that status, and the drivers of changes in that status;
  - Information management problems, including lack of standardized procedures for collecting and aggregating relevant environmental data; and
  - Dissemination problems, with information that is available not always getting into the hands of local scientists, local government officials, or local citizens.
  - That said, for some problems, countries do understand their magnitude and shape, have identified their causes, and have good ideas about appropriate policy and behavioral responses.
- Limited awareness and concern about environmental problems even where local knowledge of the problem exists among scientists and government officials.
- Limited ability to mitigate some problems through local action, leaving adaptation and preparedness as the only available options, e.g., sea-level rise, precipitation changes, invasive species, and temperature change.
- Limited governmental ability to influence behavior in outlying regions and in certain sectors, as evident with respect to sand mining, deforestation, and destruction of coral reefs.
- Limited coordination and cooperation among government ministries, leading to overlap, redundancy, and working at cross-purposes.



# Overarching strategies

The large number and diversity of environmental problems and incapacities noted in the NCSAs suggest two overarching strategies that SPREP might use to help each Pacific Island country address its unique collection of environmental problems in a systematic, thoughtful, effective, and efficient way. Specifically, it would seem valuable for SPREP to help each country by providing a) guiding questions for prioritizing among the numerous environmental problems they face and b) guidelines for designing good policies that reflect the best principles of program design.

## Guiding questions for prioritizing among environmental problems

The limited resources available to each country make prioritizing the many problems they face particularly important. Addressing all their problems effectively is not an option. Making explicit choices among those problems that get addressed and those that do not will be difficult. Nevertheless, doing so will produce better outcomes than if national governments and SPREP do not make such choices consciously and explicitly.

SPREP, national governments, and SPREP-government collaborations can better prioritize which problems to address if they explicitly and systematically identify certain characteristics of all the problems a country faces. Such an assessment of problem characteristics allows comparative assessment across problems to develop a portfolio of policies that address the most pressing problems, are likely to be adopted, and will, if adopted, be likely to produce significant and tangible progress. For example, these questions might be a useful guide for SPREP in their efforts with member governments to develop annual work programmes. An initial and partial set of questions includes:

- Do stakeholders care? For each problem:
  - What are the level, immediacy, and “sharedness” of concern among stakeholders?
  - Will significant improvements, if they occur, be valued by local stakeholders?
  - What priority do stakeholders place on efforts to address each problem relative to other environmental problems and to other non-environmental concerns?
- Can local action help? For each problem:
  - Can the problem’s impacts be mitigated through local action? Or, are adaptation and preparedness the only options available? For example, local action can reduce water quality problems but not sea level rise.
  - If local action can have an impact, is that impact likely to be large or small?
- Is local action likely to be implemented well? For each problem:
  - Are there “natural allies” with incentives to take action, because they would receive non-environmental “co-benefits” from such action?
  - Are the obstacles to local action large or small, in terms of incapacities, lack of resources, existence of political inertia or opposition, etc.?

- Can the problem be addressed with a one-time “solution” or will it require ongoing “management?”
- What factors cause the local behaviors that contribute to the problem or hinder efforts to address it?
  - Lack of knowledge about the problem.
  - Lack of concern about the problem.
  - Alternative behaviors that have fewer environmental impacts are either unavailable or expensive.
  - Active political opposition to action on the problem for economic, social, or other reasons.
  - Government laws and policies that a) exacerbate the problem (e.g., subsidies), b) are good “on paper” but are not implemented well, or c) do not yet exist.
  - All of the above.
- What are the costs? For each problem:
  - How large are the costs of taking action?
  - What types of costs are involved? What are the costs to those who must limit or halt activities they could previously engage in? What are the costs to those who must undertake new activities to address the problem?
  - Who pays the costs: government, stakeholders, non-governmental actors, foreign aid agencies?
- When is the right time to take action? How should action be sequenced among prioritized problems?

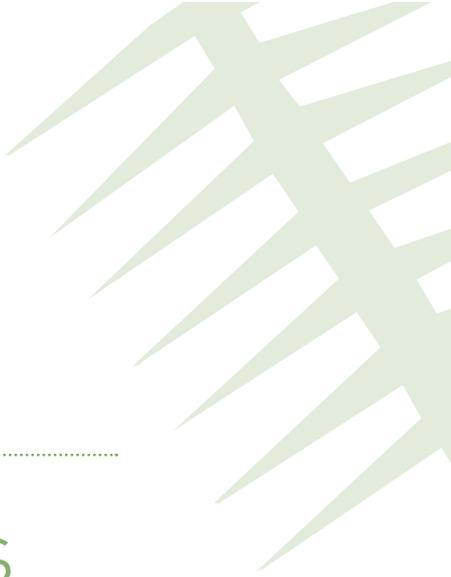
## Guidelines for designing good policies

SPREP and national governments could use the following guidelines to evaluate existing policies and work areas as well as to develop new policies and work areas.

- **Promote local goals:** SPREP should see itself as a facilitator of local goals, helping find ways to ensure that national policies – even those developed in response to external treaty obligations – reflect and promote local priorities, local concerns, local knowledge, local resources, local constraints, and local context.
- **Reduce governments’ administrative burdens:** Wherever possible, SPREP should help countries accomplish existing tasks more easily, efficiently, and cheaply rather than adding new tasks or administrative burdens. For example, this could involve SPREP helping governments fulfill treaty obligations such as reporting requirements.
- **Eliminate “harmful” policies:** SPREP should help governments review existing laws and policies to identify – and then modify or remove – existing policies that exacerbate environmental problems.
- **Build policies that also promote non-environmental goals:** SPREP and national governments should design policies so that they achieve environmental and non-environmental goals simultaneously and so that they are warranted based on their non-environmental benefits alone.
- **Engage “natural allies”:** SPREP and national governments should identify and engage “natural allies” of environmental policies by appealing to people’s existing concerns and notions of self-interest rather than by asking them to adopt new, more environmental, concerns and views of their self-interest. Designing policies and policy processes to promote the goals of the climate change, biodiversity, and desertification conventions is likely to be less effective than designing them to promote goals and interests that stakeholders already value but that also promote environmental convention goals.
- **Develop policies through participatory processes:** Policies are more likely to be effective once adopted if, when they are being developed, sincere efforts are made to engage those people affected in a participatory process. Doing so is more fair and ethical, honors the right people have to be involved in decisions that affect their lives, and brings to bear the immense knowledge, creativity,

and engagement that those affected by a problem have in generating potential solutions. At the same time, participatory processes educate and inform stakeholders which, in turn, allows them to more effectively engage in adaptation and mitigation tasks and increases their commitment to those tasks.

- **Build a policy portfolio:** SPREP and national governments should develop a coherent portfolio of policies that target both short-term and long-term goals.
  - Short-term goals allow immediate, clear, and visible progress that builds public support.
  - Long-term goals build deep and sustainable commitment among the population, but require deep and sustained commitment of time and resources if they are to work; e.g., collecting environmental data for 2 or 3 years, rather than developing an ongoing data collection and maintenance program, will not be particularly useful since it does not foster identification of trends.
  - Some innovative or novel policies may not be particularly effective while others may prove quite effective. Having a portfolio of policies, in some cases including several different approaches to a given problem, ensures that some progress can be made on a problem even if any given policy proves less effective than expected.
- **Make policies “local”:** All policies should be developed to reflect and “make sense in” the local context. Many of the NCSAs focus on mainstreaming policy, developing new laws and policies, meeting convention reporting requirements, and reorganizing governmental organization charts. Where these make local sense, they should be undertaken but where they don’t, they should not. In many countries, such tasks are likely to be less important than information dissemination, awareness-raising, or promoting small but real environmental improvements on the ground. Thus, the Niue NCSA concludes that it should “activate a high level environmental treaties multi-sectoral coordination group” and “create fulltime staff positions to coordinate the implementation of national plans developed for each of the Rio Conventions;” however, in a country of fewer than 2000 people, the personnel resources that such policies would entail might be better applied to more important national priorities.



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# Specific potential projects and tasks

**B**eyond the general guidelines just delineated, reviewing the 10 NCSAs suggested several potential projects or tasks that SPREP might consider. Since SPREP's mandate requires that it respond to requests from member states, the proposals below are suggested in the hope that they prompt national government and SPREP personnel to generate better ideas that improve on or replace the specific proposals made here.

## Foster environmental progress through “no regrets” policies that generate non-environmental co-benefits

Over the long term, raising awareness and concern around environmental problems will be crucial. In the short term, however, environmental progress may be promoted more effectively by helping individuals and governments achieve what they already want in more environmentally-friendly ways.

The NCSAs document many environmental problems that local publics are already very concerned about for non-environmental reasons. These include improving:

- Management of freshwater resources for the domestic and agricultural sectors;
- Forecasting, warning, preparedness, and response to cyclones, flooding, and drought;
- Management of forest resources;
- Management of fishery resources; and
- Coastal zone management.

All these sectors offer opportunities to devise policies that fit with existing stakeholder economic or social interests while simultaneously achieving environmental objectives, either reducing degradation due to local action or promoting changes in behaviors and infrastructure that will reduce vulnerability to those environmental impacts that local action cannot affect.

Indeed, there are some “no regrets” policies that make sense even without considering environmental benefits. Thus, Palau's NCSA notes that 40% of pumped water does not reach intended users and several NCSAs identify weather forecasting and early warning as inadequate; improvements in both areas would benefit local people even before accounting for any environmental benefits or for any future changes due to climate change or other factors.

## Develop “traditional knowledge and the environment” programs

Two resources that the NCSAs suggest could be better utilized to foster environmental progress are a) the strong traditional cultural commitments in all Pacific Island countries to connections with the natural world and b) a strong respect for the knowledge of societal elders. Both of these resources have faced an onslaught of external pressures, initially in the form of colonialism and, more recently, in the form of globalization.

National governments could ask for SPREP assistance in refining existing, or developing new, programs that restore and rejuvenate, while also tapping into and taking advantage of, traditional *connection with* and *knowledge of* the natural world. Palau’s NCSA, for example, notes that traditional culture includes “a genuine respect for the environment [reflected] in Palau’s culture, in its traditional knowledge of how to treat the land and the sea so that both will continue to provide for the needs of the people, as well as an appreciation for the beauty of these tropical islands.” This constitutes an important resource in environmental policy, as evident in the biodiversity project noted in Fiji’s NCSA to develop a “register of traditional knowledge on biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.” Much traditional knowledge exists as oral rather than written tradition. Strengthening the link between younger and older generations would transfer traditional environmental knowledge as well as traditional commitments to the environment. Honoring traditional knowledge and culture helps capture environmental knowledge that is not yet written down, instills environmental commitments in younger generations, and provides an opportunity to write down oral traditions, thereby making these traditions accessible to a wider audience and ensuring it is maintained for prosperity if, unfortunately, climate change impacts submerge parts and, in some cases all, of the islands on which these unique traditions developed.

## Develop a “citizen science” program to simultaneously collect and organize data, promote education, raise awareness, and change behavior

“Citizen science” is a strategy for conducting large-scale scientifically-sound data collection with the help of large numbers of amateur scientists, non-scientists, or not-yet-scientists in an effort to identify baselines and trends in environmental problems while fostering public science education and promoting environmental outreach and awareness. For more, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen\\_science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Citizen_science); <http://www.slideshare.net/CitizenScienceCentral/citizen-science-and-climate-change-east>; and <http://www.birds.cornell.edu/citscitoolkit/climatechange/citsci>

A citizen science program could provide a low-cost way to simultaneously address several challenges identified in the NCSAs. National governments could request SPREP assistance in coordinating a set of parallel national programs that could:

- engage children and adults by providing educational benefits to those involved;
- attract greater interest from scholars from countries within and outside the region in environmental conditions in these countries;
- develop high-quality data on a variety of local environmental indicators that, over time, could identify trends over time and across countries;
- raise local awareness and concern about various environmental problems, and
- prompt efforts to address environmental problems with local action.

Citizen science programs work because people are highly motivated to educate themselves and their children and science and math skills are central parts of a modern education. Children are keen observers of the natural world and can be trained to develop the skills needed to collect data in ways that make it useful and reliable. For scientists, citizen science offers an opportunity to collect larger amounts of data more quickly than they could by other means and, in the SPREP context, from Pacific Island countries

where they might not collect data otherwise. Citizen science elements are also increasingly attractive parts of scientific research proposals. For example, in the United States, both the National Science Foundation (NSF – [http://www.nsf.gov/news/special\\_reports/science\\_nation/citizenscience.jsp](http://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/science_nation/citizenscience.jsp)) and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA – <http://science.nasa.gov/citizen-scientists/>) have programs that fund citizen science.

A citizen science program could be designed to:

- identify and organize existing datasets that are not being properly managed (this could include people from non-SPREP countries transcribing data from SPREP countries – see
- collect, record, and transcribe relevant memories from societal elders regarding the status and changes that have occurred over their lifetime with respect to various environmental resources, such as sea level, species changes, and the like;
- collect data that would address local environmental issues while also contributing to governmental efforts to fulfill reporting requirements under UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD; and
- have SPREP serve as a central data collection and management repository to reduce Information Technology requirements placed on national staff while increasing quality and cross-national comparability of data in the database.

SPREP could also make a conscious effort to attract more environmental research by top scientific researchers and research teams. There is already scientific interest in the region, as illustrated by the reports the Australian Pacific Climate Change Science Program (see <http://www.pacificclimatechangescience.org/>) recently produced. Such efforts could be built on by developing an “advertising campaign” that would invite and facilitate environmental research in SPREP countries. The climate, biodiversity, and land degradation problems assessed in these NCSAs are all “hot topics” for scientific study worldwide and the scholars studying them are often looking for new field sites. Identifying how to ease researchers’ navigation of governmental policies and local logistics (e.g., visas, research permits, housing, transport, etc.) could help convince researchers to do field work in these countries, providing benefits for local people as well as the scientists.

## Further develop “regional expert networks” to promote “learning exchange” among SPREP countries

The NCSAs clarify the value of deploying the limited resources these countries spend on environmental problems wisely, effectively, and efficiently. SPREP can foster effective use of environmental protection resources by fostering the exchange of “good” ideas among the countries, whether those ideas come from policy experiments in other countries or from SPREP efforts to foster interactions with outside experts. The Cook Islands report noted that the NCSA process itself fostered “sharing of experiences and learning exchanges with other Pacific Island countries” that allowed each country to “share what did work in our own experiences, but also what didn’t.” Although national context and environmental problems themselves differ from country to country, a forum for sharing “lessons learned” would expose people in each country to a broad range of alternative approaches. Implemented correctly, it could do so within a framework that engaged issues of whether and how to design those alternatives to work equally well in a different country’s context. Such a program might involve a mix of email exchanges, conference calls, regular paper- or e-newsletters, and in-face meetings facilitated by SPREP personnel.

Formalizing such a program could take many forms but might start by identifying common themes of priority to most countries. It could identify environmental themes (e.g., water, sea-level rise, deforestation) as well as capacity-based themes (e.g., raising awareness, mainstreaming the environment, fostering inter-ministerial cooperation). Creating small sustained “communities” or networks of people working on

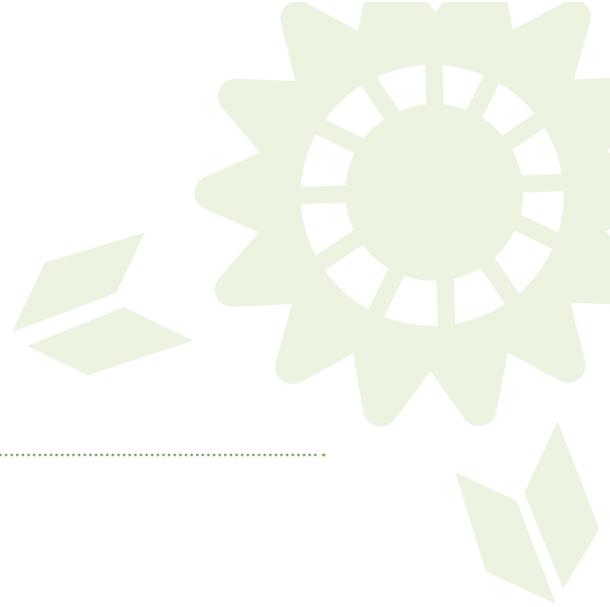
common problems would provide the obvious intellectual benefits of sharing knowledge while increasing the motivation of network members by reducing their isolation, increasing their commitment, and highlighting progress that has been made. Such groups might contain the focal-point people from each country working on the issue along with SPREP representatives and outside experts knowledgeable about the problem and relevant policies adopted outside the region. Carefully selecting outside experts known to be team players committed to the long-term success of these countries and who know how to “listen first and advise second” seems particularly important if they are to make useful and usable contributions that national representatives can hear, respond to, and improve upon.

Where appropriate, regional expert networks might respond to national government requests for “tiger teams” of 3 to 6 people deployed for short but adequate periods of time (perhaps, 3–4 weeks). These teams would help country nationals assess the “shape” of an environmental problem and its causes and devise locally-appropriate solutions that reflect local knowledge and conditions, best practices, and expert knowledge. Such an approach recognizes that no SPREP country has sufficient financial or personnel resources to have a full-time local expert for each environmental problem and that, even if they did, hiring or training a local expert often would waste resources by “buying” expertise rather than “renting” it. The success of this sort of program would depend on selecting outside experts, designing or redesigning regional expert network processes, and developing tiger team programs in ways that ensure that the recommendations made are responsive to local conditions and have credibility and trust with country nationals.

## Facilitate governmental policy development and foster coordination among governments through SPREP

Collectively, these 10 NCSAs suggest various ways that SPREP could, at the request of member governments, facilitate environmental progress in the region. Member countries are involved in many tasks and programs that are quite similar across countries, even though they are undertaken in different contexts. Yet, in many cases, each country is accomplishing these tasks on their own with limited resources. The Palau NCSA notes: “the reporting requirements of United Nations programs are a strain on the personnel and the finances of a small country.” SPREP could assist governments by providing guidance from broad-level descriptions of “best practices” to quite detailed and mundane templates for documents, spreadsheets, and the like to facilitate data collection, report writing, etc.. Such efforts both ease the administrative burdens countries face while improving the policies and strategies they promulgate. With respect to the specific tasks underlying the NCSA process, such efforts might begin by identifying common requirements that SPREP countries face under the UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD and provide off-line documents or on-line forms that remove the need for national staff to develop such documents while improving the quality and comparability of government responses. Such an approach improves efficiency and quality; reduces duplication and requirements for parallel infrastructure and personnel across countries; and avoids “re-inventing the wheel” in each country.

As one example, given the requirement for all countries to produce a Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Inventory, national governments might work with SPREP personnel to identify existing national capacities to generate such an inventory, generate a template that re-structured UNFCCC requests so they are appropriate for each country’s different circumstances, and then provide government-requested advice, support, and expertise to foster quality production of such reports. Similarly, SPREP could foster education and awareness-raising campaigns throughout the region by producing “template” materials, whether involving radio or television advertisements or printed brochures that would have core information that could be modified to fit local conditions. SPREP could develop standardized procedures for collecting, organizing, maintaining, and disseminating climate, biodiversity, and land use data; these standardized procedures could be developed to allow comparison across countries while also reflecting each country’s unique national context and local conditions.



## Conclusion

Based on a review of NCSAs from ten (10) SPREP member countries, this report identified several common themes that affect all countries in the Pacific, albeit to different degrees and in different ways. Specific environmental problems include freshwater management, precipitation changes, extreme events, sea level rise and storm surges, loss of habitat, and various local environmental problems such as dumping of medical and other wastes, beach-sand mining, and over-harvesting of native species. All the countries in the region report significant obstacles to addressing environmental problems related to limitations in their knowledge regarding the environmental problems they face, public awareness and concern about those problems, the ability of local action to mitigate the problems, the capacity of government to influence behavior in outlying regions and certain sectors, and coordination and cooperation among government ministries.

To address the range of factors that inhibit these countries from making the progress desired by people concerned about environmental protection, within these countries and at SPREP, this report has identified two overarching strategies reflected in a set of “guiding questions for prioritizing among environmental problems” and a list of “guidelines for designing good policies.” In addition, the report has suggested that national governments consider enlisting SPREP’s aid in developing 5 potential projects and tasks, as follows:

- Foster environmental progress through “no regrets” policies that generate non-environmental co-benefits.
- Develop “traditional knowledge and the environment” programs.
- Develop a “citizen science” program to simultaneously collect and organize data, promote education, raise awareness, and change behavior.
- Further develop “regional expert networks” to promote “learning exchange” among SPREP countries.
- Facilitate governmental policy development and foster coordination among governments through SPREP.

It is hoped that the ideas in this report will aid environmental protection efforts in the Pacific region by providing concerned stakeholders as well as national and SPREP personnel with a cross-country synthesis of the environmental problems facing the region, the incapacities that inhibit addressing them, and an alternative perspective on how those problems and incapacities might be more effectively addressed.

# Appendix I:

## NCSAs used as the basis for this report

- Cook Islands: NCSA Capacity Development Action Plan and Final Report (Draft) – June 2008
- Fiji: The National Strategy and Action Plan – July 2009
- Kiribati: National Capacity Self Assessment Project: Assessing the capacity of the Republic of Kiribati to implement the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Final Report – No date
- Niue: National Capacity Development Strategy and Action Plan – June 2008
- Palau: National Capacity Needs Self-Assessment For Environmental Management – September 2007
- Papua New Guinea: National Capacity Self Assessment Project: Assessing the Capacity of Papua New Guinea to Implement the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – March 2010
- Samoa: National Environmental Capacity Strategy and Action Plan – 2007
- Solomon Islands: National Capacity Self Assessment Project: NCSA Report – 2008
- Tonga: National Capacity Building Action Plan for Environmental Management (Draft) – February 2008
- Vanuatu: National Capacity Building Action Plan (NCAP) for Environmental Management – September 2007



# SPREP

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Environment Programme

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**VISION:** The Pacific environment – sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.