

Draft Action Strategy Background and Discussion Notes.

1 The Current Action Strategy for Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in the Pacific Island region 2008 - 2012

1.1 Rationale for Change

Since 1985 the Action Strategies which have emerged from the Nature Conservation and Protected Areas Conferences have been aimed at guiding conservation practices, especially protected area establishment, in the Pacific. For many years these were a compendium of goals, strategies and related implementation actions and outcomes expressed at regional, national and local levels. They identified Pacific priorities (national, regional and international) and encouraged co-ordination and cooperation between stakeholders working to address these at multiple levels. They were developed and endorsed at the regional level with input from national delegates and other stakeholders. Before the advent of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans, the Action Strategies provided a useful ad hoc regional strategy for guiding and assessing conservation progress between conferences, measured in terms of achievement of goals, targets and outcomes could be undertaken.

The 8th Pacific Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas heralded a change in the approach and format of the Action Strategy. The conference reinforced the critical role of communities in achieving conservation goals in the Pacific and the importance of partnerships and cooperation in tackling the immensity of the conservation task across the region. It was also noted that based on the recommendations of the review of the 2002 - 2007 Action Strategy progress towards the 30 year Goals of the Action Strategy was overall, not satisfactory.

That review concluded that:

- an improved sense of ownership and commitment was required among those who signed up for the Action Strategy and that this would be helped if the Strategy had a clearer focus by reducing the number of hierarchical layers and targets.
- the Action Strategy should be linked more closely to NBSAPs to reflect more closely the scope and priorities of the PICTs
- it should have a focus on shared priorities where regional collaboration can make a difference
- similar linkages with regional and international initiatives like the Island Biodiversity Programme of Work were advocated
- efforts should be made to ensure the Action Strategy reflects what the PICTs are actually doing and Governments should feel a sense of ownership of the Strategy.
- finally, the Action Strategy should be useful to the donor community to guide and develop their programmes.

The overriding message to the conference was the need to ensure the Strategy reflected the goals and expectations of the Pacific Island countries and territories and was "owned" by the conservation stakeholders of the region..

This review of the current Action Strategy concludes that it too really does not achieve this goal of widespread ownership and utilisation, except in the broadest possible sense.

The discussions at the Alotau conference resulted in a Action Strategy which focused on the **WAY** conservation should be conducted in the region rather than on specific outcomes of and measurable targets at multiple levels. This was a major departure from the format of previous Strategies and was based on the lessons learned from the implementation of those documents.

At the heart of the 2008 -2012 Action Strategy are eight Principles for Nature Conservation in the Pacific which are essentially a Code of Conduct for all those engaged in the design and implementation of conservation programmes in the region. Also presented in the new Action Strategy were guidelines for implementing community conservation programmes, which are the cornerstones for successful on the ground conservation outcomes in the region. These reflected the theme of the conference - empowering local people, communities and Pacific Institutions and the importance of engaging communities at all levels of conservation.

To align the Strategy with the priorities of the PICTS which were too numerous to be addressed specifically in the Strategy, summaries of the NBSAP's by country were annexed and were used to inform the review and updating of the Action Strategy's four 5 year Objectives. The Goals of the Islands Biodiversity Programme of Work and Pacific Plan were similarly considered.

1.2 The Structure and Scope of the 2008 - 2012 Action Strategy

1.2.1 Vision, Mission and Goals

The 2008 - 2012 Action Strategy retained the 30 year Vision, Mission and Goals of the previous Action Strategy which were endorsed by the members of the Roundtable for Nature Conservation and the delegates at the 7th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, held in Rarotonga in the Cook Islands and by the Pacific island governments at the SPREP meeting in 2003 . In 2013 it is now ten years since their endorsement but these statements remain as valid today as consensus of ideals and priority concerns and in the regional as they were when originally conceived.

It is recommended that the Vision and Mission the 2008 - 2012 Action Strategy be retained in the entirety for the 2014 - 2020 version of the Action Strategy.

VISION

Our people proudly honour our natural heritage and cultural identity; the waters of our streams, lagoons and oceans are bountiful and crystal-clear; our mountains are wild , our forests pristine and our beaches unspoiled; our societies are vibrant and diverse; we have equitable relationships with our global partners and our economies thrive; our cultures and traditions are widely appreciated ; and the products of our creativity and labour are especially prized.

Islands of Life ... Pure Pacific

MISSION

To protect and preserve the rich natural and cultural heritage of the Pacific Islands forever for the benefit of the people of the Pacific and the world

GOALS

Environment

The biodiversity and natural environment of the Pacific are conserved

Economy

Nature conservation and sustainable resource use are integral parts of all island economies

Society

Pacific peoples are leading activities for the sustainable use of the natural resources and the preservation of cultural heritage for the benefit of present and future generations

The 30 year goals represent the emergence of strengthened understanding within the region of the inter-dependencies between healthy environments, economic prosperity and social well being. These were adapted at the 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas to include the protection and conservation of cultural heritage and the benefits which must accrue for present and future generations. This more holistic, integrated understanding of the role of conservation in achieving triple bottom line outcomes is a feature of the progress made in programme development and implementation over the past decade but especially over the past five years.

In this regard the 30 year Goals generally remain as valid today as they did at inception and should be retained in the next version of the Action Strategy. The one major issue which may not be adequately addressed in the Goals is the threat of global climate change to the future of the Pacific island environments. The vulnerability of the region to this threat may need to be accommodated more explicitly in the Goals.

It is recommended that the 30 Year Goals of the 2008 - 2012 Action Strategy be retained but reviewed with a view to their updating the 2014 - 2020 version of the Action Strategy to need to take into account the impact of global climate change on biodiversity, economic development and societies in the vulnerable Pacific at the 9th Conference in Suva, Fiji, 2 - 6 December 2013.

1.3 Targets and Objectives.

1.3.1 Lessons from the Past - Targets

Of more immediate relevance for this Review are the five year Objectives which were developed at the Alotau conference in 2007. The preceding 2002 - 2007 Action Strategy contained 18 separate Objectives (7 Environmental, 7 Economic and 4 Social), which were then elaborated on by a further cluster of 5 year Targets making a total of 77 targets in all.

The Roundtable Review of that Action Strategy noted that the targets and some objectives were:

- too numerous and overlapping
- targets were far too numerous and time frames too ambitious
- too specific to apply across the region
- some were unrealistic and unachievable within a 5 year timeframe;
- system for reporting not robust or comprehensive enough

As a result the Roundtable called for the current Action Strategy to do away with the Targets altogether as the reality was the focus on achieving targets was primarily a country level function for which a Regional Action Strategy was an inefficient strategic mechanism. Under this scenario the development /achievement of targets was seen as the responsibility of PICTs, NGO,s donor agencies and other implementers working with countries and guided by national frameworks such as NBSAPs. This focus on supporting the achievement of targets at the national level would be more effective in the long run. The role of the Action Strategy was to provide the regional context for setting and achieving those Targets which would, through this alignment, become the Strategy implementation process and measure of conservation success. The Action Strategy would be the catalyst for more efficient implementation of all programmes and projects through its articulation of the Guiding Principles -Code Of Conduct and the commitment of stakeholders to adopting and upholding these in the programme and project implementation.

It is recommended that in order to provide a more measurable context to the implementation of the Action Strategy, the Action Strategy Review Committee of the 9th Pacific Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas give consideration to again identifying appropriate Targets for inclusion in the 2014 -2020 version of the Action Strategy with particular emphasis on possible alignment with the 2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the CBD and the regional strategies of the SPREP Strategic Plan. In doing so the Committee take into account the lessons learned from assessment of the utility of targets in previous Strategies.

There was also a conclusion that the economic and social goals diluted the effort of PICT's towards the environmental goal and the suggestion that it may be more effective to focus on the environment goal in the future. However, given the retention of the four goals in the current strategy, this was clearly not acted on by the Conference which endorsed the relationship between biodiversity conservation, sustainable economic development and human well being captured by the three Goals. This issue gets to the heart of the scope of the Action Strategy and may well be a subject for further review by the Action Strategy Drafting Committee at the 9th Conference.

It is recommended that as a starting point, the Action Strategy Review Committee of the 9th Pacific Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas obtain consensus on the functional scope of the next version of the Action Strategy, especially in relation to its treatment of the economic development context of biodiversity conservation.

1.3.2 Lessons from the past - 2008 - 2012 Objectives

As already mentioned, the review of the previous Action Strategy also called for the rationalisation of the 17 Objectives in the previous Strategy. This led to the development of the four Objectives in the current 2008 - 2012 Action Strategy. These are:

Objective 1

Ensure conservation has a development context that recognises, respects and supports sustainable livelihoods and community development aspirations

Objective 2

Identify, conserve and sustainably manage priority sites, habitats and ecosystems

Objective 3

Protect and recover threatened species and species of ecological, cultural and economic significance

Objective 4

Manage threats to biodiversity, especially climate change impacts and invasive species

These inter-related Objectives have been well designed to embrace the full range of Pacific conservation and sustainable development goals and strategic themes articulated in the NBSAPs of the Pacific Island countries and territories. They are the product of extensive review and consultation, and were debated, modified and eventually endorsed by the Alotau conference. They are intended to be used to align any conservation programme with the implementation of the Action Strategy and to establish five -year interim milestones towards achieving the 30 year Goals (See also Table 2 p29)

The Objectives¹ are elegant in their treatment of the relationship between the conservation of sites, habitats and ecosystems and species, sustainable development and the management of pervasive threats to healthy ecosystems and environments, including climate change.

This review concludes that while the Objectives achieve the purpose of a identifying broad priorities for action towards the Goals, their lack of specificity - i.e. SMARTness. makes it difficult to see how they achieve their stated purpose of five year Milestones and they should be recognised as long term objectives rather than short term milestones.

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¹ It is noteworthy that the original review recommendations did not extend to embracing Sustainable economic development and the sustainable use of resources within the nature conservation and protected areas context of the Action Strategy. The linkage between these themes which is rooted in the rationale/purpose of conservation and protected areas is a subject of debate which continues in the region. It is however, now widely accepted that for conservation to be relevant in the Pacific context, it must be linked sustaining livelihoods and food security and now, strengthening the resilience of island ecosystems to climate change. The adoption of Objective 1 in recognition of these theme and the Strategies Economy Goal, seems wise.

functional scope of the next version of the Action Strategy, especially in relation to its treatment of the economic development context of biodiversity conservation.

1.4 Principles of Nature Conservation in the Pacific - a Code of Conduct

In a major departure from previous Action Strategies, the 2008 - 2012 Action Strategy contains a set of eight guiding Principles which are at the heart of the re-formulated Strategy (**See Annex 1**). They define the critical components for delivering nature conservation effectively in the Pacific region based on lessons learned from past Action Strategies and the vast experience of the participants at the Alotau conference. Viewed collectively, they represent the best practice for designing, establishing, implementing and sustaining conservation programmes. Essentially, the Principles are a Code of Conduct to which all parties involved in conservation in the Pacific are urged to recognise, respect, adopt and commit to in their design and implementation of programmes.

This approach to the implementation of the Action Strategy was seen as being more pragmatic and realistic than persevering with the specificity of multiple objectives and targets which were often not regional in scope and confused the real intent of the Action Strategy as a guiding framework. However, the move away from specific, measurable targets has made the assessment of progress towards its goals and objectives more difficult than perhaps would have been the case in the past.

It is recommended that the Principles - Code of Conduct to be retained to guide the implementation of future Action Strategies and the programmes and projects of Pacific conservation stakeholders in the achievement of the full range of regional conservation goals and objectives.

1.5 Guidelines for Implementing Community Conservation Programmes.

The Action Strategy includes guidelines developed by working groups during the Alotau conference. These represent the collective wisdom of conference participants who are experienced in community conservation and were included to inform practitioners involved in conservation programmes in the Pacific of effective community conservation.

It is recommended that the Guidelines for Implementing Community Conservation Programmes developed for the 2008 - 2013 Action Strategy be retained in the 2014 - 2020 version of the Action Strategy.

2 Ownership, Scope and Utilisation of the Action Strategy

In the lead up to the Alotau conference the 2007 Action Strategy Review found that ownership of the Action Strategy was a major problem. The review process concluded that the Strategy was either unknown, or had been forgotten by most in the region. It was often confused with the SPREP Action Plan and comparatively few people in the region appeared to know of its existence and fewer still of its contents and related commitments. The review noted that since the Strategy has to be implemented at country level, this was a serious problem

The current Action Strategy was designed to better align with national priorities and strategic frameworks by developing Objectives which took these into account and improved the Strategy's relevance to PICT's. The focus on a Code of Conduct was aimed at encouraging ownership and endorsement by PICT's as well as the broad community of conservation implementers including Roundtable members, in the region.

Five years this review's assessment of the level of ownership and endorsement of the Action Strategy which currently exists concludes that with the exception of Roundtable members and SPREP staff, overall the situation has not improved. This assessment is based on the responses of Roundtable members to the self assessment questionnaire and the disappointing response by PICTs to formal requests for completion of a simple questionnaire on the use of the Action Strategy. Anecdotal evidence and consultations also suggest that the desired outcome of broad PICT ownership and employment of the Strategy has not been achieved.

In fact, only three PICT's responded to the survey, and two of these in only as a response to a direct personal request. Two out of the three respondents stated that they did not use or refer to the Action Strategy or its Guiding Principles in the planning or implementation of their programmes or projects and the third only occasionally.

A marginally improved situation is evident amongst the members of the Roundtable (Table 1) . Seven of a possible thirteen members together with two non member regional NGO's, responded to the questionnaire voluntarily. All 9 respondents reported "Occasional" reference to the Strategy in their programme planning and implementation.

The conclusion was that while it serves the region as a guiding framework for achieving programme/project success if the Code of Conduct is fully applied as currently structured the Action Strategy is not widely 'owned or used nor does not serve as a call to action or is it effective for monitoring and measuring progress.

This raises the question of just what the purpose and by implication, the format of the Action Strategy should be. Some Options are:

- (a) to essentially proceed with the current format but tweak it to take account of new any new trends in conservation approach or issues which have come to the fore in the past five years or may develop in the near future should not be discounted.
- (b) To use the current Action Strategy as a framework but return to the approach adopted prior to Alotau and introduce SMART targets against which evaluation can be undertaken in five years.
- (c) Dispense with the Action Strategy altogether (or acknowledge it as a **Guiding Framework for the Implementation of Conservation Programmes in the Pacific**) on the understanding that there already exists a plethora of strategic frameworks in the Pacific which carry greater institutional and regional authority and ownership than the Action Strategy ever will.

It is recommended that although this consultancy is also required to produce a draft Action Strategy framed along the lines of (b or c) above, these issues are nonetheless worthy of further debate and that as clarity on and confirmation of whose Action Strategy this is; i.e. Roundtable members, Roundtable and PICT's; all and sundry be addressed by the Action Strategy Working Group of the 9th Conference in order to shape the outcome of the final conference product.

Table 1 Utility of the Action Strategy (9 PIRT Members + 3 PICT)			
Overall Assessment 1	Not At All	Occasionally	Refer regularly
Have you or your programme staff referred to the Action Strategy and its Guiding Principles in the planning or implementation of your programmes/projects?	2	10	
Overall Assessment 2	Strongest		Weakest

Of the Guiding Principles which do you think your organisation is strongest and weakest in its adherence?	Principle 3 Also Principles 1,5,7		Principle 4
Overall Assessment 3 Overall, how strongly do you consider your organisation adheres to the Guiding Principles in the implementation of its programmes and projects	Poorly	Moderately	Strongly
	1	5	6

2.1 Improving the relevance/ownership of the Action Strategy

Essentially the Action Strategy is the Code of Practice developed by conservation practitioners with years of experience in implementing all facets of conservation in the Pacific. It represents "best practice" relevant to programme and project implementation at all levels in the region, including national and regional. As such the Strategy can be viewed as a surrogate Implementation Strategy for national and regional frameworks and programmes and is especially relevant as a guiding framework for implementation of NBSAPs.

As NBSAPs come up for review, they will embrace the Aichi 2020 biodiversity targets which will also be at the core of the revised Action Strategy. This high level of alignment helps ensure the Action Strategy objectives are embedded in mainstream PICT conservation and environmental planning and vice versa but what is needed to really achieve the mainstreaming of the Action **Strategy is its formal adoption and recognition by PICTs as the overarching Implementation Framework for each of the NBSAPs. Similarly the Action Strategy (which could be renamed more accurately - The Guiding Framework for the Implementing Conservation in the Pacific Region) could be formally adopted as such by other regional frameworks including the SPREP Strategic Plan and GEF funded multi-country programmes.**

This formal adoption and inclusion in the planning frameworks of PICT's, Roundtable members and donors will provide the Action Strategy with the level of institutional recognition it has lacked in the past and rigorous application of the implementing Principles of the Code of Practice will provide a strong platform for ensuring the core elements of the Strategy are recognised and integrated into national, local, sectorial and regional policies. Strong ownership of the Strategy by the region's conservation stakeholders will enhance this process.