

### *Priority issues for the tuna industry in Polynesia*

The first of a series of sub-regional workshops was held in Apia, Samoa from the 5-7 April 2006. The workshop was a follow up to the first country visits by the Project staff. The meeting brought together representatives of fishing industry/fishermen associations, managers of leading tuna fishing companies, as well as government officials involved in tuna fisheries management and development from Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and Niue. Hence the focus of this first meeting was on the tuna longline fishery in the south and south/east parts of the region. The main focus of the workshop was to:

- identify solutions to common problems, and provide direction for the future activities of the DEVFish Project and other EU funded instruments.
- identify areas for improving policies which promotes the private sector participation
- assist regional networking of Pacific Island private sector private sector interest in tuna fisheries and;
- provide information and increase awareness about regional agencies and programs available to private sector

Private sector tuna fisheries representatives from Cook Islands, Niue, Tonga and Samoa expressed cautious optimism for the future of the tuna longline industry in their countries despite severe oceanographic anomalies that have adversely affected tuna catch rates in the past three years and called on their governments and financial stakeholders for closer dialogue and support to enable the industry to ride through its current problems. The participants noted that data from the Secretariat for the Pacific Community indicates the prolonged unusual warm seawater conditions have affected the tuna longline fishery in this region, especially for albacore and yellowfin tuna, may be moderating. This should bring back a return of the fish to these waters in larger numbers. The workshop participants were informed of cyclical oceanographic factors that affect the distribution of tuna and albacore stocks in the region, which explains much of their current problems. New technology that enables better targeting of fishing boats onto the fish was discussed, noting that this would improve efficiency and reduce costs. As a result of the workshop, economic analyses will be undertaken to determine the economic optimum of the fishery and to address the major cost factors of high fuel prices and limited and expensive airfreight. These analyses should assist governments and industry to develop appropriate supportive policies and operational responses. Means of improving the value of the catch will be pursued through the establishment of government fish safety certification authorities where appropriate and improvements to fish quality to enable better access to new markets, along with development of value added products to better utilize all grades of tuna and by-catch. It was noted that in most of the Island countries the local tuna fishery industry have developed fairly close working relationships with the national fisheries departments but there is still a need for closer cooperation and support from the many other government agencies that have roles impacting upon the industry. Participants identified a number of priorities for action by regional organizations to facilitate the planned development of domestic fishing industries. These include:

- data analysis and assessment of the longline tuna resources in national waters;
- support for fisheries associations to improve their capacity and representation in decision making forums;
- assistance with modernizing of fishing operations through satellite fish finding technology; and
- advice on tuna industry development strategies.

Specific priorities for Samoa, Tonga, Cook Islands and Niue were also identified. DEVFISH will take the lead in implementing recommendations of the meeting as far as possible.