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PACIFIC POWER: A 20 Year Journey of Regional Leadership in Tuna Fisheries

Lessons in Stewardship from the Oceanic Fisheries Management Projects

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Stewardship in action: Two decades of Pacific partnership

MIDORI PAXTON
Global Head
Ecosystems and Biodiversity,
Planet Hub,
Bureau for Policy & Programme Support,
UNDP

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is honoured and privileged to have partnered with Pacific Island countries throughout the Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) journey that started some two decades ago.

Across its phases, the OFMP has stood as a beacon of regional collaboration, innovation, and resilience, demonstrating how Pacific leadership can safeguard one of the world's most valuable shared marine resources whilst simultaneously advancing sustainable development.

Since its inception, the OFMP has exemplified what can be achieved when science, policy, and collective will cohere in service of both people and planet. It has supported Pacific institutions to build capacity and integrate ecosystem-based management approaches, strengthened monitoring, control, and surveillance systems, and reinforced the link between healthy fisheries and national prosperity and development. Beyond its technical achievements, OFMP has deepened regional cooperation, giving Pacific voices a powerful platform in global fisheries governance.

The learnings captured in this report are not only a record of what has been achieved, but also a roadmap of next steps. They show that sustainable fisheries management is a cornerstone of resilience; it underpins food security, creates economic opportunity, and helps sustain cultural identity across the Pacific. They also remind us that continued vigilance is needed as the region faces new challenges, including climate-driven shifts in tuna stocks, intensifying market pressures, and persistent illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.

UNDP is proud to have worked alongside the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), the Pacific Community (SPC), the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), and numerous other development partners, civil society organisations, and governmental representatives in this effort.

Together, we have helped to demonstrate that effective, inclusive governance of shared natural resources are both possible and transformative. As we take stock of successes and look forward to the next chapter of our joint efforts, I cannot conclude without sharing my enthusiasm around the following two major global agreements which have now entered into force.

First, the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, that will further strengthen the global momentum toward a sustainable management of fisheries resources, and second, the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement (BBNJ) that complements the global framework for ocean governance by providing a mandate to support the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. UNDP remains committed to working with Pacific Island Countries, and all partners, in building on these achievements, ensuring that fisheries management continues to drive climate resilience, biodiversity protection, sustainable livelihoods, and the Pacific way of life.

MIDORI PAXTON
Director
UNDP Nature Hub

Fisheries at the heart of Pacific prosperity

The Global Environment Facility is very proud to be a long-standing partner to Pacific Island nations and supporting the sustainable management of their ocean resources.

ANDREW HUME, Ph.D.
International Waters Focal Area Coordinator
GEF Secretariat

Some of the earliest GEF International Waters investments were made in the South Pacific and this has provided an important foundation ever since. Over the past two decades the Oceanic Fisheries Management Project has carried this work forward together with UNDP, FAO, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, The Pacific Community, and many other important partners.

Through three phases of GEF support, OFMP has focused on strengthening national and regional institutions, promoting ecosystem and climate considerations into fisheries management, and strengthening compliance and monitoring systems. But perhaps most importantly, OFMP investments have also advanced economic and social outcomes, generating jobs, strengthening food security, and contributing hundreds of millions of dollars annually to Pacific economies.

This learning report on the transformation of tuna fisheries in the South Pacific highlights important lessons that exemplify the objective of the GEF International Waters Focal Area in supporting shared management of water systems. It highlights what can be achieved when individuals, organisations, and countries work together to foster regional collaboration for shared management of economically important natural resources.

It brings life to the challenges and successes of translating science into management. And it demonstrates an essential goal of all GEF investments - that sustainable management of natural resources is not a barrier to development but instead a pathway to long-term prosperity and resilience. The success of OFMP demonstrates how biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and socio-economic growth can advance together when guided by regional solidarity, sound science, and sustained investment.

More than just a reflection on the past twenty years, this learning report also provides important insights for the future. From climate-driven shifts in tuna distribution, to evolving global markets, and curbing IUU fishing, many challenges persist in the Pacific.

Yet the progress documented in this report offers confidence that Pacific Island nations are well positioned to meet them. The GEF will be there every step of the way and is committed to supporting the Pacific in ensuring that ocean resources continue to deliver benefits for healthy people and a healthy planet.

ANDREW HUME, Ph.D.
International Waters Focal Area Coordinator
GEF Secretariat

The Pacific tuna story: Resilience, sustainability, unity

NOAN DAVID PAKOP
Director General
Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)

Over the last two decades, the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and its 17 Members have transformed the management of tuna fisheries in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) into a global model of sustainability, resilience, and regional cooperation.

In partnership with the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and numerous regional organisations, the FFA's Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) has supported Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to build capacity and strengthen leadership in sustainable fisheries management.

Now in its third phase, the OFMP was born from the recognition that the Pacific's tuna resources are vital to food security and economic development, and that safeguarding them demands deeper collaboration, capacity building, and investment in science.

Central to OFMP's impact has been its support for ecosystem-based approaches and climate resilience. The project has embedded climate science into fisheries management, equipping Pacific nations to adapt to the shifting distributions of tuna stocks.

With the support of OFMP, our region has pioneered the use of advanced monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) tools, from satellite-based vessel tracking to electronic reporting, significantly reducing illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Perhaps most importantly, OFMP has been a catalyst for capacity building and knowledge transfer. It has funded training workshops, and fostered technical expertise to enable fisheries officers, scientists, and policymakers to implement evidence-based management strategies, including the adoption of harvest strategies and robust compliance frameworks.

Over several decades of working in fisheries management, at both the National Fisheries Authority of Papua New Guinea and the FFA, I have witnessed firsthand the pivotal role played by OFMP. It has been a cornerstone of the FFA's mission and an integral part of a broader regional effort that continues to deliver lasting benefits for our people, our economies, and our marine ecosystems.

Looking ahead, we face formidable challenges – from the impacts of climate change to evolving global market demands. Yet, with the enduring legacy of the OFMP and the continued partnership of our regional and international allies, I am confident that the Pacific will remain a global leader in the sustainable stewardship of its oceanic resources.

NOAN DAVID PAKOP
Director General
Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)

Acknowledgements and about this report

The FFA gratefully acknowledges the continued commitment and leadership of its Members, whose collaboration and stewardship underpin the achievements of the Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) over its successive phases.

This report was developed under OFMP3 by the FFA, with support from UNDP/GEF, and compiled by Lisa Buchanan, Chief Technical Advisor. It brings together key lessons from over 20 years of regional cooperation in oceanic fisheries management in the Western and Central Pacific. While the case studies and examples draw on OFMP-supported work, the lessons reflect the broader regional experience and cannot be separated from over two decades of collective Pacific effort in managing tuna fisheries.

Each thematic section begins with the regional context, outlining shared achievements, challenges, and lessons relevant to Pacific Island countries. Case studies and sidebars provide OFMP-specific examples, followed by a summary of how OFMP has contributed to the wider regional effort. Each section concludes with "What Still Needs Work," highlighting ongoing priorities and areas requiring further action and investment.

The report is intended as a practical learning resource for Pacific Island countries, partners, and the wider global fisheries community, supporting future efforts by identifying what has worked, where challenges persist, and what is needed to sustain progress toward 2050.

We acknowledge the continued support of partners including UNDP, GEF, SPC, PNAO, and others who have contributed technical expertise, funding, and collaboration over the life of the project.

We also recognise the many individuals who have contributed to this work, including past Chief Technical Advisors Hugh Walton and Barbara Hanchard, whose leadership has shaped the development and implementation of OFMP. We pay particular tribute to the late Hugh Walton, whose integrity, leadership and dedication to Pacific fisheries left a lasting mark on the project and the wider region.

We thank fisheries officials across FFA Members, as well as colleagues within the FFA Secretariat and partner organisations, for their ongoing engagement and technical contributions, including those who reviewed the report and provided valuable inputs.

We also gratefully acknowledge the substantial technical contribution of Peter Griffin, including drafting and analytical inputs that have informed this report, as well as contributions from Damian Christie and Francisco Blaha.

Together, this report reflects the depth of regional collaboration and shared commitment that underpin OFMP and its ongoing work.

The big picture vision

The work of the various organisations mentioned in this learnings report, in large part supports the guiding aims of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), the leading political and economic policy Organisation in the Pacific region which was established in 1971 and consists of 18 member countries and territories.

The PIF's Blue Pacific 2050 Strategy[1] sets out numerous long-term goals, levels of ambition, and measurable outcomes to be achieved by 2050, with specific milestones for 2030 as part of its implementation plan.

Relevant commitments and outcomes

Achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050 across the region, and advocate for strong global climate commitments.

Sustainably manage all Pacific Ocean and land resources, with improved protection of key biodiversity areas through networks of protected areas and area-based conservation measures, aiming to prevent extinctions and reduce extinction risks for native species.

Strengthen and respect sovereignty over maritime zones, including in response to sea level rise.

Make meaningful progress toward a safe circular economy, including improved regional waste and pollution policies (beyond the Cleaner Pacific 2025 framework), and develop regionally harmonised approaches to sustainable consumption and production.

[1] https://forumsec.org/2050

Support Members in the ratification and implementation of international agreements, such as the legally binding instrument on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), and ambitious global plastic pollution treaties.

Build regional science, education, and policy capacity, such as establishing a Pacific Centre of Excellence on Deep Oceans Science.

Promote inclusive ecosystem-based management, ensuring the full and meaningful participation of women, girls, and all Pacific peoples in stewardship efforts.

Secure significant new international funding for regional climate resilience and biodiversity protection, through coordinated engagement with global partners.

The Blue Pacific 2050 strategy is designed as a living framework, so new targets are set and updated as challenges and opportunities evolve.

Five facts about tuna in the Pacific

54%

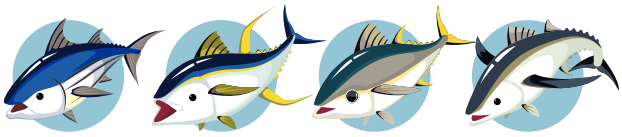
of the world's total tuna catch—amounting to approximately **5 million** metric tons—is sourced from the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

44%

growth in employment in the tuna sector between 2015 and 2022, directly supporting nearly **28,000** Pacific livelihoods.

480 USD mil/yr

the average annual revenue governments have collected from licenses and access fees over the past five years.



Our key tuna stocks – **skipjack, yellowfin, bigeye, and South Pacific albacore** – remain amongst the healthiest in the world.

The Western and Central Pacific Ocean accounted for **54%** of the world's tuna catch.

Around **30%** of global tuna supply is sourced specifically from FFA member waters.

Contents

Oceanic Fisheries Management Project - What we do

Photo: Francisco Blaha

OFMP's first phase began in 2005 to support and strengthen the regional and national institutions, led by Pacific SIDS that manage the highly valuable tuna fisheries of the WCPO.

Funded by GEF and UNDP and executed by FFA in conjunction with regional bodies including SPC, PNA, and the World Wide Fund for nature (WWF), OFMP is a three-phase project spanning over 20 years of high-impact work.

Through technical advice, funding, training, and coordination, OFMP works with Pacific SIDS to reinforce and advance effective management of their oceanic fisheries – particularly tuna, which is both an economic lifeline and a critical food source for the region.

Cook Islands delegation at the 21st Annual Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in Suva, Fiji, on 2 December 2024. Photo: FFA

What does OFMP do?

OFMP operates at multiple levels – international, regional, subregional, and national – to deliver its objectives through a comprehensive, ecosystem-based approach.

Key areas of work include:

- **Supporting Pacific nations and regional organisations by strengthening tuna stock assessment science**, improving fisheries data collection, and embedding ecosystem- and climate-informed management measures in regional decision-making forums such as the WCPFC.
- **Building government capacity through training and technical assistance so countries can negotiate conservation and management measures**, enforce rules, and combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing across their exclusive economic zones.
- **Backing collaborative regional and sub-regional arrangements**, helping Pacific small island developing states coordinate policies, apply agreed measures in national waters and fleets, and engage industry and other stakeholders to keep tuna fisheries environmentally sustainable while maximising economic benefits for their people.
- **Supporting the integration of climate considerations into fisheries planning and policy**, including through funded research and policy positions, risk assessments, and capacity development.

For OFMP, the work has always been about supporting Pacific leadership – helping create the conditions for good ideas to become lasting change. What follows are the stories behind the region's most successful tuna management initiatives, the challenges faced along the way, and the lessons they continue to teach us.

Fisheries management through the years

A timeline highlighting key milestones in Pacific tuna fisheries management since 2000, with a focus on how regional institutions and OFMP-supported efforts have contributed to long-term change.

2000–2005: Laying the foundations

2001

WCPF Convention was adopted after years of negotiations, establishing the world's largest Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO) framework.

2004

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) becomes operational, co-managing around 50% of global tuna catch.

2005

2nd GEF-supported project through UNDP and FFA: 'Pacific Islands Oceanic Fisheries Management Project', which assisted SIDS as they moved to reform, realign and restructure their national fisheries laws, policies, institutions and programs to take up the new obligations and opportunities which the WCPF Convention created OFMP Phase I launched under GEF to support Pacific SIDS in ratifying the Convention and reforming national laws.

2007–2012: Negotiation-driven reforms

2007

Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) introduced by PNA, quadrupling Pacific SIDS' purse-seine revenues by 2016.

2010

100% observer coverage mandated for PNA-licensed purse seiners, reducing IUU risks.

2012

Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration endorsed, later revitalised in 2023 to influence gender work in fisheries.

2014

WCPFC adoption of CMM 2014-06 on developing harvest strategies, sets a formal regional timetable for objectives, reference points and harvest control rules for key tuna stocks.

2018

GEF-funded Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) completed, which describes the status and trends of the fishery, principal threats to sustainability and the root causes of the major problems facing the region's living marine resources.

GEF-funded Strategic Action Programme developed and adopted by SIDS Ministers to provide SIDS with a clear road map for addressing the causes of the shared transboundary threats to their living marine resources, as identified in the TDA.

WCPFC Members agree that harvest strategies for major tuna stocks should be in place no later than 2018–2020.

2019

Pacific Community report card[1] indicates that all four species of economic importance in the region (skipjack, South Pacific albacore, yellowfin, and bigeye) are being fished sustainably, making the Pacific the only ocean basin tuna fishery to achieve this milestone.

2020

FFA-SPC maritime boundaries data sharing begins, supporting accurate EEZ enforcement.

Regional Port State Measures (PSM) framework adopted to strengthen port based enforcement.

COVID-19 pandemic leads to major operational disruptions including the temporary suspension of observer coverage and border closures.

2021

Noro Port (Solomon Islands) becomes the Pacific's first e-port with digital catch documentation.

OFMP3 project document submitted to GEF: Mainstreaming climate change and ecosystem-based approaches into the sustainable management of the highly migratory fish stocks of the West and Central Pacific Ocean, to be implemented through UNDP and FFA.

2022–2025: Climate-focused era

2023

Skipjack harvest strategy adopted.

PNA resumes 100% observer coverage post-COVID, integrating e-monitoring tools.

FFA Climate change strategy adopted by FFC.

The Commission reports substantial progress on a harvest strategy workplan for skipjack, yellowfin and bigeye.

2024

Noro Port (Solomon Islands) becomes the Pacific's first e-port with digital catch documentation.

Regional MCS Strategy 2024–2029 endorsed, accelerating electronic reporting adoption.

WCPFC adopts the Climate Change Work Plan

2025 & beyond: Future horizons

2025

The amended Treaty on Fisheries Between the Governments of Certain Pacific Island States and the Government of the United States of America (South Pacific Tuna Treaty) takes effect, modernising U.S.-Pacific fishing access.

National implementation under OFMP3 accelerates, with expanded activities across policy, livelihoods and climate in multiple countries.

2026

The Tuna Assessment Research Plan (2023–2026) and ongoing work on tropical tuna and South Pacific albacore measures continue to shape National Tuna Management Plans.

1 https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Brochures/FFA_2019_Tuna_Fishery_Report_Card.html

Glossary

BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement
CDS	Catch Documentation Schemes
CMM	Conservation and Management Measure
EAFM	Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ENBi	East New Britain Initiative
FAME	Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division (SPC)
FAD	Fish Aggregating Devices
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFA	Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GCF	Green Climate Fund, a special fund for climate adaptation projects
GFETW	Global Fisheries Enforcement Training Workshop
HMTC	Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IMCS	International Monitoring, Control and Surveillance
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated
MCS	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance
MCSWG	Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Working Group
MOC	Management Options Consultation
MSC	Marine Stewardship Council
NTMDP	National Tuna Management and Development Plan
OFMP	Oceanic Fisheries Management Project
PAW	Pre-assessment workshop
PEUMP	The Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership
PIRFO	Pacific Islands Regional Fisheries Observer
PLGED	Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration
PNA	Parties to the Nauru Agreement
POA	PNA Observer Agency
PROPER	World Bank project titled Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program - Second Phase for Economic Resilience
PSM	Port State Measures
RFMO	Regional Fisheries Management Organisation
RFSC	Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre
RIMS	Regional Information Management Systems
SC	Scientific Committee
SAW	Stock Assessment Workshop
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	The Pacific Community
TUFMAN2	Tuna Fisheries Data Management System (Phase 2)
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDS	Vessel Day Scheme
WCPFC	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WCPO	Western and Central Pacific Ocean
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

1

Ten lessons from 25 years of regional progress

1 Ten lessons from 25 years of regional progress

Over the past 25 years, FFA Members have steadily strengthened the way their shared tuna resources are managed – moving from a collection of approaches to a coordinated regional system shaped by Pacific priorities and collective decision-making.

The ten lessons below, grouped under three themes, reflect this collective, regional experience. While OFMP has contributed support across many areas, they represent the broader Pacific effort to sustain healthy tuna stocks, secure economic benefits, and reinforce the systems that underpin long-term management. Each lesson is explored in more detail in the thematic sections that follow.

Foundations for success

1. Regional cooperation is powerful – and built through commitment

One of the clearest lessons from the last two decades is that sustained regional cooperation has transformed Pacific tuna management into one of the world's most respected models of sustainable fisheries governance – but this unity has taken time, trust, and carefully structured regional processes.

Institutions like the FFA, The Pacific Community (SPC), and Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) have enabled Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to speak with unified regional positions in international negotiations. Coordination mechanisms such as the Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Working Group (MCSWG) and pre-meeting consultations like the Management Options Consultation (MOC) have been central to aligning national priorities and strengthening collective oversight of shared management measures.

Tools like the PNA's Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) have further demonstrated the strength of regional solidarity, delivering economic returns, managing fishing effort, and generating revenue for Pacific nations.

October 2025 - Operation Kurukuru 2025. Photo: FFA

OFMP has complemented this cooperation by providing funding for MOC and MCSWG meetings, offering technical advice, and supporting coordination roles that assist Members to prepare for, and participate in, regional decision making processes. See thematic sections ***Pacific-led planning: How regional fisheries management frameworks have evolved and Tuna, technology and teamwork: How Pacific Island Nations lead in MCS for Tuna fisheries for specific examples.***

2. Science-based management works only when it's understood and applied effectively

Robust science has underpinned Pacific fisheries management for decades, and its impact lies in how that science is interpreted and used in decision making. Targeted investment – including stock assessment workshops, technical exchanges, and long-term scientific roles – has supported Members to engage confidently with complex models and incorporate scientific advice into national and regional processes.

Advances in electronic reporting, data systems, and tagging have improved the quality of data feeding into regional models. Equally important has been ensuring that Members can interpret this science in the context of their own fisheries, so they can make informed decisions aligned with national priorities.

OFMP has contributed by funding SPC's stock assessment workshops, supporting technical positions at SPC and FFA, and funding national initiatives to modernise data collection and analysis. See ***From data to decisions: Science for sustainable tuna management.***

PNG hosted a High Seas Boarding and Inspection (HSBI) Training to strengthen fisheries surveillance. The HSBI training was held for 40 officers from the National Fisheries Authority and Defence Force from 21 - 25 July 2025 in Rabaul, Papua New Guinea.

The week-long training covered theory and practical vessel inspection exercises at Rabaul Port, focusing on strengthening capacity to prevent, deter and eliminate Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) Fishing. Photo: FFA

3. Strong monitoring, control and surveillance systems protect resources and revenues

Monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) is how fisheries policies are operationalised. Over the past two decades, FFA Members have built one of the most effective MCS systems in the world. Effective fisheries management depends on strong MCS systems, and those systems depend on ongoing cooperation, investment, and national commitment. Without them, sustainability and economic gains cannot be secured.

OFMP has strengthened MCS through funding for MCSWG meetings, supporting observer training programmes, resourcing national compliance initiatives, and providing technical support to refine the Vessel Day Scheme. See thematic section ***Technology and teamwork: How Pacific Island Nations lead in MCS for Tuna fisheries for examples.***

Managing for resilience

4. Harvest strategies shift management from politics to predictability

Harvest strategies offer a shift from reactive, year-by-year negotiations to pre-agreed, science-based rules that guide decision-making that pre-empts stock declines. The 2022 adoption of a harvest strategy for skipjack has shown the value of this approach: greater predictability, transparency, and resilience.

A harvest strategy – in the form of a management procedure – for South Pacific albacore was adopted at the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission in 2025. Formal development of a harvest strategy for bigeye tuna in the WCPO is well advanced. Embedding these harvest strategies at both regional and national levels will be essential to ensure sustainable, long-term management.

What are harvest strategies?

Harvest strategies are pre-agreed, science-based management plans that set out how much fishing can occur while keeping key tuna and other fish stocks at healthy levels in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

They combine long-term objectives, stock status reference points, monitoring, and harvest control rules that automatically adjust catch or effort when stocks fall below targets or approach critical limits. By moving decisions from short-term politics to rule-based triggers, harvest strategies reduce the risk of overfishing, provide more predictable conditions for fleets and coastal states, and help safeguard food security and livelihoods across the Pacific.

Each phase of OFMP has supported Member participation in harvest strategy consultations and funded advisory roles to integrate harvest strategies into national management. See the thematic section, ***Pacific-led planning: How regional fisheries management frameworks have evolved*** and ***From data to decisions: Science for sustainable tuna management for examples.***

5. Climate change is no longer a future threat – it's a pressing reality

While Pacific SIDS contribute little to global carbon emissions, they face disproportionate risks as ocean warming alters tuna ecosystems. Projections indicate significant shifts in stock distribution over the coming decades, with major implications for access, revenue, and food security.

Climate change must be embedded in harvest strategies, access agreements, and governance systems – and Pacific nations must have a meaningful role in shaping global responses. As the distribution of tuna shifts due to climate change, there is a risk that access rights and revenues will shift between countries too. Adaptation will require governance arrangements that address these distributional impacts fairly, not just technical measures to track the fish.

OFMP3 has embedded climate considerations into fisheries policy through dedicated climate advisory and science roles and Member participation in climate–fisheries policy forums. See thematic section ***Changing currents: What climate science is teaching us about Pacific tuna for examples.***

6. Economic benefits are built – not guaranteed

Pacific nations have significantly increased revenues from tuna fisheries through deliberate policy choices. The Vessel Day Scheme (VDS), stronger licensing frameworks, and market-based tools like Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification have enabled countries to capture more value from their waters. These gains have reinforced national control over tuna resources, allowing Pacific countries to decide how their fisheries are accessed, how value is captured, and how benefits flow to their people.

But they did not happen by chance. Economic benefits depend on strategic negotiation, strong rules, and sustained investment in governance. Without them, control over tuna – even within a country's own EEZ – can quickly erode.

What is the Vessel Day Scheme?

The Vessel Day Scheme is a regional system used by Pacific Island countries to manage industrial tuna fishing effort, particularly by purse seine vessels. Instead of limiting the number of boats or total catch, countries set a hard cap on the total number of fishing days available across their combined waters each year, then allocate and sell those days to fleets.

Because the cap is based on scientific advice about tuna stock health, it helps prevent overfishing while giving Pacific states stronger control over access to their resources. The scheme has also significantly increased licensing revenue, aligning economic incentives with conservation.

OFMP has supported VDS implementation, national licensing reforms, and traceability initiatives to maintain access to premium markets. See thematic section ***Pacific-led planning: How regional fisheries management frameworks have evolved for examples.***

Enabling long-term change

7. Good governance is built on strong, Pacific-led national systems

Strong national institutions and clear policy frameworks are the foundation of effective fisheries management across the region. Pacific countries and territories continue to evolve their management plans, legal frameworks and policies in line with their priorities and regional commitments. These nationally driven systems ensure that Pacific people realise the social, economic and cultural benefits of tuna fisheries.

OFMP 1, 2 and 3 has contributed targeted support where requested- such as providing technical advice, assisting with reviews of national tuna management plans and delivering regular professional development opportunities for Pacific fisheries professionals. See thematic section ***Strengthening national systems: For sustainable tuna governance for examples.***

8. Gender and inclusion need more than awareness – they need to be built in from the start

Women and marginalised groups play vital roles across the tuna value chain – particularly in processing, administration, informal trade, and increasingly in compliance-related functions such as data analysis and coordination. These contributions have long supported the sector, yet they have not always been fully reflected in formal policy and planning processes.

Participants from Operation Tui Moana 2025 celebrate their contributions at the FFA Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre in Honiara. The strong participation of women in regional surveillance operations reflects FFA's ongoing efforts to strengthen gender inclusion in fisheries. Photo: FFA

Meaningful inclusion cannot be delivered through participation targets alone. Effective initiatives intentionally incorporate specific, meaningful goals for women and marginalised groups into activity design – not just aim for 50/50 attendance. This includes recognising different roles, constraints, and opportunities – and addressing structural barriers such as safety, leadership access, and decision-making power. Equity must be built into the core of how projects are designed, funded, and measured.

OFMP 2 and 3 have supported this regional focus by integrating gender and inclusion goals into project design, contributing to the Moana Voices publication and funding livelihood training for women and youth. See thematic section ***Fairer Fisheries: Inclusion, Empowerment, and Resilience in the Pacific for examples.***

9. Successful projects are designed to adapt, not just deliver

Lasting impact rarely comes from rigid project plans – it comes from responsive design. The most effective initiatives are those that are flexible enough to shift with evolving priorities, meet countries where they are, and adapt to realities on the ground. Whether responding to changing political dynamics, or shifts in focus over time, the most successful initiatives have been those that allow for course correction and learning along the way.

OFMP's multi-phase design and flexible work planning have enabled the project to respond to emerging needs, adjust activities, and maintain momentum through changing circumstances. See thematic section ***From dollars to durability: Designing and funding sustainable Pacific tuna management for examples.***

Members engaged in cybersecurity training activities during the 10th Regional Information Management Systems (RIMS) Workshop held at the FFA Conference Centre in Honiara on 26 March 2025. Photo: FFA

10. Long-term knowledge sharing and professional development are the heart of lasting change

The most important resource in fisheries management is people. The strength of Pacific tuna governance comes from the skills, experience and relationships built across national and regional institutions over many years. Building skills, retaining expertise, and sharing knowledge across borders are essential for resilient systems. Professional development has the greatest impact when it's long-term, consistent, and grounded in Pacific contexts - not one-off training. Knowledge sharing across countries and generations reinforces regional identity, peer learning, and strengthens shared ownership of outcomes.

OFMP has supported this regional focus through investment in long-term technical roles, secondments, training programmes, and regional networks that have contributed to a generation of Pacific fisheries professionals. See thematic sections ***National systems at the heart of Pacific tuna governance: leadership, capacity and long-term vision*** *and* ***Technology and teamwork: How Pacific Island Nations lead in MCS for Tuna fisheries*** *for examples.*

2

Pacific-led planning: How regional fisheries management frameworks have evolved

2

Pacific-led planning: How regional fisheries management frameworks have evolved

Linked to Lessons 1, 4 and 6

Key takeaways:

- *Strong management frameworks provide stability and resilience, but they must be regularly updated to reflect new science, changing conditions, and evolving national priorities.*
- *Regional cooperation and science-based management have been central to the Pacific's success in managing highly migratory tuna stocks – and require ongoing investment in coordination, trust, and shared rules.*

Success in Pacific tuna management has not been accidental. It rests on deliberate, coordinated frameworks – at both regional and national levels – that translate shared visions into enforceable rules, align diverse national priorities, and ensure decisions are grounded in the best available science. These frameworks have evolved over decades, shaped by negotiation, trust-building, and continual refinement, and remain the backbone of effective management across the WCPO.

Bold regional alliances, cutting-edge science, and consistent enforcement have transformed tuna management in the WCPO, contributing to the region being recognised as a global model for sustainability.

A series of complementary management frameworks now support Pacific nations, harness real-time data and independent oversight, and set clear, enforceable rules to protect tuna stocks for future generations.

The creation of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in 2004 was designed to provide that regional overview. Twenty years on, it is widely considered a success. But WCPFC is only one part of a broader governance landscape. A range of complementary frameworks now underpin how tuna is managed across the WCPO.

"As tuna are considered highly migratory, management interventions are more effective at the regional scale,"[2]

explained researchers in Fisheries in the Pacific: The Challenges of Governance and Sustainability.

[2] https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01735395/file/2016_Fisheries_in_the_Pacific.pdf


Photo: FFA

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

The WCPFC is the primary regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) for the WCPO. It adopts binding Conservation and Management Measures (CMMs) that regulate fishing effort, protect stocks, and manage bycatch. These rules apply across the Convention Area and must be implemented by member countries through national laws and flag State responsibilities.

Supporting the Commission are two key subsidiary bodies:

- A Scientific Committee, which advises based on stock assessments and other research; and
- A Technical and Compliance Committee, which tracks compliance and proposes enforcement strategies.

While the WCPFC is the RFMO for the WCPO, it is only one element of a broader governance landscape. A range of complementary agencies and frameworks – formal and informal – support coordinated management across the region, each addressing different needs while reinforcing one another.

Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)

Established in 1979, the FFA was created to help Pacific Island countries prepare for and exercise their sovereign rights granted under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). With the adoption of UNCLOS in 1982, coastal States – including Pacific SIDS – gained exclusive rights to manage and benefit from fisheries resources within their 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

FFA remains the region's principal agency supporting countries to manage, develop, and control their offshore tuna resources. FFA works with 17 Members to:

- Negotiate and enforce collectively, including through joint surveillance operations and real-time vessel monitoring.
- Develop and implement national tuna management and development plans that align with regional measures.
- Shape the future of fisheries by supporting Members on issues such as labour standards, trade policy, and long-term sector development.

The Pacific Community (SPC)

As the region's technical and scientific agency, SPC manages the region's data and provides analysis and modelling that underpin decision-making at both national and regional levels.

Through its Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) Division, SPC conducts stock assessments for key tuna species, maintains long-term tagging and data programs, and supports Pacific Island countries to interpret and apply scientific advice.

It also helps Members strengthen national data systems, improve catch reporting, and expand local expertise in fisheries science and analytics. Whether informing harvest strategies or supporting national planning, SPC ensures that Pacific tuna management rests on the strongest possible evidence base.

Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA)

The PNA is a subregional grouping of eight Pacific Island countries (the Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu) plus Tokelau – that have joined forces to manage the tuna resources within their collective EEZs. Together, they control some of the most productive tuna fishing grounds in the world.

The PNA's cooperative management began with the 1992 Palau Arrangement, which set the first coordinated limits on purse-seine fishing effort and later provided the foundation for the Vessel Day Scheme.

The PNA is best known for pioneering the Vessel Day Scheme (VDS) for purse seine fisheries, which allocates fishing days across Members and allows them to sell access to these days. This innovation transformed fisheries governance in the region – replacing fragmented access arrangements with a coordinated zone-based system that strengthened economic control and sustainability limits. As noted in a 2018 article in the *Asia-Pacific Journal of Ocean Law and Policy*, revenues from the purse seine fishery increased steadily from the year of full implementation in 2010, and by 2016 had quadrupled – having a transformational impact on the finances of some of the smaller island Members of the PNA.

PNA has also driven reforms in observer coverage, with 100% observer presence on purse seine vessels since 2010 (interrupted only briefly during the COVID-19 pandemic). Its observer programme, managed through the PNA Observer Agency (POA), works alongside national systems to ensure independent oversight and regulatory compliance at sea.

The group continues to collaborate on high-value, shared policy issues – such as zone-based management, effort limits, and access conditions. Their coordinated leadership remains central to balancing sustainability, economic returns, and sovereignty over tuna resources.

South Pacific Group (SPG)

The South Pacific Group (SPG) is an informal coalition of southern FFA Members – including Cook Islands, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, and Tonga – working together to improve coordination on shared policy priorities.

While not a formal institution like the PNA, SPG has emerged as a valuable platform for subregional cooperation. The group collaborates on technical analyses, harvest strategy development, and joint proposals to the WCPFC—particularly around southern longline stocks such as South Pacific albacore. Regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries

Endorsed in 2015, the Roadmap sets out a shared vision to maximise economic and social benefits from tuna fisheries while safeguarding their sustainability, structured around four pillars: sustainable management, increased economic returns, employment and livelihoods, and strengthened regional cooperation.

Market access and certification

Market-driven tools have become an important complement to traditional fisheries management – helping Pacific Island countries demonstrate sustainability, access premium markets, and strengthen traceability across the supply chain.

PSM in action. MIMRA officer crosschecks suspicious vessel behaviors identified in the VMS (map on the lower left) with logbooks, catch logsheets, temperature records, etc. found on board.
Photo: Francisco Blaha

Two major approaches stand out:

- **Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification:** MSC certification recognises fisheries that meet global standards for sustainability, stock health, ecosystem impact and management systems. Certification of WCPO skipjack in 2023 marked a milestone, enabling access to higher-value markets and rewarding sustainable practices.
- **Catch Documentation Schemes (CDS):** Certain markets, especially the EU, impose regulatory CDS requirements that officially certify the legality of fish catches as they move through the supply chain. These schemes are designed to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and ensure compliance with relevant fisheries management measures.

These approaches are increasingly necessary to maintain market access. As expectations evolve, Pacific countries are working to strengthen systems that demonstrate sustainability and traceability. Efforts to improve supply chain integrity have also been supported by WWF-led initiatives focused on strengthening data systems across the Pacific tuna industry.

National legislation and policies

Pacific Island countries have progressively strengthened their fisheries laws and policies to better align with regional measures and global obligations. These reforms have focused on incorporating WCPFC rules, increasing penalties for IUU fishing, supporting national tuna management plans, and enabling tools such as electronic reporting and monitoring.

While steady progress has been made, updates remain uneven across the region, and implementation is often constrained by staffing and resourcing. Continued support for legislative review and planning will be essential to ensure national frameworks keep pace with changing management needs.

CASE STUDY

Leading from the Frontline: Lessons from Pacific tuna management

Few have witnessed the transformation of Pacific tuna fisheries as closely as Ludwig Kumoru, from his days as a Fisheries Officer in Papua New Guinea to his leadership roles as Chief Executive Officer at PNA and now as director of fisheries management at the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).

Kumoru reflected on the hard-won lessons and evolving frameworks that have shaped one of the world's most valuable and sustainably managed tuna fisheries.

From fragmentation to regional unity

"In the beginning, every country tried to do their own thing," Kumoru recalls. The establishment of the FFA in 1979 and later the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in 2004 marked a turning point, enabling Pacific nations to work together as a collective force.

"With the help of FFA, and eventually the Commission, we were able to push ideas through as a block," he says. This unity empowered Pacific nations to negotiate collectively, shifting control from distant-water fishing nations to local hands. Kumoru notes, "People began to really take ownership…if we were to benefit, we had to step up."

Today, collective responsibility and accountability are core to the region's management culture, with clear rules and consequences for non-compliance.

Building robust management frameworks

Management frameworks have become increasingly practical, coordinated and science driven

Ludwig Kumoru outlines the core components:

- Resource assessment: Science-based stock assessments guide sustainable harvests.
- Licensing and allocation: Frameworks specify "allocation, or the number of boats, number of fishing days, or amount of catch," he adds.
- Monitoring and data collection: "Every boat has to have a monitoring system. These days, we have electronic reporting, recorded and sent from the boat on a daily basis to a central system," Kumoru explains.
- Compliance and penalties: "If you don't do this, what are the penalties? You could go to court."
- Independent observers on boats are now standard: "Observers collect both scientific data and also keep an eye out to make sure what is reported is true, so there's some form of independent verification."

The rise of harvest strategies

A major shift has been the adoption of harvest strategies-pre-agreed rules that guide management responses to stock changes. "What used to happen is that we would negotiate every year what could be taken. But with harvest strategies, we have to agree well in advance," Kumoru explains.

"We set what they call a target reference point[3]. If we start ending up taking maybe 65 or 70% of the stock, we know that we have to cut down, but the rules to do so are already agreed to, so we just follow the rules."

While harvest strategies are in place for skipjack, work continues for other species. "When Members know what the share is for them, it's easier for the FFA Members as a group to bring this up to the Commission level."

Consensus, capacity, and the role of OFMP

Achieving consensus among diverse nations remains a challenge. "Part of reaching consensus is this educational part of it, making people understand these issues, what it means for them as a country, and then for us as a region."

The Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) has been an important support mechanism. "Opportunities through things like OFMP3 have really driven that. It's given that opportunity for government officers to start attending these workshops. Start to see the bigger picture. We have to get out of the silos within our countries, we have to agree as a region."

OFMP has funded training and enabled countries to hire technical experts, accelerating knowledge transfer and embedding best practices. "In my personal view, if we didn't have help from [OFMP], most of the things that we see happening wouldn't have happened. The funding front has really helped achieve a lot of these things. Through the help of OFMP3, Members are better organised. We have knowledge transfer. It has really helped the Pacific to where they are today," Kumoru says.

Addressing remaining challenges: Climate, labour, and gender

Modern frameworks now address more than just fish stocks. "It's no longer just about how much fish is in the sea. There are other considerations around climate change, the welfare of workers on boats, even gender issues," Kumoru notes.

Kumoru says the success story is grounded in regional solidarity, science-based management, and continuous learning. The Western and Central Pacific's tuna fisheries are now widely recognised as among the best managed in the world.

As Kumoru sums up, "Without help from OFMP3, I think we'd still be facing shortfalls. It's really been helpful. It has mobilised the membership from different corners of the Pacific and is one of the most positive programmes in this area."

[3] A target reference point is a desired, achievable level of stock biomass.

How OFMP has Contributed to Fisheries Management

Over the past two decades, OFMP has contributed to Pacific countries strengthening fisheries management systems at both regional and national levels. Key contributions include:

- **Facilitating unified regional positions** by funding coordination meetings such as the annual Management Options Consultation (MOC), where FFA Members prepare negotiating positions ahead of WCPFC meetings.
- **Supporting long-term technical expertise** through the funding of key advisory roles – including an FFA Fisheries Management Advisor (Climate Change) and three core SPC roles (a senior climate scientist, a fisheries scientist, and a data analyst/trainer) – to provide additional technical capacity for Pacific SIDS in policy advice, data analysis, and preparation for technical and policy meetings.
- **Supporting institutional functions within PNA**, including targeted funding to support the PNA Office to deliver services to member countries – particularly in relation to the Vessel Day Scheme and compliance frameworks.
- **Contributing to subregional cooperation** through modest contributions to South Pacific Group (SPG) meetings, helping southern FFA Members coordinate on longline management and shared policy priorities.
- **Investing in future leadership** by supporting SPC's Pacific Island Young Professionals Programme, which trains early-career professionals who then return to work in national fisheries agencies.
- **Contributing to national-level planning** through funding for the development and review of National Tuna Management Plans (NTMDPs) in countries such as Nauru, Papua New Guinea, and Kiribati, and expert advice on tiered economic concessions for FSM.
- **Reinforced traceability system**s by supporting WWF-led initiatives as part of broader market access and certification requirements to enhance supply chain transparency and accountability.

FSM's VDS leadership

"The OFMP3 project has supported Federated States of Micronesia to strengthen the implementation of our National Vessel Day Scheme Management Schemes, particularly in relation to allocations and concessions.

"This support is helping us ensure our tuna resources are managed in a way that aligns with national priorities, ensures transparency in our processes, maximises economic returns for our people, and meets regional commitments."

Eugene Pangelinan
National Oceanic Resource Management Authority (NORMA)
Federated States of Micronesia

South Pacific Albacore (SPA) Meeting. Photo: FFA

What still needs work

While much has been achieved, regional fisheries management remains a complex and ongoing effort. Aligning national priorities with collective regional decisions can be challenging, especially technical constraints, tight timelines, or the need for political compromise affect how quickly issues can move forward.

The recent agreement on South Pacific albacore[4], for example, follows more than a decade of discussions and negotiation. Even with strong coordination mechanisms in place, Pacific SIDS continue to navigate structural pressures: limited staff, overlapping responsibilities, and high turnover make it difficult to build and retain institutional knowledge. In many cases, officials must review technical papers, consult nationally, and prepare for negotiations under significant time pressure.

In addition, as global market requirements evolve, systems for traceability and supply chain transparency also need ongoing investment. Building these systems requires not just data infrastructure, but policy alignment, training, and investment across the region.

The foundation is strong. What's needed now is continued, well targeted support requested by Members to sustain technical expertise, deepen cooperation, and ensure systems can keep pace with emerging challenges.

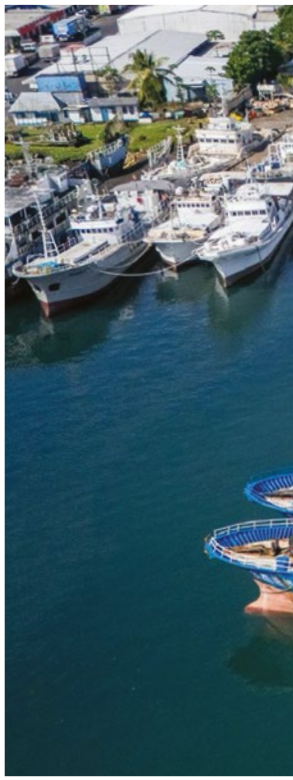
[4] https://www.ffa.int/2025/07/milestone-agreement-on-south-pacific-albacore-allocation-strengthens-regional-tuna-management/

3

From data to decisions: Science for sustainable tuna management

3

From data to decisions: Science for sustainable tuna management



Linked to Lessons 2 and 4

Key takeaways:

- *Electronic reporting and new technologies have significantly improved the timeliness and quality of tuna stock data in the Pacific, but challenges remain for full adoption and up-to-date reporting, especially among longline fleets.*
- *Capacity-building workshops like the SPC Stock Assessment Workshop (SAW) help Pacific fisheries officers understand and interpret stock assessments for improved management. They also strengthen regional collaboration and professional networks.*
- *Stock assessment science in the Pacific continues to advance, with new models, genetic tools, and regular peer reviews to ensure the best available evidence for sustainable tuna management.*

Efforts to track tuna stocks in the WCPO began in the 1950s, but by the 1980s and 1990s fishing activity had grown to such an extent that millions of tonnes of fish were being caught each year. The need for accurate, timely data to underpin management became clear.

Historically, measuring tuna stocks across the region has relied almost exclusively on conventional methods such as logsheets filled in on a daily basis showing catch or effort-based activity.

The issue with these methods was that the information only arrived when ships came into port to offload their catch. In the case of longline fishing, which is important for bigeye, yellowfin and South Pacific albacore, some vessels could remain at sea for more than a year. This created serious delays and backlogs of data, slowing understanding and affecting stock assessment accuracy.

Advancements in technology now allow many vessels to report while fishing at sea, on a daily basis, or via electronic reporting soon after arriving at port. This has improved the immediacy and relevance of the data, however longline vessels still often provide delayed submissions, where data continues to accumulate until the end of the vessels' long deployments.

Fishing vessels docked at the Mua-i-Walu Port, Walu Bay, Fiji - June 2025. Photo: FFA

Electronic reporting has been a game-changer

The electronic reporting systems being used – such as OnBoard, developed by SPC, and FIMS, by PNA have enabled standardisation of data across the fishery, which allows 'apples for apples' comparisons. The systems also have built-in 'sense checks' to make sure that the information being provided is reliable, by looking for outlying data. This improves the quality of the information, but also needs to be adopted more widely across the fishery.

Still, uptake remains uneven. While many purse seine vessels now submit near real-time data, longliners often continue to provide delayed submissions, particularly those vessels primarily operating on the high seas. Expanding electronic reporting will be crucial to improving both stock assessments and compliance.

Outside of catch and effort data provided by the industry, there are no independent surveys of fish stocks – the WCPO area is simply too large and would be impractical to survey accurately. However, tagging programmes are run under the guidance of the WCPFC every year, alternating between a focus on tagging skipjack and bigeye/yellowfin tuna. These data provide information on movement, mortality and growth, and are key inputs into the region's stock assessments.

Controlling by-catch transshipment in Noro, Solomon Islands. Photo: Francisco Blaha

Sampling the catch

Observations and samples taken both by observers on board vessels and samplers at port are used to provide information as to the size and sex of the fish being caught, along with samples of stomach contents. Biological tissue samples taken are stored for later analysis of how the fish are growing, what their fat content is, which feeds into some of the work being done by OFMP2 and OFMP3, understanding the impact of climate change on tuna abundance, monitoring the ecosystem in which tuna live, and tuna distribution patterns.

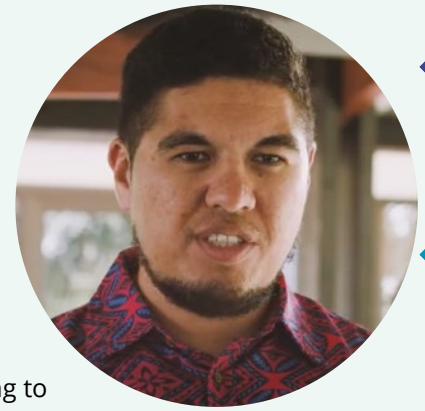
As the bulk of population estimates are based on catch data, improvements in the analysis of that data also helps to ensure the long-term sustainability of the population. At a basic level, the population is estimated based on a combination of the size of the fish being caught, and the rate at which they are being caught.

However it is also necessary to understand how fishing methods and vessel numbers and capacity have changed. Advances in technology could see catch rates remaining stable (for a time) despite a declining population. Understanding how these technological changes affect catch rates remains a challenge.

New genetic tools are helping scientists better understand tuna population structure across the WCPO. A pilot project led by SPC and CSIRO, using Close Kin Mark Recapture techniques, is testing how genetically related tuna are in different areas. By starting with South Pacific albacore, the project aims to refine population size estimates and assess whether tuna form distinct regional groups or a single migratory population.

CASE STUDY

More than numbers: How stock assessment workshops strengthen Pacific fisheries science



When Marino Wichman first attended a stock assessment workshop in 2017, he admits he was "coming in green" with little fisheries experience.

Now, working as a fisheries scientist at SPC, he leads these workshops and reflects on their transformative impact.

"At the start it was very mathematical, a lot of numbers," Wichman recalls. "These are very complex, the concepts heavy, and you are trying to make them accessible to students. But the biggest misconception about the stock assessment workshops is that they're about teaching people to run assessments, they're not. The goal is to build understanding, what are the key ins and outs of stock assessments, what are the most important parts of these assessments."

Building understanding, not just skills

The main purpose of these workshops is to equip national fisheries officers in the Pacific with the ability to interpret stock assessments so they can inform better management decisions for their countries. Rather than teaching participants to run complex models, the workshops help them understand the critical elements of assessments and their implications for national and regional fisheries management.

Wichman explains, "For Pacific Island countries and territories, expertise and human capacity is limited, which is why I was really grateful to have gone through the course. It really does provide that foundation when you walk into the scientific committee at the WCPFC."

The workshops have since expanded to cover broader topics such as climate change variability, bycatch and harvest strategies. "We generally aim to focus on issues that are really important to our Members."

Addressing real-world challenges

Staff retention remains a challenge, especially in small island administrations. "One of the difficulties that we faced was staff retention. The pay isn't great . When better opportunities come along, people move on. Often, we're having to start from scratch," Wichman says. The annual workshops remain a valuable mechanism for strengthening and refreshing technical understanding, bringing together a diverse mix of participants - from data managers to fisheries directors.

Interactive, practical learning

Workshops are hands-on and interactive, offering both introductory and advanced courses for groups of 15 to 25 participants. "There's a bit of Q&A, we use Moodle to hold all the course content so they can access it whenever they need, and we have quizzes to test knowledge or concepts," says Wichman.

The highlight of the week is a group project that simulates real-world reporting. Students split into teams, each assigned a stock assessment, and are told: "You've been asked by your manager to report back on this species. You have 20 minutes to digest the information and present the key points."

They then deliver live presentations to a panel of SPC scientists, gaining experience in distilling complex analyses into clear, decision-ready messages. Feedback has shown the importance of tailoring these presentations for different audiences, managers, fishers, or the public, which has guided plans to develop audience-specific templates for future workshops.

From data to better management

Wichman emphasises the importance of participants seeing the bigger picture: "Members are really the most crucial part, because it's their data, their information, their fisheries feeding into these models.

Continuous improvement and regional impact

The science behind stock assessments is always evolving. "Every year, the stock assessment scientists are critiqued by their peers at the Pre-assessment Workshop (PAW) on methodology, approach, and models. Wichman says, "That process is the crux of making sure we're doing the best we can, providing the best available science".

"The workshops foster camaraderie and professional networks, helping participants realise that you're actually facing the same issues, the same problems, and you build a repository of contacts that you can turn to, both formally and informally, to discuss them."

Marino Wichman
Fisheries scientist, SPC

Reflecting on the Oceanic Fisheries Management Project's (OFMP) support, Wichman says: "without that expertise, cooperation and collaboration between nations on sustainable tuna fishing would be that much harder to achieve." The workshops not only build scientific understanding but also create a strong network of fisheries professionals advocating for evidence-based management.

"The key thing about the program that you don't really hear about is the connections and camaraderie. It's a great networking platform as well", Wichman says.

In the vast Pacific, these stock assessment workshops-grounded in evidence and collaboration-are supporting Pacific nations to make informed, effective decisions for sustainable tuna management.

How OFMP has supported tuna data and scientific capability

- **Strengthened stock assessment understanding** by funding SPC's annual *Stock Assessment Workshop*, which helps fisheries officers across the region understand, interpret, and communicate scientific findings to inform national and regional decision-making.
- **Supported improved data analysis skills** by supporting SPC-led *Tuna Data and R-Assistance Workshops*, which strengthen participants' ability to manage, analyse, and apply fisheries datasets in policy and regulatory contexts.
- **Enabled real-time technical support** through an OFMP-funded *Fisheries Data Scientist* at SPC, who operates a region-wide Slack helpdesk, providing national officers with on-demand guidance for tools such as the regional TUFMAN2 database and national related queries.
- **Enhanced data access and usability** by supporting the update of SPC's country webpage portal, which aims to make national fisheries data more accessible and user-friendly for member governments.
- **Expanded access to policy resources** by contributing to an overhaul of the *FFA Members Hub* and public website – ensuring fisheries staff have timely access to key meeting documents, policy briefs, and reference materials.
- **Supported national data modernisation** by contributing to the shift from paper-based to electronic reporting in the Solomon Islands, where OFMP contributed to the digitisation of port data as part of the Noro e-port rollout – improving timeliness, accuracy, and traceability of catch information.

What still needs work

While stock assessment science in the Pacific is among the most advanced in the world, challenges persist in ensuring that timely, high-quality data feeds into models from across the region. Interpreting and applying stock assessment outputs also remains demanding for fisheries staff across the region.

The SAW continues to be one of the most effective tools for strengthening scientific understanding in tuna and billfish stock assessment. The value of the workshop is evident in its alumni, many of whom now hold senior positions in fisheries across SPC member countries.

Adoption of electronic reporting remains incomplete – particularly in the longline fishery – where paper logbooks and delayed data submission continue to limit near-real-time understanding of stock and fishery dynamics. The scale and remoteness of the WCPO makes large-scale independent surveys impractical, meaning the region continues to rely on industry-supplied data, tagging programmes, and port sampling.

Frozen tuna are hauled from a fishing vessel's cold storage. Photo: FFA.

Emerging tools like genetic population models and climate-linked forecasting offer major potential, but they require sustained investment, long-term datasets, and specialist expertise. Collaborative efforts in these innovations are fostering new partnerships for long-term research directions with SPC.

Institutional systems to support data analysis – such as national databases, data dissemination portals, and cross-border sharing protocols – still require ongoing attention to ensure they remain robust and up to date. Without these, decision-makers may lack the critical information they need, when it matters most.

To maintain momentum, Pacific countries will benefit from continued support to modernise data collection systems, scale up innovations like electronic reporting and monitoring, shift towards data automation processes and ensure that science and decision-making stay tightly connected.

Technology and teamwork: How Pacific Island Nations lead in MCS for Tuna fisheries

Linked to Lessons 1 and 3

Key takeaways:

- *Regional cooperation, technology adoption, and ongoing skills development have enabled Pacific Island nations to develop world-class Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) systems that protect tuna fisheries from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and ensure sustainable management.*
- *The Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Working Group (MCSWG) plays a central role by driving digital transformation, policy guidance, and collaborative enforcement, supporting healthier tuna stocks, reduced IUU fishing, and increased economic benefits for Pacific nations.*
- *Key lessons include the necessity of strong national legislation, clear regional policies and cooperative arrangements, ongoing adaptation to new technologies and climate impacts, and the importance of regional solidarity and training to maintain both sustainability and economic gains from fisheries.*

Protecting tuna means more than good policy – it requires effective monitoring, control and enforcement. MCS is what turns fisheries rules into real-world action: tracking vessels, verifying catches, and enforcing management arrangements to ensure compliance.

In the vast waters of the Pacific, where tuna travel freely and fleets from dozens of nations operate, strong MCS is essential to deter illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and protect one of the region's most vital resources.

The Pacific's MCS success story

Over the past two decades, Pacific Island nations have steadily transformed national enforcement efforts into a shared system capable of monitoring vast ocean areas and deterring illegal fishing. Working through the FFA and other regional platforms, countries have introduced powerful tools and procedures to uphold fisheries rules and protect their resources.

In October 1999, FFA Members agreed to a regional Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) programme, including a condition that licensed foreign vessels must be registered on the FFA Regional register of Foreign Fishing Vessels. Full implementation of the programme was targeted within two years. Observer programmes – both human and electronic – provide independent verification of what's happening on board at seas, supporting enforcement and transparency.

Strict regional licensing requirements, known as the FFA Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions (HMTCs), ensure that all foreign fishing vessels meet consistent standards to access national waters. Joint surveillance operations, involving FFA Members and the quadrilateral partners of Australia, New Zealand, France and the USA and supported by surface, aerial and satellite monitoring, help detect and deter IUU fishing activities.

These tools, backed by coordination among FFA Members, have enabled Pacific countries to defend their rights, manage shared tuna stocks more effectively, and secure greater economic returns from their fisheries.

The role of the MCS Working Group: Driving cooperation and innovation

Behind many of the Pacific's most significant MCS advances is the Regional Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Working Group (MCSWG) – a core platform to discuss national and regional MCS issues and priorities .

Made up of fisheries officials and MCS practitioners from across FFA's 17 Member countries, the MCSWG helps set regional priorities, share intelligence, and steer collective action. It has played a central role in formalising collaboration, advancing MCS technological tools , shaping regional Port State Measures, and overseeing implementation of the Regional MCS Strategy 2024–2029. It also supports Members to formalise maritime boundaries and strengthen national enforcement capability. An integrated MCS system that has delivered real-world benefits – from healthier stocks to stronger compliance.

June 2025 - DSBI Training in Nadi, Fiji. Photo: FFA

Hooked on data: Leading the way on IUU research

Recognising the immense threat posed by IUU fishing, Pacific nations, supported by the FFA and WCPFC, have invested in groundbreaking research to accurately measure the scale of IUU activity.

In 2015, the region undertook the world's first comprehensive study[5] quantifying IUU tuna fishing, using a "bottom-up" approach that analysed detailed risk categories such as unlicensed fishing, misreporting, and illegal transshipment. This methodology set a new global benchmark, providing not just aggregate figures but also insights into the specific behaviors and sectors driving IUU activity.

A follow-up study in 2021[6] revealed significant progress: estimated IUU tuna catch dropped to 192,186 tonnes (worth around US$333 million) using data from 2017-2019, down from earlier estimates of over 300,000 tonnes. Notably, the research highlighted that most IUU fishing was committed by licensed vessels not complying with regulations, rather than by "pirate" boats, enabling more targeted monitoring, control, and surveillance strategies.

The region's commitment to transparency, regular updates, and adoption of electronic monitoring technologies has positioned the WCPO region as a global leader in both the science and policy of IUU fisheries management. This pioneering research not only protects Pacific livelihoods but also sets a model for sustainable tuna management worldwide.

[5] https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d5ab1a95-87f7-4c0b-9b8c-6d3943da6d1c/content

[6] https://www.franciscoblaha.info/blog/2021/10/29/quantification-of-iuu-fishing-in-the-pacific-islands-region-2020-update-lx4s2-zbfae-8pw3d

CASE STUDY

From the deck to the regional stage: Allan Rahari's perspective

Allan Rahari's journey from patrol boat captain in the Solomon Islands to Director of Fisheries Operations Division at the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency illustrates how the region's MCS systems have evolved.

Rahari began his MCS career at sea, enforcing laws as a patrol boat commander in the Solomon Islands. "The decision to apprehend a vessel rests with the commander," he says. But without access to licensing data or regional coordination, those decisions were often made with limited information – sometimes resulting in wrongful apprehensions.

In the 1980s, Rahari remembers a "lack of interagency cooperation between fisheries and police" and "a sense of mistrust between those entities, even though they were enforcing the same rules." He worked to bridge this gap, recognising, "the enforcement aspect is actually police maritime, whereas the regulatory aspect is with fisheries, and they need to go together, as opposed to each doing its own thing."

A new era: Technology and collaboration

Rahari highlights a shift brought by regional frameworks and new technology. "A lot of the tools that we now have in place is actually premised on that interagency cooperation at a national level," he says, citing the aerial surveillance programme and the regional Port State Measures framework as examples requiring collaboration.

The establishment of the FFA Regional Fisheries Surveillance Centre (RFSC) in Honiara in 2008 was pivotal. Officers at sea gained access to vital information: "They can provide information to support their decision-making processes, including awareness of what's happening around them, vessels around their vicinity, the licensing information that is available," he says.

Technological advances have been significant. "Electronic reporting has continued to evolve over the years. The elevation of electronic reporting as a key tool to addressing unreported, misreported catches on fishing vessels has continued to strengthen," Rahari notes. The FFA leads on policy while SPC handles technical delivery: "A lot of vessels are now electronic reporting, particularly if you look at purse seine vessels. A lot of observers are also electronically reporting their observer reports."

The arrival of satellite connectivity like Starlink is another game-changer: "We started thinking about how we can provide data faster to vessels out there conducting inspections. The evolution of those satellite technologies, with things like Starlink, has continued to strengthen communications with vessels at sea."

Building capability: Training and observer support

Rahari is encouraged by the professionalisation of MCS training: "The training sort of shifted to a more regional kind of training. It is standardised across the region. This is where the Certificate in Fisheries Compliance and Enforcement came in, so when you complete the course, you have a recognised qualification."

The observer program has also evolved. "There was a lot of innovation around how we can ensure that observers are safe onboard fishing vessels. Now we have what we call an observer compensation scheme in place ensuring that observers have adequate insurance cover when actually doing their work." During COVID-19, "there was a study undertaken to ensure that the observers were able to maintain their livelihoods," with support in financial literacy and mental health for observers and their families.

Central to all this work has been the effort of the MCS Working Group meeting, which Rahari plays a key role in leading. The latest MCSWG meeting in Honiara in April 2025 was the 28th to date and a reminder of the region's commitment to continuous learning and collaboration.

Key lessons:Law, cooperation, and caution

Rahari's key lesson: "It really is about strengthening national legislation. That's a big one. It's all well and good having legislation in place, but if the legislation is very limited in terms of the penalties, then people will continue to exploit the resources." He stresses, "The implementation is always at the national level, and so they need to take it up. We at the Secretariat only facilitate the environment to ensure that it's conducive for them to take up those tools."

He also warns of "technology creep" and the crowded field of new partners and tools: "There are a lot of tools, particularly maritime domain awareness tools, that are coming into the region. There is a need to start making some clear distinctions on what tools we can use to support our work. Are these technologies cost-effective? Are they addressing duplication and information security requirements?"

OFMP's role: Bringing practitioners together

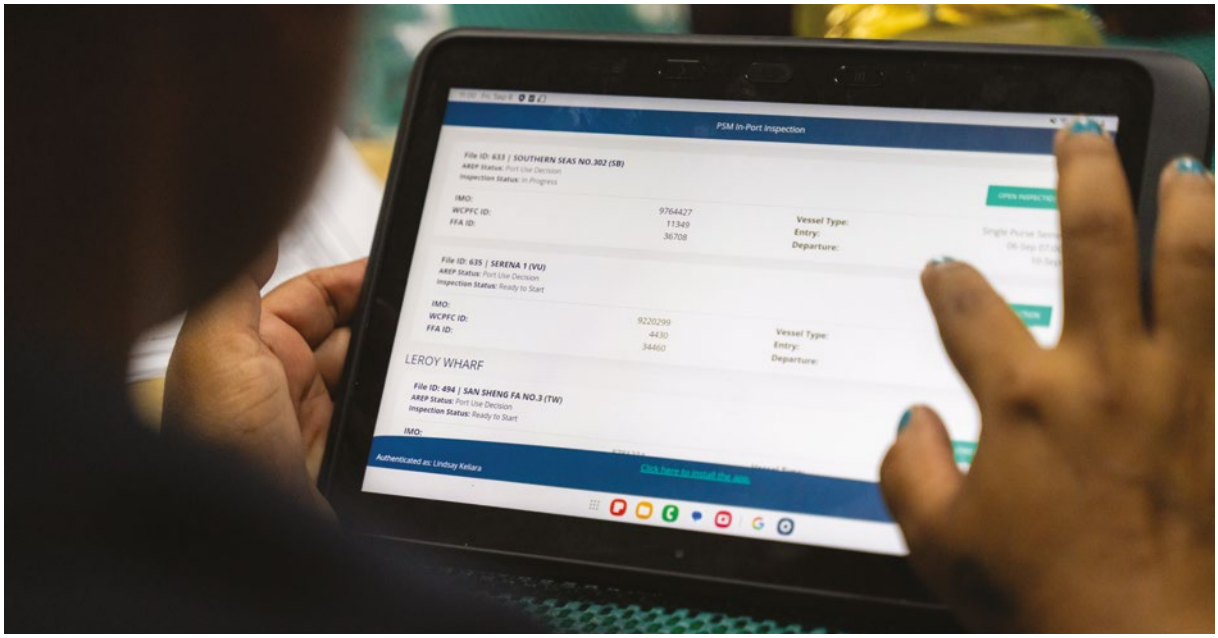
Rahari sees the support of the Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) as being important to ensuring strong participation in the MCSWG: "OFMP has really supported us in the MCSWG meetings, and I must say that the meeting this year really shows the value of funding support to these meetings.

"We were able to bring two participants per member country... so when you have fisheries and enforcement personnel sitting together during discussions, it makes the conversations a lot more complete... That funding support from OFMP in bringing together all the practitioners in the MCS space is really, really beneficial to us."

Looking ahead: Balancing sustainability and economic gains

Rahari sums up the mission: "MCS is a key component of sustainable fisheries management, and so we've done really well in terms of ensuring that our four key tuna stocks are healthy." The challenge is "maintaining that, ensuring that they continue to remain healthy, but at the same time maximising the economic benefit from them."

Rahari's experience underscores that the Pacific's MCS success is built on trust, innovation, and collaboration-qualities that will remain vital as the region faces new challenges ahead.



FFA's Electronic Port State Measures (e-PSM) system was launched in March 2024. Photo: FFA

How OFMP has contributed to supporting strengthened MCS in the Pacific

Over the past two decades, OFMP has supported the development and strengthening of Pacific MCS systems – helping to turn policy into action, and regional vision into daily enforcement.

- **Enabled regional coordination and dialogue** by funding the annual MCSWG, helping bring together fisheries and enforcement officials from across the region to align strategies, share intelligence, and strengthen collective responses to IUU fishing.
- **Supported observer training and certification** through investment in the Pacific Islands Regional Fisheries Observer (PIRFO) Train-the-Trainer programme, OFMP has supported national agencies to deliver their own observer training. The initiative enabled selected regional trainers to become certified instructors, improving the quality, consistency, and sustainability of observer training programmes across FFA member countries. This approach helps ensure that observer standards are maintained and expanded even in the face of staffing turnover or resource pressures.
- **Strengthened the implementation of the Vessel Day Scheme** by providing technical and operational assistance to the PNA Office, helping refine compliance systems and operational tools.
- **Delivered tailored national assistance** in countries such as the Republic of the Marshall Islands, including funding a dedicated study of transhipment operations to inform future port state control efforts.
- **Supported MCS capability and connectivity** by funding compliance workshops, and regional exchanges – ensuring practitioners are equipped to keep pace with evolving risks and tools.

"FFA and OFMP supported the Marshall Islands to undertake a detailed study of high seas transshipment activity, helping us to better understand patterns of fishing effort, vessel behaviour, and transshipment dynamics.

"This work is contributing to stronger monitoring and will support our long-term efforts to protect tuna stocks and maximise economic returns for our people."

Glen Joseph
Director, Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority
Marshall Islands

What still needs work

Even with strong systems in place, Pacific MCS efforts continue to face pressure from evolving risks and the practical constraints faced by national agencies. MCS teams remain small and stretched. High staff turnover makes it difficult to retain expertise or stay current with new technologies. Funding and staffing pressures also limit consistent participation in regional coordination and surveillance activities.

Technology adoption remains uneven. Electronic monitoring and reporting are expanding, but uptake varies – particularly among longline fleets and in countries with infrastructure or connectivity challenges. Data management, security, and access protocols also require further development.

Some national legal frameworks need updating to keep pace with modern enforcement. Not all countries have legislation that enables the use of electronic evidence or supports timely and adequate sanctions for non-compliance. Delays in adopting regional instruments can lead to inconsistent enforcement.

The number of external technology providers and surveillance initiatives in the region is increasing. While this brings new tools, it also poses risks of duplication, misalignment, and reduced national control over sensitive data. Better coordination is needed to ensure that outside initiatives strengthen – rather than fragment – Pacific-led systems.

As domestic fleets grow, there is a need to ensure all operators understand and follow MCS obligations. Smaller or newer actors may need tailored support, including training and accessible compliance tools.

The region has laid a strong foundation. What's needed now is sustained investment in integration, legal alignment, and ongoing technical capability – to ensure MCS systems remain Pacific-led, effective, and adaptable.

Operation Kurukuru 2025. Photo: FFA

Recognising innovation in the IUU fight

The Stop IUU Fishing Award, created by the International Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (IMCS) Network, honours national and regional fisheries initiatives showing creativity, success, and real impact against illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing – a major ocean threat.

It rewards innovative monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS) efforts, from high-tech to traditional knowledge, especially from developing countries, with winners presented at the Global Fisheries Enforcement Training Workshop (GFETW).

Past recipients include the Bahamas' Marine Action Partnership (4th award, 2023), Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (2019), Indian Ocean Commission (2016), and meritorious entries like Marshall Islands MIMRA.

https://imcsnet.org/stop-iuu-fishing-award

4

Changing currents: What climate science is teaching us about Pacific tuna fisheries

4

Changing currents: What climate science is teaching us about Pacific tuna fisheries

Linked to Lesson 5

Key takeaways:

- *Scientific modelling can estimate how tuna stocks will be impacted towards the middle of the century under various climate change scenarios.*
- *Long-term monitoring and scientific programmes are crucial to understanding how climate change will impact the marine environment in the Pacific.*
- *Ecosystem-based approaches are needed and are expanding the focus beyond tuna to assess how climate change affects their broader food web and marine biodiversity.*

"we are expecting significant changes [in tuna distribution], not in the next decade, but more around the 2040 - 2050 timeframe".

Dr Valerie Allain
Senior Fisheries Scientist (Climate Change Ecosystem Analysis)
SPC

From ocean acidification to increasing water temperatures and sea-level rise, climate change is already transforming the Pacific Ocean. These changes are not distant forecasts, they are real and unfolding, with direct implications for marine ecosystems, food security, and the economies of Pacific Island nations.

Understanding these impacts is essential to ensure the long-term sustainability of the region's most valuable fisheries. For more than a decade, scientists in the region – particularly those based at SPC – have been working to model how tuna and related species will respond to different climate scenarios. Their work is helping shape regional adaptation efforts and spark important conversations about resilience, equity, and the future of fisheries management in a warming world.

Senior Fisheries Scientist Dr Valerie Allain, who has been studying tuna ecosystems in the region for nearly 25 years, explains: "we are expecting significant changes [in tuna distribution], not in the next decade, but more around the 2040 - 2050 timeframe".

Frozen tuna are hoisted for offloading aboard a fishing vessel docked in Apia, Samoa, in May 2025. Photo: FFA

What began with a small scientific team has expanded into a multidisciplinary programme combining ocean modelling, climate forecasting, and ecosystem observation. This expanding body of research is helping to answer critical questions: Where will tuna go and how will their quantities change? What happens to national revenues if stocks shift away from their exclusive economic zones (EEZs)? And how should management systems evolve in response?

Changes in tuna distribution and abundance

Eastward shift

Climate change is expected to cause a substantial eastward shift[7] in the distribution of key tuna species such as skipjack, yellowfin, and bigeye tuna. This shift is driven by changes in sea surface temperatures, ocean currents, and prey availability.

"Then you've got the albacore tuna, which is a more temperate species, and a bit different from the others," Allain says.

"Albacore is very sensitive to oxygen content in the water, which isn't well modelled in the context of climate change, so there's a lot of uncertainty there."

[7] https://researchoutreach.org/articles/tuna-move-climate-change-impacts-pacific-island-economies/

Decreased abundance in EEZs

The EEZs of Pacific Island countries are projected to see a decrease in tuna biomass. For instance, under a high greenhouse gas emissions scenario, tuna biomass in the combined EEZs of ten Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) is expected to decrease by 13% by 2050[8].

Increased biomass in high seas

Conversely, tuna biomass in the high seas of the central-eastern Pacific Ocean is likely to increase. This redistribution could lead to a 23% increase in tuna biomass[9] in these areas under a high emissions scenario.

Looking at the big picture: Tuna habitat and biological factors

Tuna are among the most closely studied fish in the Pacific, thanks to routine catch, tagging, and observer-based monitoring across industrial fleets. These long-term data sets provide critical insights into how climate change is affecting distribution, growth, and abundance.

A very useful development, says Allain, has been the creation of the Pacific Marine Specimen Bank[10] which is maintained by SPC.

“Basically we ask observers in the region to collect biological samples, including stomachs, muscle and liver, all sorts of things. Those are analysed here at SPC and in partner’s laboratories.

“We are far from exploiting the specimen bank to its maximum potential, but it’s here and anybody basically can dig into those samples and produce useful studies and information.”

With the oldest samples being 2 to 3 decades old, and counting, the bank offers the potential to explore the impact of climate change on tuna biology.

Climate change affects the pelagic habitat (through ocean warming, acidification, changes in currents), and the availability of prey, the location of spawning grounds, and the overall health of tuna stocks. For species like skipjack and yellowfin, new conditions in the central-eastern Pacific may prove favourable. But others – such as bigeye tuna – are expected to face sustained biomass declines, even in these new areas.

The impacts go beyond tuna. As Allain explains, “Tuna are not a standalone species – they’re part of an ecosystem. If their habitat is disrupted, the tuna won’t stay healthy.” That’s why scientists are also paying attention to micronekton – 2-20cm, free-swimming organisms like squid, shrimp, and lanternfish that form the foundation of tuna diets. Monitoring the food web helps scientists understand tuna movements.

[8] https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-causing-tuna-to-migrate-which-could-spell-catastrophe-for-the-small-islands-that-depend-on-them-164000

[9] https://researchoutreach.org/articles/tuna-move-climate-change-impacts-pacific-island-economies/

[10] https://www.spc.int/ofp/pacificspecimenbank

"Characterising and understanding the tuna habitat is part of the work we're doing in collaboration with other institutions. We go to sea on research vessels, and during those scientific cruises we collect information on the micronekton specimens and the tuna environment."

Economic implications

Reduced government revenue

The shift in tuna distribution is expected to significantly impact the economies of tuna-dependent Pacific SIDS. These countries rely heavily on access fees from industrial fishing fleets, which constitute a substantial portion of their government revenue. A decrease in tuna biomass within their EEZs could lead to a reduction in access fees and government revenue by up to 17%[11] for some states.

At the same time, increased tuna biomass in high seas areas raises equity and enforcement concerns. Countries without direct access to these areas may face increased economic pressures, particularly if management frameworks fail to adapt.

Climate impacts also extend beyond tuna. Bycatch species, previously less emphasised in management discussions, are gaining attention for their role in food security and ecosystem health.

"It's something that was largely disregarded because fishing companies are only interested in tuna," says Allain.

"But it's of importance for the Pacific countries for food security because it's actually a good source of protein."

In short, climate change is reshaping both the ecology and the economics of Pacific fisheries – creating an urgent need for adaptive policies that safeguard national interests, support food security, and ensure that management frameworks remain fit for purpose.

Adaptation and mitigation strategies

Effective, adaptable management strategies are essential to navigate the increasing impacts of climate change on Pacific Island states. The WCPFC plays a vital role in ensuring that climate realities are reflected in harvest strategies, reference points, and other conservation and management measures. This is still an emerging practice in the region.

As tuna stocks shift, equity will become increasingly important – not only between Pacific nations and global actors, but also among Pacific Island countries and territories themselves. Ensuring that adaptation measures

[11] https://theconversation.com/climate-change-is-causing-tuna-to-migrate-which-could-spell-catastrophe-for-the-small-islands-that-depend-on-them-164000

are fair and responsive to differing national impacts and capacities will be key to maintaining regional solidarity and shared stewardship. In response, adaptive strategies are emerging to ensure that even as fish move, benefits remain shared. This includes forging partnerships between fishing zones and processing states, and investing in processing infrastructure across the region so that economic value is secured before the catch even leaves the Pacific.

The East New Britain Initiative (ENBi)[12] plays a vital role in supporting these approaches – facilitating cooperation, building inter-country partnerships, and enabling Pacific Island countries and territories to strengthen their economic positioning under climate change.

In May, 2025, Manatu Samani-Maile undertook a two-week attachment with the Forum Fisheries Agency in Honiara. During her visit she worked alongside the OFMP supported Climate Change Advisor, who provided technical input on Tonga's national planning. Manatu gives her perspective on the experience and the importance of working together across the Pacific to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

"Being here at the FFA Secretariat has provided valuable guidance in developing the Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management Plan for Tonga's fisheries sector.

"The Ministry of Fisheries in Tonga currently has several fisheries management plans that incorporate climate change-related activities. However, there has not yet been an overarching climate change strategy specific to the Ministry.

"Through a recent stakeholder scoping workshop, we gained important insights into how climate change is impacting fishing activities. Stakeholders shared their experiences with changing weather patterns, shifting fishing grounds, and other challenges. The workshop also provided a platform to discuss practical adaptation measures to address the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

"The information gathered during this workshop will serve as a crucial reference in guiding the development of the new Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management Plan"

Manatu Samani-Maile
Principal Fisheries Officer
Ministry of Fisheries - Tonga

[12] https://www.ffa.int/2025/10/pacific-tuna-industry-advancing-the-east-new-britain-initiative-enbi-for-inclusive-and-sustainable-benefits/

Unloading and sorting tuna in Noro. Photo: Francisco Blaha

How OFMP has contributed to climate-resilient fisheries management

Through its ongoing support, the Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) has helped the region lay the groundwork for more adaptive, climate-aware fisheries management. While scientific leadership has been anchored in regional institutions such as SPC, and policy direction shaped by FFA Members, OFMP has played a consistent supporting role, strengthening the knowledge, planning, and tools needed to respond to climate risks.

Key contributions include:

- **Strengthening regional science leadership** by supporting a Senior Climate Scientist role at SPC over more than a decade. This role has helped advance knowledge about tuna distribution, ecosystem modelling, and projected climate impacts. This role has ensured that Pacific-driven science continues to inform management decisions and regional policy development.
- **Embedding climate change in fisheries policy** through an OFMP funded Fisheries Management Advisor (Climate Change) at FFA. Through this position the project has supported the development and rollout of the FFA Climate Change Strategy and Implementation Plan. The advisor also provides targeted national support – such as training and policy analysis with fisheries agencies in Tonga and other countries.

- **Enabling regional dialogue and global advocacy.** OFMP has funded participation by Pacific SIDS in key climate-fisheries forums, including the 2023 Climate Change Symposium and the 2025 UN Ocean Conference, helping ensure that Pacific perspectives are represented in global discussions on ocean and climate governance. OFMP also engaged in COP28 held in Dubai in 2023 and via the OneCROP process to support PICTs when they negotiated at the United National Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- **Expanding knowledge-sharing platforms.** The project has contributed to updates of SPC's country web portals and improvements to the FFA Members Hub – enhancing access to climate-related data, projections, and resources that support national planning and adaptation.
- **Supporting forecasting and scenario modelling.** The project has assisted in the development of models that assess the combined impacts of fishing and climate change on tuna stocks – integrating oceanographic data, fisheries catch records, and climate projections to help make these tools more accessible to national decision-makers.
- **Promoting collaborative research and knowledge exchange.** OFMP supports cooperation between Pacific institutions and international research partners to better understand how climate change is altering marine ecosystems. This includes work on species distribution shifts, micronekton dynamics, and food web impacts – ensuring management strategies reflect the latest science.

What still needs work

While progress has been made in understanding the impacts of climate change on Pacific tuna fisheries, translating that knowledge into practical, coordinated responses remains a major challenge.

- **Climate science still outpaces policy uptake.** Although modelling and projections are becoming more sophisticated, there are gaps in how this information is integrated into management frameworks – particularly at the national level. Many countries face constraints in time, resourcing or access to specialised expertise to fully interpret and apply climate science in planning and negotiation contexts.
- **Adaptation responses remain uneven.** Some Pacific SIDS have made strong progress in embedding climate change into fisheries strategies, while others are at earlier stages. Tailored support is needed to help countries move from awareness to implementation – particularly those where staffing pressures, technical demands, or political considerations shape the pace of action.

Transporting Tuna
Photo: Francisco Blaha

- **Institutional coordination is still evolving.** Climate change affects multiple sectors – fisheries, environment, finance, disaster risk – and aligning these portfolios remains difficult. Strengthening coordination between fisheries and national climate change agencies is essential to ensure fisheries priorities are reflected in broader adaptation plans and climate finance pipelines.
- **Equity between countries must be addressed.** Projected eastward shifts in tuna distribution could increase revenue for some Pacific countries while reducing it for others. Unless governance frameworks evolve to manage these distributional impacts fairly, the risk of fragmentation or reduced solidarity may grow.
- **Economic adaptation needs to be scaled.** Adaptive approaches – such as developing processing partnerships and securing benefits before tuna leaves the region – are emerging through initiatives like the ENBi. However, these strategies remain in early stages. Strengthening institutional and financial mechanisms to support economic resilience – particularly for countries that may lose access to some of their tuna stocks – will be essential for sustaining equitable development outcomes across the region.
- **Data gaps and infrastructure constraints persist.** Sustained investment is still needed in electronic reporting, ocean monitoring, and ecosystem observation to gather fisheries-related and fisheries-independent data to strengthen the reliability of the models. Many tools are still at pilot stage, and scaling them will require long-term commitment – not just from projects like OFMP, but across the regional system.

- **Strengthening existing institutions:** Most Pacific Islands countries and territories continue to face shortfalls of dedicated climate change expertise. This needs to be developed as island nations and territories develop their efforts to adapt to climate change and endeavour to base those efforts on the best scientific evidence available.

The foundations for climate-resilient tuna management are in place – but what's needed now is scaled, sustained, and regionally aligned action to close the implementation gap.

Fisherman managing a heavy load of tuna that has been hauled onto a fishing vessel. Photo: FFA.

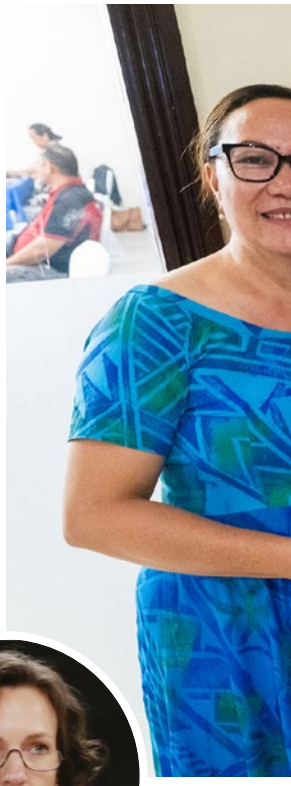
5

Towards fairer fisheries: Inclusion, empowerment, and resilience in the Pacific

5

Towards fairer fisheries: Inclusion, empowerment, and resilience in the Pacific

Linked to Lesson 8



Key takeaways:

- *Empowering women, youth, and marginalised groups is essential to building inclusive and resilient tuna fisheries – across both offshore management and onshore value chains.*
- *Equity requires more than participation targets – it relies on creating safe workplaces, fair opportunities for advancement, and recognition of the diverse roles people play across the sector.*
- *Progress is underway across the region. Regional commitments and standards are supporting this shift, while national implementation and recognition of diverse contributions continue to strengthen.*

The importance of inclusive participation

For decades, women have played essential but often under-recognised roles in Pacific tuna fisheries – particularly in processing, marketing, administration, and informal trade. In fact, women make up as much as two-thirds[13] of the post-harvest workforce, yet their work is frequently concentrated in lower-paid, less visible roles.

By contrast, women's participation in tuna fishing itself remains low, although a small number have taken on senior roles, such as captaining longline vessels or leading all-female crews.

As Kate Barclay, Professor of International Studies and Global Societies at University of Technology Sydney and an expert in the field of gender in Pacific fisheries notes, "it's probably a pretty small number of women who do want to work on boats, but there are women who want to, and they should be able to do that safely".

Inclusion in fisheries is not just about gender balance on vessels—it's about recognising and valuing the full range of contributions, ensuring safe and fair working conditions, and creating pathways for meaningful participation and influence at all levels of the industry.

"it's probably a pretty small number of women who do want to work on boats, but there are women who want to, and they should be able to do that safely".

Kate Barclay, Professor of International Studies and Global Societies University of Technology Sydney

[13] https://pasifika.news/2022/03/women-fish-too-invisible-women-in-tuna-industries/

FFA Open Day 2019
Photo: FFA

Progress and persistent gaps

In recent years, regional commitments such as the revitalised Pacific Leaders Gender Equality Declaration (PLGED) and the Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions (HMTC) have helped elevate gender and labour issues in the fisheries sector. Nearly all Pacific Island countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and development partners increasingly link funding to gender outcomes. However, implementation continues to progress at different paces.

A 2023 FFA-led study on Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)[14] found that while awareness of gender equality and the need for greater social inclusion has increased, many national fisheries agencies face challenges in sustaining follow-up activities, targeted strategies, or dedicated resources.

The study also highlighted that while offshore fishing and observer roles remain male-dominated, there are meaningful opportunities in small-scale fisheries and value-adding activities, such as tuna smoking, drying, and market sales. These are areas where women and marginalised groups could thrive with greater access to training in business development and financial literacy.

[14] https://www.ffa.int/download/gender-social-inclusion-in-tuna-fisheries-an-analysis-of-gender-social-inclusion-in-pacific-tuna-fisheries/

Women crew. Photo: FFA

Barriers to equality go beyond participation

Structural and systemic barriers continue to influence who benefits from the tuna industry. These include:

- **Safety and welfare concerns**, particularly for women working at sea.
- **Unpaid caregiving responsibilities**, which limit mobility.
- **Limited representation** in leadership and decision-making roles.

The GESI study stressed that human rights abuses on fishing vessels – such as inadequate living conditions – are not only a barrier to women's participation but an issue for the whole industry. It recommended stronger enforcement of the HMTC, which requires clean and safe on-board facilities for all crew.

In 2019 FFA Members adopted the Crew Employment Harmonised Minimum Terms and Conditions (HMTCs)[15] which was based on the International Labour Organisation's Working in Fishing Convention (C188). The terms and conditions were revised in 2024.

Under this framework, fishing vessels that do not meet crew and labour standards can lose their fishing rights. This marks the first global instance where labour standards are formally linked to the legal right to fish, and represents a major step toward improving working conditions for crew across the region's tuna fleets.

"One of the key lessons from OFMP is that gender equality in fisheries is not just about participation numbers. Real progress requires addressing influence, safety, and opportunity across the value chain, and removing structural barriers through intentional policy, systems, and program design from the outset."

Lisa Buchanan
Chief Technical Advisor, OFMP3
Oceanic Fisheries Management Project

[15] https://www.ffa.int/download/minimum-terms-and-conditions/

April 2025 - 28th MCS Working Group. Photo: FFA

Inclusive approaches in action

At the national level, there are signs of progress. For example, a loan provided to SolTuna by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) included requirements to strengthen gender and social inclusion. With additional support, the company:

- Built a daycare centre for factory workers' children.
- Delivered financial literacy and leadership training.
- Created pathways for women to move into senior roles.

In a significant regional milestone, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) agreed in December 2024 to adopt a Conservation and Management Measure (CMM) on labour standards CMM 2024-04 – the first of its kind among RFMOs.

This breakthrough reflects years of Pacific-led advocacy, building on the region's implementation of the HMTC and the International Labour Organisation's C188 Convention. It signals a growing recognition that decent working conditions and the protection of human rights are a core element of sustainable fisheries management, not a separate issue.

During Phase 2 of the Labour Standards for crew working on the fishing vessels project, the FFA will collaborate with Members to support the integration of the FFA HMTCs and the WCPFC CMM into national legislation.

These examples demonstrate that meaningful change is possible when inclusion is embedded from the outset – and supported with funding, leadership, and accountability.

A tuna industry that benefits everyone

An inclusive tuna sector fosters resilience. When all stakeholders are safe, visible, and able to contribute meaningfully, the entire system becomes stronger.

Inclusion needs to be embedded in how fisheries are managed, how value chains are supported, and how benefits are shared – across communities, countries, and generations.

Lessons for meaningful inclusion: Insights from the OFMP experience

OFMP's work on gender inclusion in the Pacific has prompted practical reflection on what actually supports meaningful and lasting change. From project-level design to regional advocacy, several key insights have emerged:

Quotas alone are not enough

Setting targets like 50% female participation may look inclusive on paper, but they don't address the underlying barriers – such as time constraints, safety concerns, and traditional gender roles – that often limit women's ability to participate. Effective inclusion requires practical, targeted strategies that remove or reduce these constraints.

Recognise women's onshore contributions in offshore fisheries

Offshore fisheries initiatives often overlook the critical work women do in post-harvest roles. Inclusion must go beyond vessels to recognise the full value chain.

Empowerment requires more than presence

Women may attend meetings or trainings, but that doesn't automatically mean they are heard or have influence. True empowerment means ensuring that women have the confidence, opportunity, and support to influence decisions.

Local context and cultural norms matter

Gender dynamics vary across Pacific Island countries. Strategies must reflect cultural norms, local realities, and community expectations – while also addressing harmful norms where they undermine safety, inclusion or rights..

Rights and welfare are foundational

Barriers such as unsafe working conditions and human rights abuses affect everyone in the industry – not just women. Linking labour standards to fishing rights – now being implemented across the region—has set a global precedent.

Photo: Francisco Blaha

How OFMP has contributed to social inclusion and gender equality

OFMP has helped raise the visibility of gender and social inclusion issues in the tuna sector, while supporting early actions to embed equity in project activities and regional decision making.

Key contributions include:

- **Highlighting women's roles across the value chain.** The project supported publications and events that showcased Pacific women's leadership in fisheries – such as the Moana Voices series and the regional Gender Symposium – helping challenge assumptions and increase recognition of women's contributions across both offshore and post-harvest sectors, contributing to greater visibility of women's roles and shifting perceptions in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

- **Promoting economic empowerment through value-adding.** OFMP partnered with the FFA PROPER project, SPC, and FAO to conduct livelihood training for all FFA Member countries. To build on this work and provide a strategic framework for future efforts, OFMP3 is now supporting the development of an FFA Livelihoods Framework, with a particular emphasis on value-adding opportunities for women and youth.This supports more coordinated and scalable income generation and improves access for women and youth to skills and opportunities.

- **Linking gender goals with broader project outcomes.** OFMP has supported the alignment of inclusion goals with national and regional strategies – such as integrating GESI considerations into national tuna management plans where appropriate and tracking participation in project-funded capacity-building. This helps contribute to inclusion being embedded across training, implementation and decision making, leading to more inclusive and representative fisheries management processes.

- **Strengthening gender planning and awareness.** OFMP supported the development of a dedicated Gender Action Plan, helping to integrate Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) considerations into project design, implementation, and monitoring. This included collaboration with the FFA Gender and Social Inclusion Advisor, along with support for project-level gender assessments and design inputs, strengthening the systematic integration of gender consider

FFA Open Day, 2024.
Photo: FFA

What still needs work

Despite greater recognition of inclusion as a priority, meaningful change can be difficult to achieve in practice – particularly in a sector traditionally dominated by men, both culturally and institutionally.

- **Participation is not the same as influence.** Women and marginalised groups may be present in meetings or training, but that doesn't guarantee meaningful input or decision-making power. Without targeted support – such as leadership development, mentoring, or safe speaking spaces – engagement may remain limited.
- **Onshore contributions still need greater visibility.** While women make up the majority of the post-harvest workforce, their roles are often informal, lower paid, and excluded from fisheries policy. Recognition and resourcing for these parts of the tuna value chain are critical for equitable benefits.
- **Structural barriers persist.** Safety concerns, caregiving responsibilities, and access to capital or networks continue to limit participation in higher-value roles across the sector. These barriers are often invisible in project design unless explicitly addressed.
- **National policies are at different stages.** While regional frameworks are strengthening, countries are progressing at different paces in developing sector-specific gender and inclusion strategies for offshore fisheries. Implementation can be constrained by resourcing or competing priorities.
- **Inclusion in fisheries isn't just about reaching gender targets.** It's about creating environments where different contributions are recognised, and where people feel safe, valued, and able to participate meaningfully. For many institutions, this is an ongoing process that takes time, leadership, and the right support. recognising these goals – and moving toward them – remains critical to the long-term strength and fairness of the sector.

6

National systems at the heart of Pacific tuna governance: Leadership, capacity and long-term vision

6

National systems at the heart of Pacific tuna governance: Leadership, capacity and long-term vision

Linked to Lesson 7

Key takeaways:

- *Strong national agencies working with regional coordination underpin sustainable tuna management.*
- *Long-term national investment has strengthened planning, teams and systems across the region - enabling countries to manage their tuna resources effectively and participate confidently in regional processes.*

Building from within: Why national capacity matters

Pacific Island countries and territories play a central role in managing tuna within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) – through licensing, monitoring, enforcement, and compliance. They are also responsible for vessels flying their national flag that are operating on the high seas. Because tuna species move across national jurisdictions and into the high seas, national systems also need to connect with coordinated regional frameworks, such as those of the WCPFC.

National capacity is therefore foundational to effective tuna governance. When countries have well-supported fisheries agencies, clear policies, robust data systems, and experienced personnel, they are well placed to:

- Enforce rules in their own waters.
- Engage confidently in regional negotiations.
- Align national priorities with regional and global sustainability goals.
- Ensure their tuna resources generate long-term economic and social benefits.

DSBI Training in Apia, Samoa. Photo: FFA

What national systems look like today

Over the past two decades, Pacific Island countries and territories have steadily strengthened their national tuna management systems. Today, most have:

- **Dedicated tuna management** units within fisheries agencies.
- **Clear licensing and compliance frameworks** for domestic and foreign vessels.
- **Strong enforcement linkages** with regional surveillance operations.
- **Data systems** connected to regional platforms like TUFMAN2.
- **Regular participation** in science and management meetings.

These systems have developed over time through consistent national commitment, political leadership, and long-term investment.

Planning as a foundation for sovereignty

National Tuna Management and Development Plans (NTMDPs) outline each country's priorities and long-term approach to managing its tuna resources. They play an important role in shaping national management frameworks and guiding long-term decision making.

In recent years, countries have continued to shape and advance their NTMDPs – updating plans, setting policy direction and, linking fisheries planning with inclusion, climate considerations and national development goals. With technical support from FFA and SPC where requested, these plans are becoming increasingly integrated, forward-looking, and tailored to national contexts and priorities.

"The Government of Papua New Guinea sincerely acknowledges the valuable support provided through the OFMP III Project, which has facilitated inclusive and comprehensive national, sub-regional, and regional consultations to modernise our 2025 National Tuna Fishery Management Plan. This important milestone demonstrates our continued commitment to the sustainable and responsible management of our tuna resources. It also ensures that the social and economic benefits generated from this sector are shared fairly and equitably among our people, in alignment with Papua New Guinea's national development priorities and regional obligations."

Mr. Justin Ilakini
Managing Director
Papua New Guinea
National Fisheries
Authority

54th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting. Photo: FFA

CASE STUDY

Linking national systems and coastal food security

In November 2023, a regional workshop brought together 57 participants from 14 Pacific Island countries to focus on strengthening national capability to support nearshore fisheries for food security and livelihoods. While nearshore Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) were a key area of technical focus, the broader goal was to ensure countries are equipped to design and manage programs that link coastal fishing access with nutrition, income generation, and community resilience.

The workshop was co-hosted by SPC, FAO, the World Bank's PROPER initiative, and OFMP3, and also served as important groundwork for a forthcoming Green Climate Fund (GCF) project that will scale FAD programs and strengthen coastal food security across the Pacific. By surfacing national priorities and shared challenges, the workshop helped shape the scope and relevance of this broader regional investment.

Training sessions combined technical content – such as FAD deployment safety, gear selection, and post-harvest handling – with broader discussions on national strategy, extension systems, and program design. Real-world examples from across the region illustrated how national fisheries officers are increasingly leading coastal fisheries initiatives that support community nutrition, economic resilience, and local ownership.

Participants shared successes and practical challenges in areas like community engagement, policy alignment, and monitoring – reinforcing the need to embed coastal initiatives within national fisheries plans and institutional systems.

The workshop also highlighted common operational issues, including clarifying governance roles, strengthening data management, addressing FAD losses and damage, and managing infrastructure vulnerabilities. In response, participants endorsed a train-the-trainer model to scale national capacity and called for further investment in durable equipment, early warning systems, and national FAD strategies.

By linking coastal food systems with national and regional governance, the workshop marked a key step in embedding nearshore FAD programs within broader fisheries planning. It also laid the foundation for more sustained, country-led investment in climate-resilient, inclusive tuna systems. This momentum is also feeding into broader work, including the development of a regional Livelihoods Framework to support value-adding, skills development, and inclusive economic opportunities – ensuring that nearshore fisheries initiatives are part of a wider push to strengthen national fisheries systems.

July 2025 - 6th Regional Fisheries Ministers Meeting. Photo: FFA

How OFMP has contributed to national systems and capability

The Oceanic Fisheries Management Project (OFMP) has supported Pacific Island countries to strengthen the systems and institutions that underpin national tuna management. This support has been delivered in partnership with regional agencies and guided by FFA Country Partnership Agreements – helping to embed technical activities and support within broader planning and governance processes.

Key areas of support include:

- **Assisting country-led planning processes.** OFMP funding and technical inputs helped countries update or refine their National Tuna Management Plans – providing flexible support for consultation, analysis, and alignment with regional measures.
- **Providing targeted advisory support.** Through project-funded positions at FFA and SPC, the project has helped deliver technical advice and training to national fisheries agencies. This has included assistance with integrating climate change, strengthening data and compliance systems, and aligning national strategies with regional frameworks.
- **Contributing to institutional systems.** OFMP supported improvements to national data infrastructure, including TUFMAN2 integration, development of national data portals, and uptake of country dashboards – enhancing the ability of fisheries agencies to track performance, support decision-making, and align with regional reporting systems.

- **Investing in long-term capability and participation.** Across all phases, OFMP has supported professional development through initiatives such as the annual Stock Assessment Workshop, targeted training, and travel support. These efforts have helped fisheries officers build technical skills, participate effectively in regional forums, and contribute to sustained national representation in science and policy processes.
- **Aligning with national priorities.** The project supported specific national goals under FFA Country Partnership Agreements – such as transhipment analysis in the Marshall Islands, turtle management in the Cook Islands, and investment readiness support in FSM.

While this support varied across countries, it always worked alongside national systems and Member priorities for the long-term stewardship of tuna resources.

What still needs work

While significant gains have been made in national tuna governance, ongoing work is needed to ensure systems remain resilient and responsive to emerging priorities.

- **Sustaining capability across regions.** Many fisheries administrations have strengthened their teams and systems in recent years, but sustaining specialist capability can be challenging for small administrations where staff turnover, competing responsibilities and limited specialist positions are common. These realities can affect the consistency of participation in regional processes or the ability to maintain technical expertise over time.
- **Embedding regular planning cycles.** National Tuna Management and Development Plans (NTMDPs) are now widely in place ensuring that these plans are routinely updated and implemented - including incorporating evolving priorities such as climate resilience, social inclusion, and labour standards is an area of continuing work for many administrations.
- **Balancing national and regional systems.** Regional collaboration is a core strength of Pacific tuna governance. National agencies continue to work closely with regional bodies for access to tools, models, and technical guidance. Over time, strengthening in house capability for data use and compliance can help further reinforce these regional mechanisms.
- **Resourcing modern systems.** Digital reporting tools, data systems and national training programmes benefit from sustained investment to ensure continuity over time. Many countries are already integrating these elements into national planning and ongoing attention to resourcing will support their effectiveness as technologies and needs evolve.

Pacific Island countries are charting their own pathways in tuna governance, with national institutions playing an increasingly central role in shaping sustainable management. As countries continue to assert their leadership in oceanic fisheries, collaborative support can help ensure institutions remain equipped, connected and resilient as new challenges emerge. Ongoing attention to national systems will continue to underpin long-term sustainability and shared benefits from the tuna resource.

July 2025 - FFCMIN24 - Officials Meeting.
Photo: FFA

7

From dollars to durability: Designing and funding sustainable Pacific tuna management

7

From dollars to durability: Designing and funding sustainable Pacific tuna management

Linked to Lesson 9

Key takeaways:

- *Sustainable tuna management requires sustained and diverse funding – from regional collaboration to national systems, NGOs, and global partners.*
- *Effective design makes long-term investments work. Funding delivers greater impact when projects are adaptable, aligned with institutions, and support Pacific-led priorities.*

As reflected in Lessons 9 and 10, long-term, predictable funding and effective project design are key enablers of sustainable tuna management. This chapter explores how diverse funding sources – and how projects are designed – shape long-term impact.

Over the past 20 years, significant investments from a wide variety of sources have been made in developing and sustaining effective tuna fisheries management in the WCPO.

These investments have supported the growth of national fisheries institutions, regional governance frameworks, licensing and compliance systems, and the science and technology that underpin effective management. They've come from governments, donors, investment banks, global funds, NGOs, and the private sector.

But money alone doesn't guarantee long-term success. The way funding is structured – who it empowers, how adaptable it is, and whether it aligns with Pacific priorities – has often made the difference between short-term activity and lasting systems change.

February 2026 - Signing of renewal of EU-funded PEUMP. Photo: FFA

Who funds Pacific tuna management?

Managing tuna in the Western and Central Pacific has always required collaboration – financial and institutional. A wide array of funding sources contributes to this effort, from national licence revenues to regional programmes, international aid, and NGO-led investments. Together, these help sustain the systems, infrastructure, and institutions that support effective tuna governance.

Members' contributions

Pacific Island countries fund their own national fisheries administrations and participate as Members in regional governance bodies such as the WCPFC. In 2015, member contributions to tuna fisheries management were estimated at US$50 million annually[16]. At the same time, countries derive substantial income from licence fees – PNA countries alone generate around US$500 million per year from tuna access arrangements[17].

Government aid and international development finance

Bilateral donors – including Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the United States – have long supported training, infrastructure, and institutional strengthening across the region. Multilateral institutions such as the GEF, UNDP, World Bank, European Union, and the FAO have also played a role in enabling regional initiatives and enabling long-term investments in science, capacity building, and climate-resilient development.

500 USD mil/yr

is generated by PNA countries alone from tuna access arrangements.[18]

[16] https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/966441503678446432/pdf/119107-WP-PUBLIC-P154324-133p-PPTunafisheriesbackgroundfinal.pdf

[17] https://tunapacific.ffa.int/2024/06/05/how-pacific-island-nations-built-one-of-the-worlds-largest-sustainable-tuna-fisheries/#:~:text=PNA%20nations%20collectively%20derive%20around,of%20coastal%20states%20didn't.

Regional institutions

Core Pacific institutions – such as the FFA, SPC, and the PNA Office – not only attract and deliver funding programmes, but also provide the technical expertise, scientific leadership, and coordination needed to translate investment into impact. They work closely with governance bodies such as the WCPFC to align national priorities with regional conservation management frameworks.

NGOs and market-based initiatives

Non-governmental organisations contribute both funding and innovation. For example, The Nature Conservancy has invested in electronic monitoring systems and supply chain transparency, while WWF has supported sustainable fishing practices and certification pathways. The Marine Stewardship Council has incentivised better fisheries performance through eco-labelling and third-party assessments.

Impact and challenges

Funding from numerous stakeholders has been instrumental in supporting the sustainability and economic viability of the Pacific fisheries. These investments shape how institutions collaborate, plan and deliver long-term outcomes.

Equitable distribution

Member nations and regional bodies have had to cooperate and in some cases compromise to ensure that all fisheries benefit equitably from the funding that's available.

Continuity and alignment

Short project cycles, fragmented funding, and shifting donor priorities can affect long-term progress. The most effective investments have been those that align with Pacific strategies, build on existing systems, and provide consistent support over time – rather than reinventing the wheel.

Accountability and transparency

As more partners invest in Pacific tuna governance, there is increasing emphasis on clear, transparent systems that show how funding is contributing to agreed priorities and outcomes. Meeting future challenges – from climate change to economic diversification – will depend not only on how much funding is available, but how well it is designed, aligned, and delivered.

Photo: Francisco Blaha

Designing projects that deliver: Lessons from OFMP

Delivering OFMP over more than two decades has shown what works in practice. Across three phases, the project has supported regional priorities through different political cycles, donor expectations, and emerging challenges. Key insights include:

Design for adaptability

In long-term projects like OFMP, circumstances inevitably shift between project design and implementation – due to changing national priorities, political dynamics, and new scientific insights. OFMP's flexible project design: with activities broad enough to respond to emerging needs - has been a core strength.

Work through existing institutions

Rather than establishing parallel systems, OFMP is delivered through regional institutions – principally FFA, SPC and PNAO. By aligning with their systems and governance processes, OFMP was able to work within the bigger picture of investments to coordinate and strengthen what was already working. Project managers from across projects could sit together, align timelines, and ensure that investments added value, rather than reinventing the wheel. This approach strengthened institutional capacity and helped embed project results into wider regional systems.

Align with regional mechanisms and national priorities

Success relied on alignment with Pacific priorities – both at the regional level (e.g. through FFA frameworks) and at the national level via Country Partnership Agreements. This approach supported policy coherence across countries and helped ensure that national efforts contributed to shared regional goals.

Minimise gaps between project phases

OFMP's multi-phase structure allowed each stage to build on previous investments and achievements. Long gaps between project phases may undermine momentum and institutional continuity. Smoother transitions help sustain progress.

Clarify financial and audit requirements from the outset

Experience from multi-agency initiatives like OFMP has highlighted the importance of establishing clear expectations for financial management from the outset. Project stakeholders have different systems and levels of familiarity with donor requirements.

Establishing clear expectations from the beginning is crucial. Without clarity – especially around documentation, audits, and reporting – delays and misunderstandings can arise. Embedding detailed guidance, tailored briefings, and proactive support into project design would help reduce administrative friction and support smoother delivery upon project commencement.

Ensure adequate management support for delivery

Effective project delivery relies not only on technical expertise – but also on systems for coordination, administration and financial oversight. Allocating sufficient resources to these functions supports effective implementation and reduces risks.

Budget for practical M&E support throughout the project

Monitoring and evaluation requires time, expertise and consistent data collection. Building dedicated monitoring and evaluation resources into project design supports learning, transparency, and adaptive management.

Designing for lasting impact

These lessons reflect a key insight: sustainable funding is not just about securing resources, but about designing and delivering projects that last. For Pacific tuna fisheries, the real value of investment lies in how it strengthens institutions, supports national systems, and adapts to emerging priorities.

As challenges like climate change, labour standards, and technological transformation reshape the landscape, future investments will benefit from flexibility, alignment with regional institutions, and a long-term focus on national capability.

8

Charting a course to 2050: Sustaining tuna, empowering communities

8

Charting a course to 2050: Sustaining tuna, empowering communities

Linked to all Lessons Learnt

Key takeaways:

- *The Pacific tuna story is one of transformation – driven by national leadership, regional cooperation, and long-term investment in knowledge, capacity, and governance.*
- *As new challenges emerge, the region's proven strengths – coordination, adaptability, and commitment to equity – remain its greatest assets.*

This final chapter reflects on the themes that have emerged throughout this report and looks ahead to how they can guide the Pacific's ongoing work towards sustainable tuna fisheries and resilient communities.

Progress to date: A regional success story

Over the past 25 years, Pacific Island countries and territories have fundamentally reshaped the management of their tuna fisheries – evolving a fragmented, externally influenced system into one of the most effective regional fisheries management arrangements in the world. Through sustained national effort and strong regional partnerships, they've built a science-based, cooperative approach that balances conservation with economic benefit.

This progress hasn't happened by accident. It's the result of deliberate choices: to invest in national systems, to build regional solidarity, and to design partnerships that complement national efforts. OFMP has supported this evolution – contributing to a wider regional effort that has steadily reshaped the future of tuna management in the WCPO.

Through sustained national effort and strong regional partnerships, they've built a science-based, cooperative approach that balances conservation with economic benefit.

22nd Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Photo: FFA

A region that leads, together

Today, Pacific Island countries are standard-setters in global fisheries governance. From introducing labour rights as a condition of access, to driving forward harvest strategies and climate adaptation, the region has, once again, demonstrated that small island states can lead on issues of global importance.

This leadership is grounded in principles that have remained consistent and reflect the region's long standing commitment to both stewardship and rights-based approaches:

- That tuna resources should be sustainably managed and equitably shared.
- That science and evidence must guide decision-making.
- That national systems are the foundation of effective regional cooperation.
- And that communities must be able to participate in and benefit from the industry.

Looking to 2050

The next decades will bring new challenges – climate-driven shifts, social change, geopolitical complexity, and rapid technological advancement. But they will also bring new opportunities. Pacific Island countries are better prepared than ever to shape the future of oceanic fisheries – on their own terms and in line with their values.

As the Pacific charts its course to 2050 and beyond, the lessons captured throughout this report – on regional cooperation, evidence-based management, inclusive participation, and adaptability – offer a roadmap for the work ahead. Continuing to strengthen institutions, sustain partnerships, and invest in Pacific-led solutions will help ensure a future in which both tuna and Pacific communities continue to thrive.

Additional reading

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