

Pacific islanders depend on coastal and offshore fisheries for food, jobs and revenue. For example, offshore tuna fishing licenses and access fees can account for a large share of government revenues: 63 per cent in Kiribati, 30 per cent in Tuvalu, and 18 per cent in Nauru (Bell et al. 2015). But growing populations and demand for seafood are resulting in unsustainable catch rates and ecosystem degradation. A sustainable 'blue economy' will need better fisheries management that is integrated with other production sectors, and alternative economic activities that reduce ecosystem pressures. This In Brief considers pressure points and policy pathways to achieve better development outcomes.

Rising Pressures

Pressures from outside the region are on the rise from increased resource exploitation and climate change. Pacific islands' offshore fisheries now supply more than 35 per cent of the world's tuna. As fish stocks are depleted elsewhere, demand will climb. National governments are struggling to control fishing activities and to respond to multi-sector and climatic challenges. Not enough of the increasing revenues are going to support sustainable management and development. New economic opportunities are emerging — for example in tourism, aquaculture and seabed mining — but managing the often competing demands is presenting challenges, not only offshore but inshore.

Many islanders depend on inshore fisheries for nutrition and livelihoods, but under business-as-usual, most coastal fisheries won't meet food security needs by 2030 because of declining productivity. Fishing and development activities in coastal zones are largely unregulated — less than 10 per cent of coastal areas in the Pacific islands have effective fisheries management.¹ This puts food security at risk. Fish provide about 50–90 per cent of animal protein intake in Pacific Island countries (Bell et al. 2009). As coastal areas are degraded, the ripple effects are wide. For example, cheap and less nutri-

tious food sources are being substituted for fish, adding to the high incidence of non-communicable diseases — obesity, heart disease and diabetes.

Institutional Innovation and Gaps

Pacific regional agencies are steadily improving regulatory responses to ocean resource management — it's a race against time but gains are being made. Leveraging scarcity, the eight fishing nations of the Pacific — the Parties to the Nauru Agreement — have introduced a Vessel Day Scheme to limit access to their fisheries and increase returns. License fees have risen more than 500 per cent since 2010, and new revenue sources are being developed, such as charging for access to fish aggregating devices, making local observers on fishing boats mandatory, and boosting local processing.

Even more could be achieved with tighter controls on supply, regional auctioning of fishing licenses, and more integrated value chains to increase opportunities for domestic enterprises. National planning and fishery agencies could also do much to strengthen marine zone planning — for example, seabed regulatory frameworks and methods to enforce quantitative limits on the catch of at-risk fish species need further development.

Angling for Better Outcomes

The blue economy has huge potential, but requires more innovation in governance to maximise benefits. Pressures on coastal fisheries could be reduced by encouraging alternative livelihoods and sources of protein. Aquaculture holds potential provided supply chains from shore to plate are viable, but so far food security and income benefits have been few mainly because of limited demand and weak supply chains. Better options may lie in diverting more of the offshore tuna catch to local markets (especially bycatch and small tuna), and developing alternative livelihoods more suited to island geographies and cultures — not necessarily reliant on fisheries.

The private sector plays a valuable role in creating development opportunities but it could do more. Technical support, local fish processing, job creation and marketing are obvious contributions; however, some firms are going further. In Solomon Islands, SolTuna processes fish for local markets as well as overseas markets. And it recognises the central role in fisheries of women, who make up over 50 per cent of the workforce (Harper et al. 2013). [SolTuna's gender-aware policies](#) offer maternity leave, access to company housing, and medical services including gender violence counselling. These policies enhance whole-of-community benefits, but are still rare.

More inclusive private and public partnerships are improving access to finances, technical support, and market information for local enterprises in tourism, fishery and sea transport. New telecommunications technologies hold huge potential, especially when extended to remote populations through partnerships between government, banks and telecoms. And it's possible to strengthen what already exists. Enhancing linkages between fisheries and tourism operations — for example, sport fishing and reef conservation — hold some of the best prospects for future economic development because fisheries are near their development limits, but tourism has scope for expansion (Gillett 2011). Palau, Kiribati and Fiji are taking the lead.

Regional agencies are filling some of the gaps left by weak national agencies that lack capacity. They are working to strengthen coastal management and develop sustainable livelihoods under a new vision — [A New Song for Coastal Fisheries](#). Oceania's locally managed marine areas are recognised globally as being at the cutting edge, but are vulnerable because they're not fully integrated with national and regional legal and institutional frameworks, and with wider value chains. To translate the vision's words into action, multilateral, regional and national agency support will be needed more than ever; alone communities struggle to make a difference.

Progress is also being made on regional off-shore fishery management. Concerted efforts by regional agencies and island states recently secured

agreement on a [Western and Central Pacific Tuna Commission harvest strategy](#) to set regional targets, sanctions and enforcement regimes for migratory fish stocks — so far lacking. The *Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries*, recently endorsed by the Pacific Island Forum, will help get traction by setting goals and indicators to achieve greater sustainability, financial returns, employment and security from fisheries, and by tracking progress through the use of annual fishery report cards.

Regional monitoring and data collection will be necessary, but not sufficient: currently, the ability to process data and take timely action is weak. Technical support is part of the answer — political leadership and collaboration across scales is another part.

Notes on Authors

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Endnote

1. Perry Head 15/9/2015. Personal communication on expert discussions at the SPC Regional Workshop on the Future of Coastal/Inshore Fisheries Management. Noumea, 3–6/3/2015.

