

Building Capacity and Cooperation for Sustainable Development of Pacific Coastal Resources Forum: ‘The Townsville Forum’

Mercure Hotel, Townsville, Australia; 3-7 September 2007

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Townsville Forum was a platform for discussing research, management and governance of coral reefs in the Pacific, with the key objectives being to improve networking, enhance scientific co-operation, build capacity and explore solutions to common problems.

It was held by the Australian and French Governments, in association with the Coral Reef Initiative for the Pacific (CRISP) and North Queensland’s James Cook University. Participants from a number of Pacific Island Countries shared experiences, successes and challenges, including those of traditional management, with Australian, French and other experts to identify Pacific solutions. Australian and French experts also shared their knowledge in the management of the marine environment.

The Forum examined the four following themes, and included a range of case studies on each of the themes:

Theme 1: MPAs (Marine Protected Areas)

Theme 2: ICM (Integrated Coastal Management)

Theme 3: Sustainable industries

Theme 4: Governance (Integrating Traditional Management)

The following are the recommendations that arose as a result of the Forum. These recommendations are made to assist those organisations, governments and agencies working on these issues in the Pacific region.

Theme 1. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

The term Marine Protected Area (MPA) includes any area of the coast and ocean that is under management to control potentially destructive activities and conserve the biodiversity resources. Other terms used in the Pacific to describe such an area are Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) and Marine Managed Area (MMA). Pacific participants defined a MPA as an area that was either entirely ‘no-take’, meaning there is no extraction, especially fish, from the area, or that a large part of the area is no-take. Most MPAs in the Pacific are predominantly no-take, based on the traditional ‘tabu’ area practices. Larger MPAs may include several zones, including areas where non-destructive fishing is permitted, such as in the Great Barrier Reef.

There have been many different models of MPAs in the Pacific; many of which have been particularly successful as illustrated in the Best Practice Case Studies (to be included). However, many of the models based on traditional practices now have to be altered for contemporary use.

Recommendations:

1. Develop low cost MPA models suitable to the Pacific including their design, establishment, and implementation; utilize local consultants, build on existing local capacities and relevant people engaged in the process in order to defer the high costs in designing and managing MPAs.

Many MPAs have been developed by international donors and NGOs during fixed term projects and then handed to governments and communities to continue management without the provision of ongoing logistical and financial support. Pacific countries requested that low cost MPA models be developed based on Pacific experience. The models should use local expertise in project planning and development as a way of expanding national capacity and ensuring that financial benefits are transferred to Pacific countries. This will also help ensure the long term sustainability of the MPA (through appropriate management, enforcement, community acceptance and culturally appropriate activities).

2. Address sustainable financing of MPAs and capacity building of skills needed to manage MPAs.

Pacific country representatives requested assistance through the establishment of a sustainable financing mechanism to continue the management and development of MPAs and for associated training national staff and communities. Sustainable financing of MPAs will ensure the long term viability of these managed areas

3. Assist in ongoing baseline monitoring and survey of biological, physical, economic and social data.

There was a widely recognised need to establish accurate baseline data on the status of reef and coastal communities and the ecosystems prior to MPA development. This should be continued as regular programs of assessment and monitoring to determine the effectiveness of MPA design and management and also to demonstrate their success to affected local communities. Participants requested training and financial assistance for national government staff and especially for community members to implement these assessments, including mechanisms to disseminate data and information back to communities.

4. Assist with developing legislation to support community initiatives.

Traditional management of natural resources remains active in many Pacific communities but is either not recognised or supported by national governments; or community developed rules may be in conflict with national laws and regulations. Pacific participants requested assistance in the development of legislation that will better recognise the effectiveness of traditional knowledge and management, and removes conflicts with existing legislation to permit community management and enforcement of MPAs initiated by communities.

Theme 2. Integrated Coastal Management

Pacific Island states are predominantly 'coastal'. Many high island states have short, steep catchment areas that channel water (and any excess sediments and other pollutants) directly onto the coastal resources of mangroves and coral reefs. However, in the atoll states the whole island acts as a catchment area and excess groundwater will flow onto the coral reefs. Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) is a widely used term that describes mechanisms to reduce damaging activities in the wider catchment areas, thereby minimizing losses in adjacent coastal and nearshore marine areas. ICM is being widely adopted around the world involving all stakeholders in the management of human activities to ensure that damage to coastal environments is minimised. Pacific Island representatives recognised that ICM was an essential process to ensure sustainable use of coastal resources for Pacific people, but that few of the countries had sufficient expertise to implement ICM in all their areas. The term 'island management' would also be appropriate, due to the small distances between catchment and coast and the holistic intention of managing from the hilltops to the sea.

Recommendations:

5. Provide scientific information to deal with complex issues impacting communities.

Pacific Island communities require capacity building assistance to comprehend and apply scientific evaluation to assess social, cultural, economic and ecological aspects of coastal resource use and management. This is regarded as essential for the sustainable use and development of coastal resources.

6. Develop and strengthen public awareness and education.

In parallel with Recommendation 5, there is need for better education and awareness raising in communities and in all levels of government to assist in better decision making and improved compliance with regulations to conserve natural resources. Specific mention was made of raising awareness on how activities in catchments can lead to damage of the coast. Pacific delegates requested that materials developed to raise awareness and educate children be shared amongst Pacific countries. It was also noted that 2008 will be the International Year of the Reef and there will be opportunities for agencies and countries to launch events to emphasise the need to conserve coral reefs.

7. Harmonize national institutions and infrastructure, especially policies and legislative framework.

Pacific countries report that many current policies and legislation are incompatible with ICM implementation and MPA development. These have arisen through the formation of different government sectors, which may have contradictory mandates e.g. fisheries and forestry departments are tasked with increasing economic returns from natural resources, whereas environment departments seek to conserve these resources. Many laws have been passed that overlay existing laws, but do not remove them from the statutes, thereby creating confusion in the public, government and judiciary. Pacific countries requested assistance in strengthening national institutions and infrastructure and legal assistance in redrafting laws and regulations to remove conflicting ones and harmonize other laws. It is important to promote stronger inter-departmental coordination in order to break down sectoral interests that can set back ICM.

Theme 3. Sustainable Industries

Many of the Best Practice Case Studies presented at the Townsville Forum highlighted alternative livelihood mechanisms to improve community wellbeing, food supply and confidence, while simultaneously seeking to reduce pressures on natural resources. These case studies covered many aspects including small-scale aquaculture, the capture and cultivation of larval fishes, the growing of corals and coral rock for the aquarium trade, sustainable eco-tourism. However, the lessons from these successful mechanisms have not been widely disseminated throughout the Pacific nor are they applicable in all countries. Thus these recommendations seek assistance to expand sustainable industries to other countries and develop new ones.

Recommendations

8. Need for resource assessment and assessment of economic value of establishing MPAs.

Many communities and governments remain to be convinced of the economic and ecological value of well managed MPAs. The most convincing evidence for success lies in economic and ecological assessments and monitoring that demonstrate improved returns for participating communities such as higher fish catches, better coastal protection, improved options for nature-based tourism (or eco-tourism), and improved biodiversity. This request is for capacity building at national and community levels in natural resource assessment and monitoring and in techniques to assess the economic performance of MPAs to disseminate the results to governments, developers and communities.

9. Develop effective management plans for sustainable livelihoods and industries, including training and legislation.

The Forum was presented with case studies illustrating that ineffectively planned introduction of alternative livelihood mechanisms may lead to failure if management has not been effectively planned, if training was inadequate and if insufficient research and development was undertaken to ensure financially sound and consistent markets for products. Alternative livelihoods should also be socially and culturally appropriate. Participants requested assistance in developing sustainable industries throughout the Pacific to improve economic wellbeing by implementing training and developing markets, both in-country and overseas, for the resulting products.

10. Develop frameworks to address the issue of access and benefit sharing for communities.

Pacific countries and communities requested international assistance in protecting their traditional knowledge on the use of traditional medicines from natural biota, and in deriving fair and equitable financial and other benefits from the use of the knowledge and natural resources by national and international companies. Expertise and knowledge can be shared on ways to implement domestic frameworks of management by enhancing communication channels between existing networks.

Theme 4. Governance Recommendations

The Townsville Forum recognised that there had been three different governance models for making decisions on the management of coastal resources:

- i. the **Pacific Traditional Management** mechanism that had existed for many hundreds of years prior to the period of colonization and spread of western scientific methods. Natural resource management decisions were made in a holistic way in the community which had ownership of land and sea resources. After lengthy discussion (often largely by male members of the communities), a traditional chief made a decision on natural resource use e.g. what land could be cultivated, what trees could be removed, and the establishment of tabu areas where fishing was prohibited;
- ii. **Colonial Sectoral Management** was introduced 100 to 150 years ago whereby separate national government departments were made responsible for expanding forestry, fisheries and development. These were often in conflict with environment departments and local communities which wanted to conserve natural resources for future use. Management decisions were based on broader national economic interests, and occasionally on scientific advice. This phase often usurped community control over natural resource management and introduced the ‘commons’ into marine resource access, thereby reversing community ownership and enforcement;
- iii. **‘Pacific Way’ Coastal Management** is the newest variation, which merges the best features of the two models above. In this model, considerable authority is returned to the community for co-management of natural resources with national governments, academic institutions and NGOs. This newer ‘Pacific Way’ seeks to involve all stakeholders in the community in decision making, including women and youth, who were often excluded from traditional management.

The Townsville Forum also recognised that within these models, there were customary, as well as local and national government systems operating. A long-term objective could be to make a critical evaluation of the mechanisms of governance, including assessing their effectiveness. This was recognised as a larger study, beyond the immediate objectives of this Forum.

Recommendations:

11. Further empower communities by involving them as equal partners in project processes and developments.

National governments, donor agencies and NGOs are urged to involve community members as equal partners in decision making on future projects and developments that occur within community areas or are likely to affect them. This will involve capacity building for community members to participate in project planning and the forming of multi-stakeholder committees to direct decision making, thereby helping to ensure the sustainability of decisions.

12. Strengthen existing institutions and start new ones where necessary.

There are many institutions active in catchment and coastal management, but frequently they lack sufficient capacity to design and manage projects. Assistance is requested to strengthen these institutions and encourage new combinations of institutions e.g. forming partnerships between governments, NGOs and international agencies to ensure informed and coordinated decision-making. In some instances it may be necessary to start new coordination institutions that link existing agencies. Note: Recommendation 1 that stresses the need to use Pacific Island experts as consultants.

13. Strengthen enforcement capacities and existing capacities in conflict resolution mechanisms and management tools.

Many well developed plans for the management of catchment and coastal resources are less successful because national governments and local communities lack the logistic and personal capacity to enforce regulations, or because of unresolved conflicts between groups within communities or with neighbouring communities using or poaching natural resources, especially fisheries. Assistance is requested to provide governments and communities with sufficient resources for effective planning, management and enforcement of management plans aimed at conserving natural resources for food security and for future generations.

14. Encourage the use of community knowledge, especially in the absence of best scientific information.

National governments and communities frequently lack sufficient scientific understanding or access to sound scientific advice for effective integrated coastal management. If this cannot be provided to or accessed by communities, it is recommended that traditional knowledge and practices that have been demonstrated to be sustainable be used as the basis for management decisions.