

## COUNTRY STATEMENT – TONGA



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#### 1. Overview of Coastal Resource Management Activities

##### **PRESENT SITUATION OF FISHERIES IN TONGA**

The area of the inshore fishing grounds of the main island Tongatapu has been estimated to be 947 km<sup>2</sup>, of which reefs and mangroves make up 11.2 and 0.36 percent respectively, with the remaining consisting of shallow and deep lagoon with an outer shelf less than 160m deep. The potential Exclusive Economic Zone of Tonga covers an area of approximately 700,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

The control, development and management of the fisheries resources in Tonga are the responsibility of the Department of Fisheries, now under the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forestry and Fisheries. Its main vision is to have an Island Kingdom where agriculture, fisheries & forestry contributes significantly to better living standards of all, in an economically, socially & environmentally sustainable manner

The Department of Fisheries is currently empowered by two legislative policies: the Fisheries Management Act 2002 and the Aquaculture Management Act 2003, which provides guidance for conservation, management, development and sustainable utilization of fisheries resources as well as the development of the aquaculture sector. Fishing is an important household activity in Tonga where about one third of households fish for mainly subsistence purposes. Subsistence fishing occurs at shallow-reefs and lagoon areas in the region, which provide an important source of protein for the people.

##### **Planned projects relating to management or conservation at the national and/or community level**

The Fisheries Division continues to enforce its Fisheries Laws for the management, conservation and sustainable utilization of Tonga's fisheries resources.

A legal framework is also in place to support the community-based fisheries management approach. Six island communities have been designated as coastal communities for the purposes of community-based fisheries management in their allocated Special Management Areas (SMAs). These are the islands of 'O'ua, Ha'afeva and Felemea (Ha'apai), Ovaka (Vava'u), and 'Atata and 'Eueiki (Tongatapu). Currently, these community members continue to lead in managing and conserving their SMA, in collaboration with the Fisheries Division. Core activities include limiting outside fishers and their allowable catch in the SMA, as well as restocking and closing off fishing in the Fish Habitat Reserves (FHRs).

A Programmed of Work for Protected Areas (PoWPA) Project has been conducted to establish an SMA for Nomuka Island (Ha'apai). Recently a coastal community management plan has been drafted with the community. Implementation of the project is in partnership with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MECC).

The SMAs of 'Atata, Felemea and Ovaka had secured financial and technical support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme (SGP) through the Civil Society Tonga. This project aims to strengthen community management and conservation efforts, including more training and developing public awareness materials. A small component is also included to promote alternative sources of livelihoods.

### **Promoting alternative livelihoods (using FADs)**

Two new fish aggregating devices (FADs) have been deployed off the island of 'Eua on April 2014, with the assistance from SPC and members of the Fisheries staff, together with 'Eua and Nasili Fishermen Association. These deployments followed a workshop and training that were carried out earlier in the week, which raised fishermen awareness on FAD gears and its usage following by training on how to construct and deploy FADs.

FADs are important fishing tools that are design to attract and aggregate fish, to enhance food security and livelihoods of locals, and will particularly help shift fishing pressure from coastal/inshore reefs to offshore waters. One of the two FADs was anchored approximately 3.15 miles east of Petani Village, at an approximate depth of 200m. The other FAD was deployed roughly 2.6 miles from 'Eua at approximately 100m depth. Both FADs were equipped with surface and sub-surface designs to maximise their efficiency. They are expected to become effective in about a few days or a month, when they start attracting tuna and other pelagic species.

### **New established SMA in Tonga**

The final stages of the establishment of three new SMAs (Nomuka (Hp), Taunga (Vv) and Fafa (Ttp)) were successfully completed within this period, which included the Minister's endorsement of their respective management plans, following by a Gazette Notice on the 4th of December 2013. Nomuka and Taunga are community-based SMAs that are co-managed by the Fisheries Division and their respective communities.

They also have no-fishing zones (Fish Habitat Reserves or marine reserves), which prohibits any fishing activities to anyone for the purpose of ensuring full conservation and protection of marine resources and their habitats. The third new SMA, Fafa Island (Tongatapu), does not have a community but is co-managed by the Fisheries Division and Fafa Island Resort. It serves as a Fish Habitat Reserve, prohibiting all fishing activities within the Fafa SMA.

A baseline survey for the status of the resources at the Fafa reef was also carried out as well as deploying boundary markers for the Fafa SMA during this period.

By the end of December 2013, a remaining of 18 communities has submitted written requests to the Fisheries Division for a SMA program to be established. These communities comprise of 6 from Vava'u, 10 from Ha'apai and 2 from Tongatapu

## **Problems and Constraints of Coastal Resource Management**

### **Challenges being faced at the national and/or community level in developing and implementing the points above;**

- There are very limited resources (funds, staff) for enforcement and conducting resource assessments and monitoring at the national level. Getting Fisheries Regulations gazette is also a very long process.
- At the community level, illegal fishing within SMAs and FHRs is still being reported as a common problem, while compliance and enforcement capacity is poor. There is a priority need to strengthen this area as well as increase public awareness of the SMA programmed, starting at the managing community level. The planned GEF SGP project aims to address these issues, at least for some SMAs. Data collection by community members can be inconsistent at times; hence improvement in this area for FCM data is much needed. *(For instance; non-compliance of fisheries regulations within the SMA community and by members from other communities faced in 2011 and one case was witnessed within the Nomuka SMA in 2014)*
- For close collaboration with SMA communities, there are also limited resources (particularly funds) to ensure regular engagements. Their typical remote island locations greatly add on to the high operation costs associated with ongoing implementation and monitoring.
- Collection of Fish Catch Monitoring (FCM) data continued in throughout the year. This data is collected by SMA community members to monitor catch within their SMA, which is then sent to CDAS and entered to a database for analysis. An unsatisfactory result was witnessed from data that was collected from these SMAs on a Data working group presentation in June 2014. Issues with data collection include recording errors, inconsistency and missing data although data analysis has been initiated.
- Collaborations with line ministries and NGOs have so far been successful, particularly with sharing of financial resources and expertise as well as facilitating funding applications. Planning and implementing activities can however be delayed due to the delayed process of securing funds and staff availability.

### **Actual challenges to solve or alleviate the problems / constraints above.**

- Recruitment of appropriate staff with preferable skills and knowledge is still under way awaiting the finalised budget for the year.
- Assessing the impact of SMAs as a fisheries management tool is an important activity for staff to also undertake. Compliance and enforcement community trainings were also conducted by staff and outer island staff at 'Atata and Ovaka to improve awareness on fisheries regulations and SMA enforcement capacity. This was made possible through their Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Program (SGP) projects.

### **AND**

- SMA educational and awareness programs have been delivered through various means. These include regular National Television (TV) and Radio Programs; presentations at high schools; meetings and workshops with communities and dissemination of brochures.
- Main office here in Tonga should organise thoroughly with fisheries offices in the outer islands on alternatives and ways to assist with local communities on collecting quality data. At the same time staff of the section; should make a round trip on all SMA communities providing a refresher training and sufficient assistance on how to collect data.
- Collaborations were made with the Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience (SPCR) for a Climate Resilience Sector Project that will be funded by Asia Development Bank (ADB) for establishing 6 new SMAs in Vava'u. This project is planned to be implemented by January 2015, estimated at USD\$530,000 worth of funding assistance.
- Funding for new Ha'apai SMAs was also discussed with the Civil Society Forum of Tonga (CSFT) to fund project within SMA in Ha'apai which includes; Nomuka, Mounga'one, Lofanga, 'Uiha, Mutoa, Ha'ano, Pokotala mo Fakakai.