

Search

Choose Country homepage

[Home](#)[Islands Business](#)[Fiji Islands Business](#)[Latest News](#)[Features](#)[Gallery](#)[Archives](#)[Subscribe](#)[About Us](#)[Contact Us](#)[Business](#)[Participate](#)

WE SAY: Coastal fish resources a concern

WE SAY

'A recent seminar on coastal fisheries has brought to light that the Pacific islands region's coastal fisheries resources are a cause for growing concern. For the first time in the recorded history of the islands, high value commodities such as sea cucumber, or bêche-de-mer as it is known in the trade, have been fished to the point of collapse across much of the region'

As the reality of food scarcity and soaring oil prices hit home, putting increasing pressure on food affordability all over the world, one of the logical solutions touted by food economists is to decrease dependency on food sources that come from the outside—especially for geographically far-flung spots in the world such as the Pacific Islands. Simultaneously, there have to be strategies put in place to fall back on and shore up traditional pathways of food production locally. For the islands these are sustainable agriculture and fisheries. The resurrection of agriculture as a viable alternative to imported foods in the islands is proving to be an uphill task to most islands governments because of a number of factors.

These range from the convenience that packaged foods offer, the continuously increasing pressure on available cultivable land, the comparatively cheaper prices of extraneous foods and the lack of availability of both farmhands because of increased urban and overseas migration—and mechanisation because small economic scales of the islands environments make them economically inefficient.

An additional disincentive to agriculture and horticulture is the ever increasing height of the bar for quarantine in the export of fruit and vegetables to markets in developed nations, therefore rendering a large part of the agricultural activity to mere sustainability of the indigenous population and to an extent to the local tourist and hospitality markets.

Aside from agriculture in the islands, what is not often obvious—and is in fact an even greater threat to food security than diminishing agriculture—is the need for efficient management of the coastal fishing activity. Coastal fishing is the backbone of the food chain in the Pacific islands, as it is in almost all inhabited islands across the world. Sustainability in coastal fishing is key to food security in the Pacific islands and must be accorded the highest priority.

Sustainable coastal fishing both as a self sufficient harvesting activity and an economic one are under increasing threat from a number of factors. These range from the pressure brought to bear with natural increases in coastal populations that have led to higher demand to depleting fish stocks as a result of environmental changes including the acidification of the oceans and its ramifications on coral reef ecosystems.

This has progressively led to lower yields and higher prices because of a widening demand to supply ratio. The problems of sustainable, small scale fishing that caters to islanders personal nutritional as well as small economic needs is often neglected in the media and common public discourse, with much attention being paid to deep-sea fishing that takes place on an industrial scale and involves billions of dollars of the world's economy.

The importance of small scale subsistence fishing that is so vital to the sustenance of Pacific islanders' food security more often than not plays second fiddle to the larger debates surrounding the environmental and ecological aspects of whaling and tuna fishing by long-liners and purse seiners.

While that debate is important from the point of view of ecological

Other Stories

[LETTER FROM SUVA: Anger over leaked paper](#)

[Views from Auckland](#)

[WE SAY: Economic recovery all but elusive](#)

[WE SAY: What Tonga needs is time to find its future](#)

[WHISPERS](#)

[PACIFIC UPDATE](#)

[COVER REPORT: Sinophillia or Sinophobia?](#)

[COVER REPORT: Wikileaks reveal China's plan for the islands](#)

[COVER REPORT: Moti reveals plan to switch allegiance](#)

[POLITICS: Countdown begins for Panguna mine reopening](#)

[POLITICS: Controversy surrounds fishermen's deaths](#)

[POLITICS: Cure-all MMS in the news...yet again](#)

[VIEWPOINT: Clinton outlines US role in the world](#)

[VIEWPOINT: Protect our foreign workers](#)

[BUSINESS: Samoa tourism picks up after the tsunami](#)

[BUSINESS: Aust/NZ banks review remittance costs to islands](#)

[BUSINESS PROFILE: Two of a kind](#)

[SPORT: World Cup boost for Pacific rugby](#)

[ENVIRONMENT: Mixed response to Cancun meeting But still more work to be done by the Pacific](#)

[ENVIRONMENT: Strengthen Pacific National Meteorological Services](#)

[FISHERIES: Fisheries resources not in good shape](#)

[RAMSI UPDATE: Measuring a nation's progress](#)

sustainability and concerns relating to the preservation of the larger food chain, discussion on coastal fisheries is equally important if not more because it directly concerns the lives and livelihoods of present and future generations of Pacific islanders and their very existence amid the flux of ecological and economic changes completely beyond the ambit of their control.

A recent seminar on coastal fisheries has brought to light that the Pacific islands region's coastal fisheries resources are a cause for growing concern. For the first time in the recorded history of the islands, high value commodities such as sea cucumber, or bêche-de-mer as it is known in the trade, have been fished to the point of collapse across much of the region. In decades past, seafarers travelled far and wide for these "treasures", leading to over exploitation and finally their endangerment as a species. As a result, three of the largest bêche-de-mer fisheries—in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu—have been closed in the hope that depleted stocks will recover. A recent report from the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency warns of similar endangerment of coastal species because of over exploitation because of burgeoning population and growing tourism.

There are no easy answers for increasing coastal fish stocks, especially those of depleted species. But as a conference of officials, community members and NGOs working in the marine conservation space concluded, much could be achieved by involving community-based initiatives for fisheries management.

The idea, which is a bottoms-up approach is far more likely to bear results than a centrally designed top down one implemented by government departments. This is more of a grass root approach where communities engaged in the actual activity of coastal fishing for their livelihood and their own subsistence are empowered to manage not only their fishing activity but also given the responsibility to care for the ecosystem.

The good thing is that this is not a new concept that has to be forced on the communities to accept. Such environmental management practices, though not called that, have been part and parcel of the traditional survival strategies of Pacific islands communities for generations. This idea only reinforces that, building on existing practices, fine tuning and codifying them with new scientifically devised best practice—and perhaps equipment and infrastructure.

What also needs to be done to improve these efforts in future is to implement systems to collate the results of monitoring—on which research shows some 60 percent of allocated resources are spent—so that strategies can be improved and fine-tuned to yield better results for the conservation of the ecosystems and the shoring up of fish stocks.

These initiatives by Forum organisations are to be encouraged and national governments concerned must make human resources as well as funding available for the efficient implementation of these strategies.

In these straitened economic times, every dollar spent on boosting self sufficiency that helps substitution of the importation of foreign and nutritionally inferior foods while at the same time protecting ecosystems and building natural, indigenous food stocks is well spent.