

World Tuna Day



FISH talks.. Tongan delegate Lavinia Vaipuna at a recent fisheries meeting. Photo:FFAmedia

It's a fishy business

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WHEN Tonga's Lavinia Vaipuna stretched a 30-second introduction to her regional fisheries meeting colleagues into a seven-minute country report, no one could fault her for making up for lost time.

Travel mishaps meant the Tonga Agriculture and fisheries IT Manager was still en route when FFA's inaugural Regional Information Management Systems (RIMS1) workshop started.

She had waited 20 years for the regional space to open up where she could start talking about the information close to her heart - all the IT and databases challenges that underscore the work against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and keeps fisheries management ticking.

"I am so thankful it is finally happening - an IMS workshop where we can address our information management systems issues," she says.

Since Vaipuna entered IT work at Tonga's Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries two decades ago, she has seen firsthand her nation's entry into the digital and internet ages.

More than most, she is conscious of the challenges involved.

"As an IT person collecting all the databases of offshore and inshore work, administration, financial work, observer data, tuna data...it all comes to me. So many (fisheries) journals touch on how information management systems are the key issue for us,

whatever direction you look."

In all directions too, fisheries management across the Pacific nations has eyed a growing list of platforms, databases, software, and monitoring and reporting tools to help keep track of fishing activity in their waters.

On top of terms like TUFMAN1, TUFMAN2, TUFMANMCS, VMS, TUBS, eTUNALOG, national fisheries data systems, and newer terms such as iFIMS and the cloud, for many countries, the growing scale of logins and platforms is increasing room for duplication, and highlighting the overlap between systems.

That's led to pressure on regional agencies to adapt and move towards more integration, more simplicity, less duplication - all the while addressing security concerns and ensuring national interests are met.

What do countries want when it comes to a regional information management facility for fisheries? The wish list includes integration of all the tools into a more time efficient, one-stop portal with no hidden surprises.

For the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency, FFA, the response to those needs has been to work on integrating the diverse applications that countries are using or want to share or develop, into a one-stop, Information Management System organised under the Regional Information Management Framework for Fisheries.

"Right now some of us have so many logins you don't even remember your passwords to access what data-

base," says Justino Helgen of the Federated States of Micronesia. Helgen is VMS and Compliance Manager within FSM's NORMA, or fisheries unit.

Using the IMS since its introduction in 2012, Helgen can log into the IMS and view information on the SPC TUFMAN range and the FFA/WCPFC VMS info. Tailoring the IMS to his specific requirements too, he can track something the other information layers don't provide - he can see which vessels have fallen behind with their reports, and how far behind they are.

Seeing the red flags at a glance is not the only feature he enjoys. Helgen says the IMS makes for better national level communication on vessel compliance and vessels of interest across maritime police, port and transportation authorities looking at the same information he has.

"We don't have to email or call each other for lists. It is definitely a one-stop shop."

While FSM is one of a handful of Pacific nations where the IMS has gained a foothold, and for other FFA members at the RIMS1 meeting, the FSM story resonated with their challenges of integrating information within fisheries and across other sectors.

Asked by regional colleagues what the IMS challenges are for FSM, Helgen says he has yet to come across any major hiccups for the national IMS portal.

"We are still learning, still looking at what projects can be added to the system and what information can be used and shared by us nationally, and regionally with members."

"From my view, this is what the IMS should look like - everything feeds into it. It's a one-stop login, one portal; you access all the different areas once you are in there."

Three years in, it is early days for the FFA's Regional Information Management facility (RIMF). It has evolved from a vision supported by the EU-funded DEVFISH II project and Japan to a new five-year, NZ\$5million programme supported by New Zealand. FFA Fisheries Committee Officials in May, followed by FFC Ministers in July, will give their input and ownership to recommendations from the inaugural meeting. IS

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