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Coastal fisheries in the Pacific 'a mixed report'

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A new report on the status of reef and near-shore fisheries of Pacific Islands has delivered a mixed verdict about their health.

It says some fisheries are under strain, some have been fished to the brink of local extinction, and that management action needs to be strengthened to protect this valuable resource.

The report, issued by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), looks at four main areas: reef fisheries, near-shore fisheries, aquaculture, and the roles of men and women in fishing occupations.

Mr Lindsay Chapman, SPC's Coastal Fisheries Programme Manager, says Pacific Islands population growth is placing increasing pressure on the fisheries accessible to local fishers.

"Our problem is to collect accurate data on these fisheries – who is catching what, and how much are they taking," he says. "Without good data it is difficult to establish reasonable limits and good management plans."

He says the need for reliable catch information and sensible management is more important than ever, given the dual impacts of climate change and increasing fishing pressure.

"We need to develop good tools to monitor climate change," he says. "We need the best possible management of these fisheries to maximise sustainable yields and reduce the size of the 'food gap' between available seafood and that required to meet the needs of rapidly growing Pacific Islands population."

The small island of Niue's Principal Fisheries Officer James Tafatu agrees. "We only have a population of about 1300 or 1500 at the moment, but that may grow. Our leaders have identified food security as a major issue.

"We need to get data so we can manage our fisheries well. And this is not just about the fish, but also about how the community uses fish and the role women play in fisheries."

SPC is helping many Pacific islands and territories to develop management measures, including size limits and short harvest seasons.

"We are looking at positive measures, like the installation of new FADs



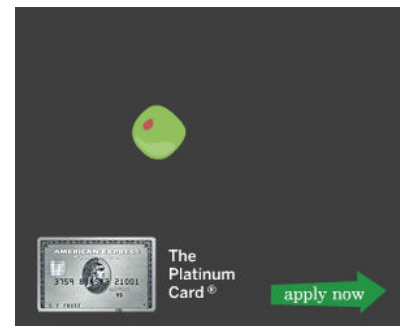
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Aquaculture also holds some promise for closing the food gap and generating income for Pacific Islanders. It has a 50-year history in the region but the challenges of uncertain markets, high-quality management and coping with the environment have proved formidable.

“Prawns, pearls and tilapia are the most valuable crops,” Mr Chapman says. “There is some hope for clams and coral for the ornamental trade, and aquaculture may also be able to restore stocks of the valuable sea cucumber.”

The report also deals with a gender imbalance in fisheries careers, with women holding less than 20% of positions in fisheries science and management.

Most women are confined to administrative and clerical positions, and the Report advocates ‘breaking down the barriers’ to help women gain work at all levels if they so choose.

• *For more information, contact Lindsay Chapman, Coastal Fisheries Programme Manager, SPC, New Caledonia, Phone: +687 262 000, email LindsayC@spc.int*

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