

7 INSTITUTIONAL ASPECTS

The countries and territories affected by the LRFF trade are mainly those with extensive coral reefs, where a major source of protein for coastal communities is reef-associated fishes and invertebrates, and ecotourism is viewed as an important economic activity. Ecotourism is particularly important in some Pacific island countries and parts of Southeast Asia where opportunities for economic growth and employment are few. Ecotourism potential depends on maintaining the quality of the coral reefs. Thus, reef conservation is vital not only as a key to income from tourism but also for food security of the communities themselves.

Understandably, the high-value nature of the LRFF trade has attracted much interest in the Indo-Pacific region. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, few, if any of these countries have any sound management practices. Indeed, most of the countries do not have the capacity or financial resources to implement effective fisheries management plans.

Past approaches to addressing concerns in the LRFF trade in the Pacific island countries through external assistance have been characterized as ad hoc and short term, with inadequate training of local personnel and sometimes flawed methods, and lacking in coordination. The result has been conflict of interests, duplication of effort, and wasted resources.

Cooperation among such countries to share experiences, and to seek help jointly in managing their LRFF fisheries is a cost-effective and efficient approach. There is already an excellent track record of such cooperation in the Pacific island countries in managing their highly valuable migratory tuna resources. Although there has been little formal cooperation to date among producer countries in dealing with the LRFF trade, there has been positive action among the Pacific island countries, while Australia, which has a long, if mixed, record of fisheries management, has already put in place measures to regulate its LRFF trade. There is little cooperation among countries in Southeast Asia in respect of the LRFF trade.

EXISTING INSTITUTIONS

Pacific Regional LRFT Initiative

Of the eight intergovernmental organizations in the Pacific island countries, two have been involved in the LRFF trade: the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), which has been addressing issues concerned with the LRFF trade; and the Forum Fisheries Agency, which has provided funding.

The 22 countries of the SPC requested the SPC in 1998 to work toward sustainable LRFF fisheries. The subsequent action by the SPC was called The Pacific Regional LRFT Initiative. The Initiative has the primary objective of providing technical assistance and support, where required, in order to establish sound policies, strategies, and management plans; develop the capacity in these countries to sustainably implement these policies, strategies, and plans; and strengthen regional cooperation among these countries on the sustainable management of live reef resources.

In 1999, the SPC signed a memorandum of understanding with three nongovernment organizations—The Nature Conservancy, the International Marinelife Alliance, and the World Resources Institute—to work together in addressing LRFF trade concerns.

As of mid-2003, the achievements of the Initiative have been

- assessments of the resources in four countries (the Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Tonga, and Vanuatu);
- management guidelines for two countries (the Fiji Islands and Kiribati);
- assistance in developing management plans for the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea;
- information material, including texts, a video, waterproof fish identification cards, and a poster of the main fish species of concern;
- a training workshop on visual assessment of LRFF species and a regional workshop on current issues and problems; and

- ongoing advice to three countries (Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga) on managing the industry.²¹⁹

The Initiative has been supported by the Asian Development Bank (through regional technical assistance), the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (in the Solomon Islands), the United States Agency for International Development (through The Nature Conservancy), and the Government of Taipei, China (for a review of the trade). Private donors have included the MacArthur Foundation, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation, and the Oak Foundation.

Regional/International Organizations

Apart from the International Marinelife Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, and the World Resources Institute, which are nongovernment organizations that have been working directly with the SPC, the following groups have interests in the LRFF trade:

- Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) group, which includes a few representatives from the Pacific Islands and also the major consumer economies in Southeast Asia. Two working groups of APEC are relevant to the LRFF trade: Fisheries, and Marine Resource Conservation. Both have addressed issues relating to the international trade in live fish and to mariculture.
- Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), an FAO body established in 1948, which functions to promote full and proper utilization of living aquatic resources by developing and managing fishing and culture operations and related activities. It is not clear whether APFIC has done anything in relation to the LRFF trade, but the membership includes all major consumer countries so a potential role is apparent.

²¹⁹ Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2002; Yeeting, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, in press; Yeeting, Labrosse, and Adams 2001.

- Hong Kong Chamber of Seafood Merchants, established in 1997, which represents the live seafood industry to the Government;
- Marine Aquarium Council, a new US-based private group that promotes conservation of marine resources;
- Network of Aquaculture Centers in Asia-Pacific, an intergovernment group that aims, inter alia, to improve grouper culture and has produced technical guidelines on fish health management in the trade;
- Society for the Conservation of Reef Fish Aggregations, established in 2000, which specifically promotes the protection and management of spawning aggregations;
- TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network founded in the 1970s to assist in implementing the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), by addressing issues related to documentation and practical control and management of international trade in threatened species; and
- World Wildlife Fund, especially its Hong Kong, China office, which has been undertaking local public awareness activities.

FUTURE REGIONAL COOPERATION

The Pacific Regional LRFT Initiative has demonstrated the benefits of a coordinated approach to the LRFF trade. It would be clearly desirable to extend such cooperation and coordination to other producing countries. Such linkages could lead to uniformity in collection of production data; awareness of the problems and prospects in each country; and pooling of resources for further development of assessment, management, and monitoring the LRFF fisheries, as well as for training personnel in these aspects.

Involvement of representatives of the fishers, brokers, importers, and others in the trade would be important in seeking

ways of arriving at a mutually agreeable basis for sustainable trade in LRFF.

Meanwhile, independent assistance efforts continue, even within the SPC group. Most Pacific island countries tend to accept any assistance available. Thus, overlap and resource waste continue to some extent. However, such activities at least help create awareness of the problems and of ways to obtain sustainable benefits from the LRFF trade.

Some other activities that a regional approach would facilitate include

- maintaining a registry of companies and vessels involved in the trade, for the purpose of sharing information about “good” and “bad” players and possibly for blacklisting bad players;
- developing a centralized vessel monitoring system, in which transport and supply boats are required to carry and continually operate position transmitters. In order to cope with the possibility of poaching in remote areas, the cooperative agreement underpinning the system would have to include key parties on the market side. Only then would there be the possibility of ensuring that all vessels involved in the industry are subject to the monitoring requirements;
- research into optimizing the benefits from the resources without depleting them, for the sustained benefit of the resource owners; and
- developing alternative forms of livelihood that do not create additional pressure on the marine resources.

ROLE OF REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL DONOR ORGANIZATIONS

In part, the independent assistance projects in various LRFF trade countries exist because there has been little donor coordination or consultation concerning the trade. Given the

problems that have arisen in duplication, conflict of interests, and wasted resources, there is the same need for coordination among donors as there is for coordination among the countries concerned. In the LRFF trade, there is much to be gained by supporting regional rather than individual-country activities.

The continuing boom-and-bust nature of LRFF fisheries, the present inability of most countries to implement management measures effectively, and the cost of improving national capacity suggest that aquaculture, rather than fishery, should be the focus of future attention in some countries— subject to the necessary controls and considerations (see Chapter 6). Feasibility studies are needed across the region to determine where aquaculture really makes sense, ecologically and economically. For that subgroup of producing countries, a number of areas of research in aquaculture technology need to be addressed. Concurrently, programs of awareness and training for coastal communities could be mounted. Along the trade chain from fishing companies to consumers, there is a need to promote hatchery-reared rather than wild-caught fish.

All these endeavors would benefit from a regional approach, to both collate and distill experiences and recommendations from individual countries, and avoid duplication of effort, especially important given the relatively small size of the trade. Most LRFF-producing countries cannot afford by themselves to assist coastal communities to take advantage of the LRFF. A set of activities emanating from a regional body of all stakeholders should be the basis for future involvement of regional or international assistance agencies, rather than assisting individual countries.