

Introduction

In early 2001, Asian Development Bank (ADB) expressed the growing concern that the importance of fisheries to Pacific Island economies is not fully appreciated by the countries of the region nor by the donor community. In discussions with Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), ADB developed a concept for a project to improve the accuracy of the estimates of the contribution of fisheries to national economies. At a later stage, World Bank agreed to participate in this joint activity.

The partners in this activity established that the immediate objective of the project would be to measure the economic contribution of fisheries to the economies of Pacific Island nations from available data. It was recognized that a thorough quantification of the economic benefits of fisheries would require more than a short intervention. Accordingly, longer-term objectives were set as follows:

- (i) To help improve the accuracy of measuring the contribution of fisheries to national economies;
- (ii) To generate interest among government fisheries agencies in measuring the economic contribution of fisheries to their national economies;
- (iii) To provide information which could eventually be used to quantify the benefits of the various fisheries management options.

It was decided that the project should initially focus on the fisheries contribution to gross domestic product (GDP), including examining the methods used by national authorities in the calculation of this contribution, commenting on the validity of these methods, and producing an independent estimation of the fishing contribution to GDP. A need was also recognized for a compilation of information on the specific economic benefits of fisheries, including contributions to employment, exports, government revenue, and nutrition.

To implement the project, two consultants were recruited: (i) a fisheries specialist was contracted by ADB, and (ii) a macroeconomist was contracted by World Bank. The information used in compiling this report was collected from May to September 2001. Short visits of 1–2 days for data collection were made by the fisheries specialist

to Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Samoa, Solomon Islands, and Tonga. More time was available to obtain information in the Fiji Islands, the home base of one of the consultants. Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Tuvalu, and Vanuatu were not visited due to the constraints of time, funding, or airline schedules. Information from those countries came either from personal contact with government officials at regional meetings or from telephone and e-mail contact. In most countries, it was possible to obtain data from the staff of both the fisheries and statistics agencies. However, data coverage was substantially better in countries that were actually visited.

Although it would be desirable for the study to be as broad as to cover the full fisheries sector of the Pacific Island region, it was necessary to limit the scope of the exercise. The period covered is generally the mid- and late-1990s, with 1999 being used in several comparisons. Coverage is limited to the 14 independent Pacific Island countries. While it is recognized that freshwater fisheries are substantial in at least one of the countries, the present study is limited to marine fisheries.