3rd Meeting of the Scientific Committee

Port Vila, Vanuatu
28 September - 3 October 2015

SC-03-INF-03

ABNJ Deep Seas Project
FAO

ABNJ Deep Seas Project

Sustainable Fisheries Management and Biodiversity Conservation of Deep Sea Living Resources in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction

PROJECT UPDATE

To the
South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation 3rd Scientific Committee
28 September – 3 October 2015
Port Vila, Vanuatu

Summary

FAO provided an update on the ABNJ Deep Seas Project to which the SPRFMO is a partner. FAO described the new VME database and the need for data inputs from SPRFMO. The SC was informed about the development of a range of tools designed to assist future data collection including SMARTFORMS an electronic data collection form for onboard use. FAO is also continuing to produce identification guides for vulnerable deep-sea species, a manual on the collection of data on deep-seas species.

About the ABNJ Deep Sea Project

The "Sustainable Fisheries Management and Biodiversity Conservation of Deep Sea Living Resources in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Project (ABNJ Deep Seas Project for short) is a five year project designed to enhance sustainability in the use of deep-sea living resources and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ through the systematic application of an ecosystem approach.

This project has four major components:

> 1: Strengthening policy and legal frameworks for sustainable fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ deep seas;
>
> 2: Reducing adverse impacts on VMEs and enhanced conservation and management of components of EBSAs;
>
> 3: Improving planning and adaptive management for deep sea fisheries in ABNJ; and
>
> 4: Development and testing of methods for area-based planning.

The ABNJ Deep Seas Project started in September 2015 and is one of four projects under the Common Oceans Programme. Components 1, 2, and 3 are led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and Component 4 is led by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) through the World Conservation and Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC).

How the SPRFMO is involved

SPRFMO is an important partner of the ABNJ Deep Seas Project. SPRFMO has been involved in the design and development of the Project and has agreed to contribute to activities that promote collaboration and sharing of experiences in deep-sea fisheries and associated biodiversity as well as specific activities on capacity building for developing countries. See the last page for more details.

SPRFMO activities associated with the ABNJ Deep Seas Project will contribute an estimated USD 200,000 of project co-financing.

About this report

This report includes information on the current status of the Project and upcoming activities that are relevant to the SPRFMO.

Project activities to-date

- **New project staff:** The Project Coordinator (Mr Chris O'Brien) and the Area-based Planner (Ms Hannah Thomas) have recently taken up their positions with FAO and UNEP-WCMC, respectively.

- **Development of a guide for the implementation of international legal and policy instruments related to deep-sea fisheries and biodiversity conservation in the ABNJ:** Work is well underway on the production of a practical guide on international obligations relating to deep-sea fisheries and biodiversity conservation that can be used by stakeholders involved in deep-sea fisheries and biodiversity conservation. This work includes a review and analysis of current policy and legal instruments and identifies challenges in the implementation of current management requirements, and highlights the best practices currently applied around the world. The review and implementation guide will be available in early 2016.

- **Review of current practices and processes for VMEs:** A review of current practices by region relating to VMEs is underway. Part of this work included an international workshop to review draft overviews of regional chapters (March 2015, Swakopmund, Namibia). The draft chapters are now being reviewed and will be published before the end of 2015.

> The current practices for identification and management of VMEs publication will include a chapter on the South Pacific. SPRFMO participants were invited to the workshop and participated in the authoring of the South Pacific chapter.

- **Updating the VME Portal and DataBase:** The Vulnerable Marine Ecosystems (VME) Portal and DataBase were launched in December 2014 (www.fao.org/in-action/vulnerable-marine-ecosystems/en/). The VME Portal provides general information on VMEs, including sections for relevant publications and international instruments, links to VME-related tools and terminology, and the VME DataBase containing information on VME-related measures in ABNJ for each regional fisheries body, including SPRFMO. The database and website serve as information sharing platform as well as an awareness building tool.

> SPRFMO will be asked to update the VME database content for the South Pacific after the Commission meeting each year. The update should include any new or modified measures on fishing with bottom contact gears (including fishing footprints, encounter protocols, new VME indicator species), VME areas, and new reports (from the Commission or Scientific Committee) with VME relevant information. Currently, the contact person for entering new information and data in SPRFMO is the data officer. Training and assistance is available through FAO.

- **Best practices in VME encounter protocols and impact assessments:** A workshop was held in May 2015 in collaboration with the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR) to facilitate the sharing of best practices and effective solutions on VME encounter protocols and impact assessments. Participants included managers, scientists, the fishing industry and NGO's. Key messages on the challenges faced by the stakeholders in practicing these methods and ways forward were identified, and a technical document containing these is being finalized.

Up-coming project activities

- **Industry meeting:** a planning meeting of interested deep-sea fisheries industry stakeholders will be held prior to the ICFA meeting in Vigo Spain on 6 October to discuss the content of a Global Deep-sea Industry Symposium that will be held in 2016. The symposium will provide a forum to discuss industry practices in deep-sea fisheries, common challenges and ways forward.

- **The first Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting** is planned for December 2015 (the exact date is yet to be notified).

> A representative from SPRFMO will be invited to the ABNJ Deep Seas Project Steering Committee meeting – tentatively to be held in December 2015

- **2nd edition of the *Worldwide Review of Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas (WWR)*:** The *Worldwide Review of Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas* (FAO, 2009) will be updated and expanded in 2015 / 2016. The last review covered deep-sea fisheries for the period 2003-2006 using information acquired from a questionnaire circulated to some 40 countries and regional bodies. The updated review will address information gaps identified in the last review and will describe progress made on monitoring of data-poor deep-sea stocks, and benefits from updated stock assessment for key species.

> The 2nd edition of the Worldwide Review of Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas will include a chapter on the South Pacific region.

- **Global reviews and best practices for the assessment and management of key deep-sea species:** Following on from the Alfonsino (*Beryx* spp.) Workshop in 2012 and global review, the Deep-seas Project will hold a similar review and assessment of orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*). The reviews and identification of best practices for the assessment and management of orange roughy will commence with a workshop in early 2016.

- **Identification guides for vulnerable deep-sea species:** The Project will continue to produce identification guides to assist in the implementation of fisheries management measures and reporting obligations (e.g. by-catch requirements, recording of catches, and to improve scientific assessments). User-friendly guides will be developed for use on board vessels by observers, scientists and non-scientific personnel. Following on from the first guides for deep-sea cartilaginous fishes of the Indian Ocean and the South East Atlantic, work will soon begin to develop guides on deep-sea sharks in the South Pacific. Training workshops on the use of the deep-sea species guides will also be conducted.

- **A manual on collection of data on deep-sea species** is being produced and will be published by early 2016. This will supplement existing observer manuals and will be useful for those vessels operating in areas without RFMO technical support or without full observer coverage on data collection to meet new data collection requirements. The manual is written for a variety of users such as observers, scientists and non-scientists.

- **An electronic application for reporting onboard observations from deep-sea fisheries vessels** is currently being developed by FAO and an interested group of RFMOs. This application, called SmartForms, will include an initial set of forms for VME reporting requirements. This will be tested by the RFMOs interested in deploying the application. SmartForms will include a range of implementation options including: an iMarine integrated version; a version that forwards data directly to an RFMO backend (bypassing iMarine); or a vessel operated offline system. Several components will be developed and can be used to customize the application. These include a forms designer for fisheries observations, based on simple templates; and an application manager that manages user and application settings. A reporting component will also be added.

  > SPRFMO is invited to participate in the SmartForm discussions. If there is interest from SPRFMO in using such a reporting tool, SPRFMO should inform FAO by 9 October 2015 to ensure participation in continuing discussions and development.

- **An electronic application for submitting voluntary information on biodiversity elements.** This application will be an optional application of the SmartForms and is intended to collect information on species of interest (e.g. marine mammals, seabirds, etc.) onboard fishing vessels to facilitate partnerships between industry and the global biodiversity community. FAO will facilitate partnerships with NGOs that compile global observations maps of species of interest to develop collaborative programs with the fishing industry.

- **International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas Challenges and Ways Forward.** FAO will be hosting a second meeting on the *International Guidelines for the Management of Deep-sea Fisheries in the High Seas Challenges and Ways Forward*. The first meeting was held in Busan in 2010 and reviewed the issues encountered by RFMOs and States in implementing the guidelines. The second meeting will likely take place in 2016.

Find out more about the ABNJ Deep Seas Project

- Contact the ABNJ Deep Seas Project Coordinator (Mr Chris O'Brien) on chris.obrien@fao.org

- Visit the ABNJ Programme and the ABNJ Deep Seas Project website: www.commonoceans.org

ABNJ Deep Seas Project activities involving SPRFMO (from the project document):

Component 2: Reducing adverse impacts on VMEs and enhancing conservation of components of EBSAs	
Output 2.1.1	
Activity 2.1.1.1	Contribute to the collation and consolidation of existing biological and ecological information on Deep Sea Fisheries and biodiversity in support of management processes.
Activity 2.1.1.4	Contribute to updating the South Pacific chapter of the "Worldwide Review of Bottom Fisheries in the High Seas".
Activity 2.1.1.5	Participate in and assist with the development of a report on best practices for identification of VMEs, including discussions on VME indicators.
	Contribute information for the VME database and provide ideas for the potential development of additional functionalities of the VME database.
Output 2.1.3	
Activity 2.1.3.3	Participate in the development of and training for taxonomic ID guides, fishery data collection manuals, and observer/crew training material.
Output 2.1.4	
Activity 2.1.4.2	Contribute to a review of regional fisheries management measures on biodiversity conservation, and the development of tools for recording biodiversity.
Activity 2.1.4.3	Participate in the testing of new techniques for mitigating adverse impacts from Deep Sea Fisheries on ecosystems (including VME issues).
Output 2.2.1	
Activity 2.2.1.2	Participate in the "twinning" programs (i.e. institutional exchanges or collaboration) for deep sea scientists and carry out customized training workshops on data collection and the application of VME criteria.
Component 3: Improved planning and adaptive management for DSF in the ABNJ	
Output 3.1.1	
Activity 3.1.1.1	Participate in the development of a toolbox/operational manual for the management of deep-sea fisheries, encounter protocols, use of VME criteria and greater collaboration with industry, and with a workshop on ecosystem impact assessments.
Activity 3.1.1.2	Contribute to improving knowledge on key deep-sea species and on applied and new methodologies and technologies for studying and assessing these species.
Output 3.1.5	
Activity 3.1.5.1	Experimental testing in selected pilot areas of improved management measures, indicators, and thresholds and the trial implementation of successful results from the testing within an adaptive management process (linked to activities on testing new techniques for mitigating adverse impacts from Deep Sea Fisheries under Component 2).