



Apia, Western Samoa:

Eighth Meeting affirms SPREP's independence

SPREP's first meeting since attaining fully independent status took place in Apia, Western Samoa in October 1995.

The Agreement Establishing SPREP which was opened for signature on 16 June 1993 entered into force on 30 August 1995, following ratification by Niue in July. Later action by Nauru, Tonga and the Solomon Islands has brought the total number of ratifications or accessions to thirteen.

Officially opening the Eighth SPREP Meeting in Apia, the Hon. Fa'aso'otauloa Pati, Minister of Lands, Surveys and Environment in Western Samoa, said that SPREP's fully independent status was an important event both for the region and for Western Samoa. He congratulated the Director and member countries on the speed at which the SPREP Agreement had entered into force.

The Secretary-General of the South Pacific Commission, Mr Ati George Sokomanu, also offered congratulations for SPREP's coming of age and reaching "a legally recognised international/regional organisational status". He strongly affirmed that the effective links between SPREP and the South Pacific



Participants in the Eighth SPREP meeting in Apia in October 1995.
Photo: SPREP

Commission would continue into the future.

High-level support for SPREP

Speaking in the opening session, SPREP Director, Dr Vili Fuavao, thanked the opening speakers for their continuing cooperation and support.

He also expressed his appreciation of the presence at the meeting of the Honourable Prime Minister of Tuvalu, and of Honourable Ministers from French Polynesia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, saying their presence was an indication of their strong support and commitment to SPREP and the ideals it stood for.

Director's overview

Given that some areas within the environment sector, while identified as regional priorities, nevertheless find difficulty in attracting long-term funding, Dr Fuavao stressed that the Secretariat and SPREP members needed to keep abreast of global developments, constantly assessing how they might affect the priorities and work programmes of the organisation.

Dr Fuavao said it was imperative that Pacific Island countries position themselves to take advantage of funds, for which there was strong competition under the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in its four focal areas. A joint SPREP/UNDP Workshop convened in

Nadi in August 1995 developed a strategy emphasising Pacific Island country priorities, and the importance of a country-driven consultative process to further develop both national and regional projects for submission to the GEF.

Financial shortfall

Overviewing institutional, policy, finance, and Work Programme developments in SPREP in 1994/95, Dr Fuavao expressed his concern at the level of outstanding voluntary contributions from members which left the Secretariat facing a shortfall in its primary function budget. Similar shortfalls exist in outstanding Parties' contributions under both the SPREP and Apia Conventions.

The Director called upon the Work Programme and Budget Sub-committee, as a matter of urgency, to come up with workable solutions to avoid a financial crisis in coming years.

Review of Action Plan

Delegates agreed that a first draft of the revised SPREP Action Plan would be produced, at the latest, by the end of the first quarter of 1996. The Meeting noted that the Action Plan was required to establish the strategy of SPREP, and endorsed suggestions on the importance of defining SPREP's respective roles as a coordinator, project implementer, and disseminator of information.

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New SPREP headquarters

Discussing progress towards the new SPREP headquarters, the Meeting noted that the final design needed to be environmentally friendly and appropriate, whilst ensuring minimisation of capital and recurrent costs. It was recommended that Gazzard Sheldon Architects, whose design won the concept design competition, be engaged to design the SPREP headquarters complex.

Concern at nuclear testing

Profound concern was expressed by representatives of Australia, New Zealand, Tuvalu, Western Samoa, Niue and American Samoa regarding the resumption by France of nuclear testing in the South Pacific, with the Australian delegate citing France's obligation, under the Convention for the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment of the South Pacific Region, to conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment before commencing a major project such as nuclear testing.

The French delegation said that SPREP was a regional organisation dealing with technical issues, and not competent to discuss the tests. The representative of Western Samoa supported the inclusion of the item in the SPREP meeting, given its mandate and the current concern of Pacific Island countries over the environmental impact of French nuclear testing in the Pacific.



SPREP technical staff tag and release a live turtle found in Apia markets.
Photo: SPREP



SPREP staff perform traditional Samoan dances at the SPREP Meeting.
Photo: SPREP

Conventions' implementation criticised

Slow progress in the implementation of the Apia and SPREP Conventions was a major issue of discussion in the meetings of Contracting Parties to these Conventions in October, 1995 in Apia.

Officially opening both meetings, the Hon. Fa'aso'otauloa Pati, Minister of Lands, Surveys and Environment of Western Samoa, noted that the Apia Convention—the first to demonstrate concern for the environment of the region—had been signed in Apia in 1976, nineteen years ago.

The Minister referred to the slow passage of entry into force of both Conventions, and slow progress so far towards implementing their objectives, despite promised action by Parties at previous meetings.

Opening the SPREP Convention Meeting, the Hon. Fa'aso'otauloa Pati said: "What is at stake is the very future of a convention designed to put our region at the forefront of protecting marine and coastal areas. As things stand, it is not achieving its commendable objectives in a satisfactory or readily measurable manner".

Lack of resources

SPREP Director Dr Vili Fuavao cited as crucial issues the constraints to national reporting, and the present lack of financial and human resources in the Secretariat to administer the Conventions effectively.

He reiterated his call from the last Meeting of the Parties when he urged all SPREP Member countries to sign and

accede to the Convention and for all Parties to implement their obligations under the Convention.

Call for unit within SPREP

Delegates at both meetings discussed the establishment of a small unit within SPREP which would be responsible for Secretariat functions of the Apia, SPREP and Waigani Conventions. While this is attractive, there are serious budgetary considerations since contributions by the Contracting Parties would be insufficient to cover all costs of the unit.

Parties at the SPREP Convention Meeting agreed that a Working Group be established to consider ways in which the SPREP and Apia Conventions could be more fully integrated into the SPREP Work Programme.

Nuclear test opposition

Considerable discussion centred on the continuation by France of nuclear testing in the South Pacific, including debate with the French representative over whether the area used for testing falls within the SPREP Convention.

A Declaration on the nuclear issue was supported by Australia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Nauru, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Western Samoa. Included were clauses calling on France to cease nuclear testing, undertake long-term environmental monitoring, guarantee access to international scientific experts, and accept full responsibility for any necessary remediation or compensation.

from the Director's desk



*SPREP Director,
Dr. Vili A.
Fuavao*

It is a great pleasure for me to write for the first issue of the *Environment Newsletter* since SPREP gained full legal autonomy. To those governments which made this possible by ratifying or acceding to the SPREP Agreement, I express my appreciation. It is an opportune time to reflect on our priorities and key directions for the future.

SPREP has undergone very rapid growth over the last five years — going from a staff of four in the early 1990s to its present staff of 52. Its budget has similarly expanded.

I do not foresee, however, that such growth will continue, or that it would be desirable. The development of SPREP from this point onwards will be driven less by physical or financial expansion as by the search for increasing effectiveness in carrying out its mandate. The first step is a review of the Action Plan which I believe needs to be more focused if SPREP is to achieve maximum impact in the future.

Our basic priority has always been to respond to the needs and requests of our member countries. The first step was the preparation of the National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS) which identified national priorities.

In assisting with their implementation

over the longer term, SPREP will continue to play an important bridging role. This critical review process—interpreting the needs and expectations of members to our development partners and vice versa—is one of SPREP's most important functions, and one which has been greatly enhanced by the technical and institutional experience we have gained in recent years.

Institutional strengthening in member countries must continue to receive major emphasis. SPREP will fail in its mission if its growth and activity level is not kept in balance with the growth of the environment movement in member countries.

We have addressed this need in a variety of ways. We have posted people in national organisations. We have also brought young people to SPREP on 3-12 month attachments. This gives them invaluable training and exposure in both technical and organisational areas, as well as building up the pool of regional expertise.

Recent years have seen increasing interaction and dialogue between SPREP and a range of non-government organisations, both national and international.

This is most valuable. NGOs provide

essential links to communities. Feedback from NGOs also acts as a check and balance for SPREP's future development.

In just a few short years, SPREP has established itself as a centre of technical environmental information in the Pacific, an organisation which can represent the region as one voice in the international context. What we most need now is not more growth but rather a capacity for self-scrutiny, a willingness to undergo change and adjustment in response to the needs of our region and our larger world.

*Vili Fuavao
Director*

Capacity 21 — Working with development planners and financial institutions

A major focus for the Capacity 21 project in recent months has been the reviewing of national development plans and sectoral policies as well as practices of financial institutions to determine their relationship to sustainable development objectives.

Separate reviews were undertaken in Federated States of Micronesia, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. This information was used to develop training material aimed at the planning and financing sectors.

A series of national workshops on sustainable development is also underway. The first was held in Western Samoa in December 1995, the next in Vanuatu (March) and FSM (April).

Need to address policy sources

Addressing the Western Samoa workshop, resource person Mr Bikeni

Paeniu (economist and former Prime Minister of Tuvalu) emphasised the need to address the policy sources of environmental depletion and degradation instead of dealing with environmental problems after their occurrence. "The objective is to merge environmental issues with mainstream development policies", said Mr Paeniu.

Capacity 21 reviewed

Participants from FSM, Kiribati, Nauru, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Western Samoa met with Capacity 21 programme staff and UNDP in Apia in January to evaluate activities implemented since the programme's inception in mid-1994.

Participants considered that features assisting effective implementation included the use of sub-regional programme officers for Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia who are



*Ms Sarah Naupa, Programme Officer—
Melanesia and Mr O'Kean Ehmes,
Programme Officer—Micronesia.
Photo: SPREP*

nationals of Vanuatu, FSM and American Samoa. The programme's use of Pacific Island consultants in the interests of building up the existing pool of regional expertise was also noted.

Capacity 21 work with planning and financing sectors will be brought into regional focus through a regional Conference on Sustainable Development and Planning in June.

Expanding information role for SPREP

The growing importance of SPREP's role as the major environmental information clearing house of the Pacific region was heralded at a five-day meeting in Canberra in mid-November last year.

The Canberra meeting, Facilitating Access to Environmental Information in the Pacific Region, was held to find ways to strengthen environmental information systems and services in the Pacific region, and to facilitate environmental information exchange to support sustainable development. Coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme's INFOTERRA, it brought together 13 National Focal Points (NFPs) as well as representatives from regional organisations.

According to SPREP representatives at the meeting, Computer Specialist Alex Williams and Senior Library Assistant Satui Bentin, discussion among the NFPs clearly indicated that SPREP was becoming an increasingly important source of environmental information, augmenting INFOTERRA's long presence in the region.

INFOTERRA's 1995 statistics recorded one information enquiry for the year to its Regional Service Centre for the Pacific (currently located in Canberra). By comparison, SPREP averages twenty requests a week.

Discussion included a proposal for greater coordination between SPREP and INFOTERRA information facilities. This would provide expanded and more effective information services to users.

Meeting proposal to extend e-mail services

Given their geographic isolation, viable and operational communications infrastructure is of paramount importance to the development of Pacific Island countries. The meeting handed in a proposal to the Australian Government requesting approximately US\$68,000 to fund the establishment of an e-mail service (probably through the Pacific Sustainable Development Network) for

all seven Pacific Island countries represented—Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and Western Samoa. Currently, only Western Samoa, Fiji and Vanuatu are connected.

Efforts to sustain information service

The Western Samoa Sustainable Development E-Mail Network established under the UNDP-funded Pacific Sustainable Development Networking Programme (PSDNP) is becoming organised to launch a new action plan to sustain the Network. The Western Samoa Network provides advanced, low-cost information access to members in the region.

With uncertainty in future funding from UNDP, the Western Samoa User Group met with the PSDN Secretariat from the South Pacific Commission (SPC) in January to discuss procedures and a technical upgrade proposed by the PSDN Secretariat.

The Action Plan endorsed by the User Group at the meeting projects a fully self-funding network by the year 1998,

with the User Group gradually undertaking the administration responsibilities and costs currently met by SPC and SPREP. To implement this strategy, a Sustainable Development Network Working Group has been established.

The Convener of the Group is Mr Koroseta Too, the Executive Director of O Le Siosiomaga Society Inc. The rest of the group include Mr Steve Nagler (US Peace Corps Director), Mr Steve Brown of Eco Tour Samoa, Mr Tepa Suaesi of the Western Samoa Division of Environment and Conservation, Prof. William A. Pattie, USP Alafua Vice-Chancellor, and Mr Kolone Vaai. The group will collectively liaise with SPREP's Sustainable Development Network Officer, Ms Wanda Ieremia, who is currently managing the network.

The new technology proposed will provide members with on-line interactive access to the Internet, and facilitate direct communication between Pacific Island countries more efficiently.

Over the previous year, the Network members have enjoyed the benefits of advanced information access under the Pacific Sustainable Development Networking Programme. In the years to come, the Western Samoa SD Network will endeavour to increase the benefits and maintain a reliable, low-cost information system for all.



Wanda Ieremia, Western Samoa SD Network Officer. Photo: SPREP

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The current Western Samoa Network community of e-mail users consists of 47 e-mail sites including intergovernmental and regional organisations, government ministries and agencies, academic and research institutions, and members of the private sector. Though the host machine is located in Apia, users have been able to dial in from abroad.

Special regional report to UN Commission

The progress of sustainable development in the Pacific region will be under the international spotlight when the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) meets in New York in April-May this year. Included in its agenda is a review of the oceans and small island elements of Agenda 21.

Opportunity for Pacific region

The decision that a special report should be sent to the Commission from the Pacific region was made by the Advisory Committee established by the South Pacific Forum in Brisbane last year. According to SPREP's Sustainable Development Officer Gerald Miles: "The Committee wants to take the opportunity to send a strong message to the United Nations about the progress towards sustainable development that we have made in this region".

The Advisory Committee, which met in Apia in October 1995, called for a special regional report to be prepared and submitted to the 1996 session of the CSD. Countries participating in the meeting were Australia, Cook Islands, FSM, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue,

PNG, Tonga, USA, Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna and Western Samoa.

Regional organisations, United Nations organisations and NGOs were also represented.

Institutional response

The Advisory Committee is part of this region's institutional response to the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. Made up of SPREP member governments and with participants from NGOs, regional organisations, development banks and the UN system, the Advisory Committee reviews action taken to implement the activities contained in the 15 chapters of the Barbados Programme of Action. The October meeting was the first formal review of progress since the Barbados Conference.

The Advisory Committee transmits its reports through the SPREP meeting and ultimately to the United Nations CSD. The Commission was established in 1992 to monitor the implementation of Agenda 21, the global blueprint for sustainable development arising from the Earth Summit.

Building info capacity in member countries

The building up of environmental information capacity within member countries has been an important focus of activity for the SPREP Library and Information Centre over the last six months.

The key objective has been to establish and strengthen existing national centres and Environment Unit libraries to collect and disseminate environmental information within member countries. Lucas Dosung, Library and Information Service Co-ordinator and Senior Library Assistant Satui Bentin have visited Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, Cook Islands and Kiribati for initial establishment of libraries and training of staff.

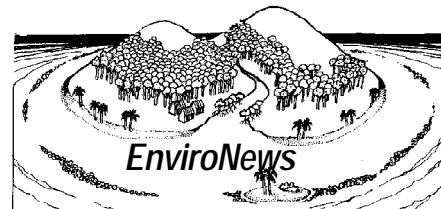
People responsible for libraries are taught how to catalogue, index and organise library materials and how to

create their own database in a standardised format. This compatibility enables easy exchange of environmental information between member countries and the SPREP Library and Information Centre.

These information centres also function as deposit libraries and distribution centres for all SPREP publications, and provide national environment information to SPREP.

Six countries in first phase

With extra budgetary funding from AusAID in mid-1995, six countries were identified for the first phase of the project for establishment of libraries and training of personnel: Western Samoa and Cook Islands (Polynesia), FSM and Kiribati (Micronesia) and Vanuatu and Solomon Islands (Melanesia).



Key role of people in global warming

A major report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has pointed to human activities as a discernible influence on climate. This view goes considerably beyond earlier IPCC reports on this issue.

The Geneva-based IPCC says the new report is likely to be the standard reference for policy makers into the next century.

Based on the findings of three working groups, the IPCC says that the earth's temperature could rise between one and 3.5 degrees Celsius by the year 2010 — an average rate of warming probably higher than any in the last 10,000 years.

Leatherback turtle sighting

The recent sighting of a leatherback turtle in Western Samoan waters is an unusual occurrence, according to SPREP Biodiversity Officer, Sue Miller.

"The leatherback is an oceanic species commonly found in open ocean, except when returning to its nesting sites", said Ms Miller. She said it was unusual to find them as far east as Western Samoa. The leatherback was found dead in fishing nets near Apia.

SPREP technical staff recorded details of the sighting in the SPREP turtle database.



SPREP technical staff measure a leatherback turtle found in fishing nets near Apia. Photo: SPREP

Milestone in Pohnpei resource management

Empowering local people so that they are actively involved in decisions about their environment is critical in the Pacific. Much of the land and sea resources are customary owned and governments have had little jurisdiction and few resources.

Bureaucrats are often slow to appreciate this, and instead try to impose policies. This approach does not work. Consultation is an imperative, not something that takes place after decisions are made.

This story illustrates how Pohnpeians learned from an initial mistake. The subsequent process in which a far-reaching resource management strategy has been developed through extensive community consultation is a model for sustainable development in the Pacific.

The strong commitment of local communities has been essential in the successful development of a Watershed Management Strategy for Pohnpei. A recent workshop in Pohnpei saw strong support by local communities for action plans developed in three pilot catchments, as well as for the concept



Sakau (kava) preparation in Pohnpei.
Photo: Andrew Tilling, SPREP

of resource management for the whole island.

The strategy is the culmination of a number of years of work by the Pohnpei Division of Forestry and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and, more recently, by consultants from New Zealand's Landcare Research Ltd and SPREP's South Pacific Biodiversity Conservation Programme (SPBCP). Local villagers have been integrally involved in planning and consultation to decide on how to manage the loss of forest cover and biodiversity, largely due to *sakau* (kava) cultivation in the upper catchments.

Early opposition

This milestone in resource management in Pohnpei is all the more remarkable as initial attempts by the State government to impose rules and regulations on the use of land and resources met with much resentment and opposition from landowners.

Concern in the early 1980s about the effects of the increasing impact of deforestation on the heavily forested interior resulted in legislation which designated approximately 5100 ha of the central upland forest (*Nanwel*) and 5525 ha of coastal mangrove forest (*Naniak*) as a protected area. This was intended to safeguard water supplies, cultural and archaeological sites and the high level of endemic flora and fauna, and to provide for the economic potential of ecotourism and recreation.

Unfortunately, there was little consultation with local people about the purpose of the law, and survey teams attempting to mark out the boundaries of the reserves were met by angry villagers armed with sticks and bush knives.

Island-wide consultation

As a consequence, a Watershed Steering Committee was formed in 1990 to promote watershed conservation efforts and a long-term strategy, and an island-wide education and consultation programme was launched.

This raised community awareness about the issues involved and led to a request by villagers to extend resource management to the entire island, from

the mountain tops to the edge of the lagoon, including the agroforestry areas in between (*Nansapw*). The community also indicated a strong desire to participate actively in planning for their own future.

ADB funding input

Shortly afterwards, TNC and the Pohnpei Division of Forestry formulated the Watershed Management and Environment Project for assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). This enabled consultants to be hired to assist in technical aspects of watershed management and to identify sustainable development opportunities.

The SPBCP has also provided financial and technical help for flora and fauna surveys, community planning, training and review of the institutional and legal framework for local environmental decision making.

Involving local people in decisions about their environment is critical in the Pacific

Linking traditional and modern

One of the most exciting and innovative aspects of this work has been the effort to integrate modern resource management methods with traditional decision-making structures and local socio-cultural conditions.

For example, a computer-based Geographical Information System (GIS) was used to identify forest loss over time and to identify areas of land-use suitability and constraints for the whole island. On the other hand, community values and areas of sensitivity like *tabu* sites were identified by a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) process at local *kousapw* (village) level in one pilot sub-catchment.

This social information was then used to modify the biophysical information in the GIS to produce a more culturally sensitive land-use suitability map for the sub-catchment. This process will be



Bill Raynor of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Conservation Area Support Officer Valentine Santiago use role plays in a Participatory Rural Appraisal process. Photo: Andrew Tilling, SPREP

extended to two other pilot catchments to assist land-use planning. Other features have been the development of community action plans in the three pilot areas and a pre-feasibility study of compatible income-generating options for the whole island.

Enlisting chiefly support

Since local people are the key to implementing policies to conserve the environment and develop alternative income-generating enterprises, every effort has been made to link local efforts to the ancient social structure headed by high chiefs (*Nanmwarki* and *Nahnken*)

at municipal level and *Soumas en Kousapw* at local level. So far, this process has been enthusiastically received, but its ultimate success is likely to depend on the devolution of authority from the State government to legally empower local decision makers.

Extending this planning and management experience to the whole island will fall to the Division of Forestry (soon to become the Office of Agriculture and Forestry). The TNC and the SPBCP will continue their assistance but the ADB will no longer be involved as its Technical Assistance is over.

Marine park for Kosrae

The Utwa-Walung mangrove swamp of Kosrae, considered to contain the largest and best examples of mangrove, marine and wetland ecosystems in Kosrae, has been proposed as a funded Conservation Area (CA) after an assessment last November by a SPBCP team from SPREP. The proposed CA is located on the south-western coastline of the island of Kosrae.

An earlier proposal for consideration as a Conservation Area did not receive SPBCP endorsement, as it was considered that there had been insufficient consultation with communities, and that the concept proposal was too narrowly based on tourism.

The new proposal comprises a reef, lagoon, estuary and associated wetlands, and surrounding terrestrial environment, and is centred on the most extensive area of mangrove and seagrass habitat in Kosrae. A unique feature of the area is the marine lakes with depths of up to 60 ft, forming part of an enclosed waterway linking Utwa and Walung harbours.

CASO workshops support community role

Unlike the strict protected areas concept where human use is strictly limited to passive, non-extractive activities, the SPBCP promotes the conservation of biodiversity through the sustainable use of biological resources and, ultimately, the management of individual projects by local people themselves.

Hence, these communities need a clear understanding of the need for wise use and management of the environment. They must also be the main beneficiaries of conservation efforts.

This approach was the theme of a regional workshop in Vanuatu in September-early October 1995 for Conservation Area Support Officers (CASOs) from across the Pacific. It was the second regional workshop for CASOs, following regional training in Nadi, Fiji in October 1994.

The main focus was project and day-to-day management by the CASO whose initial role is to assist local communities set up and manage Conservation Areas. The workshop relied on the presentation of case study material from the more

established and successful projects (Pohnpei, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu). There were also interactive sessions to develop guidelines for participatory planning and management of conservation areas.

Conservation Area Coordinating Committee workshops

Workshops have also been held for the Conservation Area Coordinating Committee, one in Fiji in August and the other in Palau in October 1995. They

acquainted community leaders and lead agencies involved in Conservation Area projects supported by the SPBCP with the programme's philosophy and day-to-day management requirements, including financial reporting.

The workshops were also an opportunity for countries and agencies covered by the SPBCP to reflect on the formulation of concept proposals and design documents, and to fine-tune reporting procedures.

CASO workshop participants, Vanuatu. Photo: Andrew Tilling, SPREP

