Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) Training for Pacific Region Heading Towards Certificate IV Qualifications

5th – 30th October 2015, FFA HQ, Honiara, Solomon Islands

Fisheries enforcement and compliance is critical for the management of the regions tuna and oceanic resources. The need for a consolidated MCS study programme was identified by regional stakeholders at the MCS Working Group meetings run by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA). Since 2012, FFA members have called for greater recognition of MCS and effective fisheries management. It was identified that this could be achieved by an MCS practitioners’ introductory training programme. This programme has been developed by FFA in close consultation with the relevant industries. It defines the important relationships between MCS capacity at national and regional levels.

The first MCS training programme, which is comprised of four courses was delivered by FFA and Ministry for Primary Industries of New Zealand (MPI) staff with a couple of consultants plus observation and validation by The University of the South Pacific (USP) in 2014. FFA and partner trainers refined their teaching resources to better align with the curriculum and competency standards for the anticipated Certificate IV in Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance (Cert IV FEC) for delivery of the second edition of these courses. This year, the training was delivered by qualified trainers supported by the Common Oceans/ABNJ Tuna Project coordinated by Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and funded by the Global Environment Facility, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand via MPI and the Australia Fisheries Management Authority.
In his opening address the Director General of FFA, Mr James Movick said, “I want to thank the FAO for their project funding support to this activity, and acknowledge USP’s role in formally accrediting this technical skills-based qualification. I also want to thank you all, for taking the time to participate in the course. This training is part of FFA’s efforts to increase the professionalization of our Pacific MCS officers. For many years, FFA has conducted ad-hoc training courses then issued a piece of paper and participants go back home. However, in terms of building career potential and broadening that career in other fields, this piece of paper cannot be used. This new accredited process can now help persuade Governments to pay more attention to MCS officers in terms of career options and to build professional positions with properly accredited qualifications”.

In total, 16 fisheries MCS and/or surveillance officers were trained and they came from 8 FFA Member countries, namely Cook Islands, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Six of this total were female trainees. All these fisheries officers were involved in MCS or surveillance work and some were experienced having worked in their respective countries for several years. Trainee numbers were maintained at an optimum level for individual competency assessments which will be later qualified through USP’s recognition of prior learning process.

The Cert IV FEC programme covers curricula that comply with standards of competency related to demonstrating knowledge of the Western and Central Pacific Ocean Fishery, MCS concepts and legal frameworks. This programme also helps students to apply MCS tools to effective fisheries management and contribute to effective MCS activities as well as operational planning and coordination. Finally, students will be able to contribute to regional cooperation in MCS activities and apply occupational health and safety requirements.

The demonstration of skills through interviewing exercises, a moot court, investigative boarding of a fishing vessel anchored within the port of Honiara and documentation of notes and evidence enabled trainees to participate in real-life scenarios that are directly related to their work. The FFA vessel monitoring system exercise allowed for regional cooperation in tracking IUU fishing and actual analysis of operational data using actual forms and templates that FFA provided in a mock database.

Comments from trainees were predominantly positive, stating that they had a good learning experience and all of them reckoned that they would recommend this training to colleagues. One trainee said: “The training covers all the required skills and knowledge for fisheries officers and the legal frameworks gave me the big picture of the whole organization of fisheries”.

One important component of the Common Oceans/ABNJ Tuna Project helps to address IUU fishing through a number of strategies, which are largely based on empowering officials from t-RFMO member countries through capacity building of enforcement and compliance officers.

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