



Ministry of Fisheries
and Marine Resources

Solomon Islands

National Fisheries Policy 2019–2029



A policy for the conservation, management, development and sustainable use of the fisheries and aquatic resources of Solomon Islands



Solomon Islands National Fisheries Policy

2019–2029

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Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources

2019



Noumea, New Caledonia,
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Abbreviations

CBRM	Community-based resource management
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agency
FMA	Fisheries Management Act 2015
FIMS	Fisheries information management systems
MFMR	Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
NTSA	Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement
PNA	Parties to the Nauru Agreement
SBD	Solomon Islands dollars
SINSO	Solomon Islands National Statistics Office
SPC	Pacific Community
VDS	Vessel Day Scheme
WCPCF	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission
WCPO	Western and Central Pacific Ocean



Foreword

I am very pleased to present the first ever National Fisheries Policy for Solomon Islands. The publication of this document reflects the progress made by the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in recent years whereby our vision and mission are now clear, our engagement in the region and internationally is robust, and our structure and processes are increasingly fit for purpose.

We recognise the importance of a guiding policy to enable us to action our vision for a sustainable fisheries sector that contributes to the socio-economic needs of all Solomon Islanders. We take that responsibility seriously and believe that this policy will set the long-term future direction for the Ministry. The policy will guide our corporate and strategic planning processes as well as the regular reviews of our business and communications plans.

We are proud that this policy has been developed and written internally by our own staff, management and the Executive of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, with the encouragement and guidance of Dr Christain Ramofafia as Permanent Secretary.

I'd like to acknowledge in particular the participation and willing contributions from the deputy directors of each division and their section heads. The process of developing the policy has had the added bonus of helping us touch base with each other as a team, to exchange views and debate; and to better understand and consolidate our positions in terms of key fisheries issues. We are confident that the policy will guide us to achieve a future that we aspire to for our nation.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the New Zealand funded Mekem Strong Solomon Islands Fisheries Programme and particularly contributions from the Team Leader throughout the development of this document. I am grateful to our partners SPC for a final review of the document and assisting with its publication.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'F' followed by a horizontal line and a small dot at the end.

Mr Ferral Lasi
Permanent Secretary (Acting)
Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources
Honiara
Solomon Islands

Introduction

Solomon Islands has a population of 642,000 (SINSO 2015) spread across nine provinces with over 70 distinct languages. The official language is English and Pidgin is spoken in common across all language groups. The country is divided into ten administrative regions; nine regions administered by elected provincial assemblies and the capital city, Honiara, administered by the Honiara City Council (Solomon Islands Government 2009).

Solomon Islands has an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of 1.58 million square kilometres (CIA 2014), the second largest in the Pacific. The total area of seagrass is at least 100 km² (McKenzie et al. 2006), mangroves occupy about 650 km² (Warren-Rhodes et al. 2011) and the total coral reef area is 3591 km² (Sulu et al. 2014).

Solomon Islands is one of the most rural societies in the world with more than 80% of the population engaged in subsistence farming and fishing. Solomon Islands has an annual population growth rate of 2.3%, and a very young population with a median age of 19.8 years and about 41% of the population under 15 years of age (Solomon Islands Government 2009).

Fisheries and marine resources play a critical role in the national economy, being the second largest source of export income after forestry. The Solomon Islands fisheries are divided into four major sectors: offshore, inshore (coastal), inland freshwater and aquaculture.

Offshore fisheries sector

Solomon Islands offshore fisheries are dominated by tuna fishing, comprising purse-seine, long-line and pole and line fishery sectors. Tuna are a regional resource located in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). Because tuna are a regional resource their effective conservation, management and development require a high degree of cooperation between coastal states and those states with fishing interests.

Responsibility for management and control of the nation's commercial tuna resources rests at the national level with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources (MFMR). In support of this Solomon Islands is party to a number of agreements that are relevant to offshore fisheries and participates in the work of several agencies with cooperative aims, including the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), and the collection of agreements between the tuna-rich central Pacific countries (Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA), the Palau Arrangement and the Federated States of Micronesia Arrangement). The annual catch of the four main tuna species (albacore, bigeye, skipjack and yellowfin) from the Pacific region averages around 2.5 million tonnes, with about 6% of this coming from Solomon Islands waters (Fig. 1). The estimated value of the Solomon Islands catch (at first point of sale) is about SBD 2400 million per year. In 2017, the Solomon Islands government received more than SBD 300 million in fisheries access and administrative fees through the MFMR. The sector was estimated to employ more than 5000 people in the formal sector in 2004 (and this figure is expected to have increased in the intervening years) (Gillett 2016).

All four major tuna stocks in the WCPO are considered to be in a relatively 'healthy' status according to the 2018 SPC/FFA tuna fisheries report card (<https://www.ffa.int/node/2126>). There is however uncertainty around the stock status of bigeye and yellowfin that means an unfavourable stock size cannot be ruled out. The relative status of each of the main stocks against biological reference points is updated annually by FFA and SPC using data from member countries and is used to provide management advice.

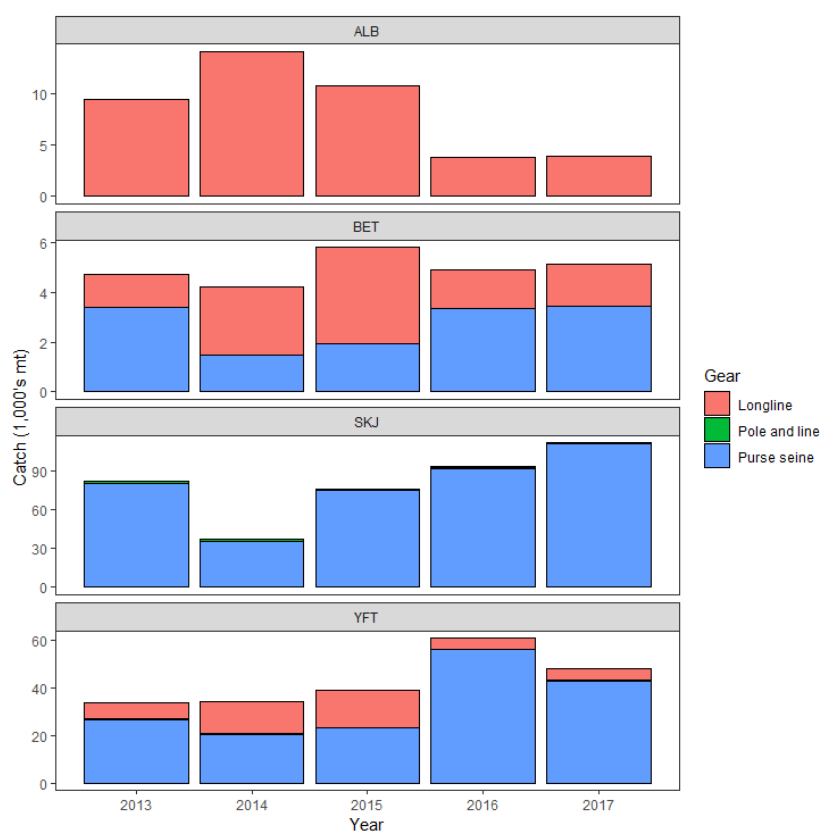


Figure 1. Annual catch estimates in Solomon Islands waters for 2013–2017 for (from top to bottom) albacore, big eye, skipjack and yellowfin tuna, for the three gear types operating in the Solomon Islands (source: SPC).

Inshore fisheries sector

Inshore (coastal) small-scale fisheries are an important source of food security and household income in Solomon Islands. In rural areas, where most Solomon Islanders live, nearly half of all women and 90% of men fish or collect aquatic resources for food and income (Solomon Islands Government 2009). Fishing, and collection, is done with a wide range of gears and techniques and the fisheries themselves are diverse and composed of multiple species.

Solomon Islands is a part of the Coral Triangle region, a global centre for marine diversity that exemplifies the richness, uniqueness and beauty of the world's coastal and marine environment. The coral reef fish fauna alone, of Solomon Islands waters, consists of at least 82 families, 348 genera and 1019 species (Green et al. 2006). Forty-seven of these had not been documented in Solomon Islands prior to 2004. A more recent Honiara market survey by the MFMR (Rhodes and Tua 2016) identified a further 55 species that represented new records for Solomon Islands. Rhodes and Tua (2016) also found that juveniles made up a substantial component of the catch for most commercially important finfish species, which has important implications for management.

The total value and quantity of inshore fisheries harvests have been estimated from a range of studies, none of which is comprehensive enough to be definitive for the whole country. Arena et al. (2015) valued inshore subsistence fisheries (defined as catching fish for home/own consumption) at SBD 442 million per year. While the absolute values differ amongst studies (e.g. World Bank 2000; Gillett 2009), it is likely that the real catch of subsistence fishers in Solomon Islands lies between 17,500 and 33,556 tonnes per year (Table 1), and that these fisheries are more important to people's livelihoods than previously thought. The intensity of fishing varies among different provinces, suggesting that sustainable management practices should be tailored to the context of the province.

Table 1. Subsistence fisheries catch (tonnes) by province, 2013 (source: Arena et al. 2015).

Province	Total population	Total catch (t)	Catch per kilometre of coast (kg/km)	Catch per ha of reef (kg/ha)
Central	26,051	2,214	1,503	230
Choiseul	26,372	2,482	1,373	115
Guadalcanal	93,613	5,625	6,996	542
Isabel	26,158	1,964	653	46
Makira-Ulawa	40,419	3,162	3,638	377
Malaita	137,596	8,131	9,043	499
Rennel and Bellona	3,041	205	579	136
Temotu	2,1362	1,956	1,629	88
Western	76,649	7,263	2,307	172
Honiara	64,609	554		
Total	516,147	33,556	2,473	192

Inshore commercial fisheries also provide an important source of income for Solomon Islanders. Beche-de-mer and trochus are highly valued on international markets. However, the value of exports and catches, of both commodities, have been decreasing steadily for the past 40 years. International trading of these inshore fisheries resources is governed by the requirements of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species to which Solomon Islands is party.

Arena et al. (2015) valued commercial inshore fisheries at SBD 70 million per year. For 2014, Gillett (2016) estimated the coastal commercial catch in Solomon Islands to be 6,468 mt, worth SBD 98 million per year. This considered the following components:

- baitfish: 32.5 mt, worth SBD 32,500
- exported coastal fishery products: 1435 mt, worth SBD 8 million (a year when export of beche-de-mer was banned)
- domestically consumed coastal commercial fishery products: 5000 mt, worth SBD 90 million.

In addition the beche-de-mer harvest was valued at more than SBD 32 million when opened in 2015 (Govan 2017).

Inshore fisheries management and development is the domain of local communities, provincial governments and the national government. Community-based resource management (CBRM) is most suited to the land and sea tenure context of Solomon Islands and the relatively weak central government capacity. Over the last 15 or so years the numbers of communities known to have carried out some sort of CBRM has increased from a handful to more than 300 (Govan 2015), and much has been learned in terms of best practice in facilitating community processes. The government has made commitments through the UN Ocean Conference to strengthen CBRM initiatives to contribute to fulfilling SDG 14.

Inland freshwater fisheries

The many large islands in the country result in a relatively large inland population having no direct access to marine food resources, and for this reason Solomon Islands has a significant subsistence freshwater fishery. Information is scarce on the inland fisheries, and no comprehensive survey has been carried out. Anecdotal information and survey reports that focus on single islands suggest that flagtails, gobies, eels and freshwater shrimps are important native species (Gillett 2016). Mozambique tilapia inhabits many rivers, streams and swamps in Solomon Islands. Many people have become accustomed to eating it and enjoy its taste. In peri-urban settings inland of Honiara and Auki, Lees Lake on Guadalcanal and Lake Tengano on Rennell Island, people depend on tilapia as a supplementary or main source of animal protein (MFMR 2010). Limited by the information scarcity described above, freshwater fishery production in Solomon Islands in 2014 was deemed to be 2300 mt, with a farm gate value of SBD 29 million (Gillett 2016).

The Fisheries Management Act (FMA) 2015 is applicable to inland waters but to date there are no inland waters fisheries management initiatives at the national government level.

Aquaculture sector

There is increasing recognition that growing populations, combined with the effects of climate change and overfishing on fisheries resources, particularly inshore reef fisheries resources, will compound food security problems arising from an increasing gap between fish demand and supply from coastal fisheries. Solomon Islands is one of the Pacific Island countries where shortfalls in food fish production are projected to be most serious (Bell et al. 2009). Calculations suggest coastal fisheries will not supply the fish required for future food security, with projected shortfalls of more than 4000 tonnes per year in fish supply versus demand by 2030. There is a need for new sources of fish to meet future food security requirements, and aquaculture is one means of supplying future demand.

Solomon Islands is blessed with diverse, and often pristine, marine, coastal and freshwater environments. Supported by low labour costs, access to good quality water and fast improving communication technologies, there is opportunity for aquaculture to flourish. Aquaculture in Solomon Islands is still relatively undeveloped despite a long history beginning in the late 1950s. Aquaculture activities have included tilapia (*Oreochromis mossambicus*) farming, pearl oyster farming, farming of *Macrobrachium rosenbergii*, giant clam farming and seaweed (*Kappaphycus alvarezii*) farming. These activities have been the result of government and private sector initiatives. The history of aquaculture development in Solomon



Islands is represented in Figure 2. Aquaculture accounted for SBD 2.4 million worth of exports in 2017 (Solic database 2017), solely due to seaweed. The sustained operation of a rural seaweed farming industry over recent years, and the ongoing interest of rural entrepreneurs in farming of freshwater, brackish-water and marine fish and marine resources, suggests that aquaculture has potential to develop further as one platform to secure food and nutrition security as well as create rural livelihood and national revenue-generating opportunities.

The national government facilitates research into new and emerging aquaculture opportunities to develop science-based policy and implement development plans.

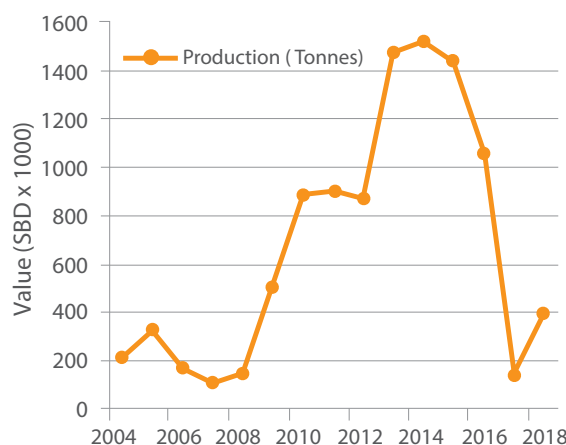
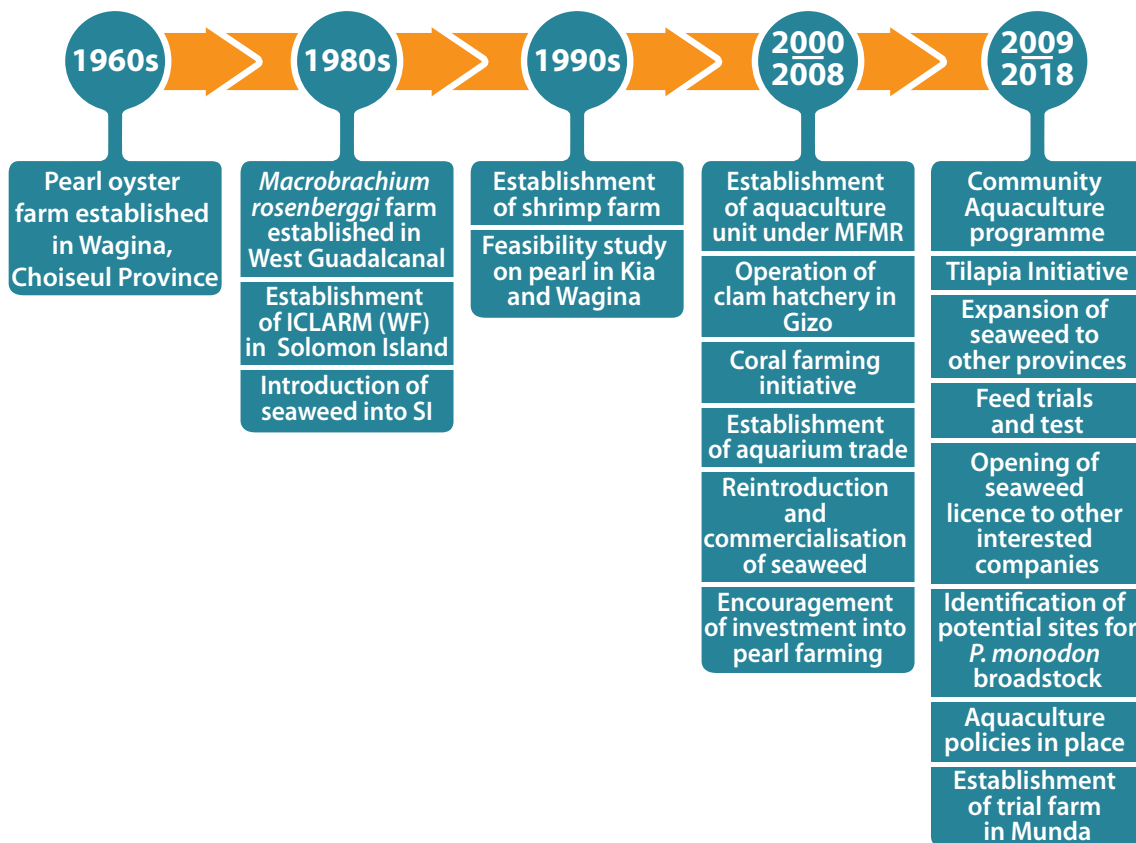


Figure 2. History of aquaculture development in Solomon Islands (source: Solomon Islands National Aquaculture Management and Development Plan 2018–2023) and annual production of seaweed 2004–2018 (MFMR data).



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Policy context

Strategic context

This policy is an umbrella policy for the fisheries sector and should be considered together with the FMA 2015, which provides the enabling legislative environment for MFMR’s work, and other fisheries-specific policy documents including the following.

Policy-level documents:

- Solomon Islands National Development Strategy which addresses the Sustainable Development Goals
- Solomon Islands Government Policy
- Solomon Islands Ocean Policy.

Strategy-level documents:

- Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Strategy
- Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources Business Plan

Operational plans:

- Tuna Management and Development Plan
- National Plan of Action on Sharks
- National Aquaculture Development Plan
- Beche-de-mer Management Plan
- Baitfish Management Plan
- Coral Management Plan
- Clam Management Plan
- Trochus Management Plan (in preparation)
- Special area management plans
- Other management plans, and national plans of action as they are developed.

The MFMR policy map (Figure 3) provides a visual representation of how these documents relate to each other. ‘Policy statements’ are short documents that are developed by the MFMR for specific topics when required. Policy statements draw on all relevant documents in the policy map that are related to that topic.

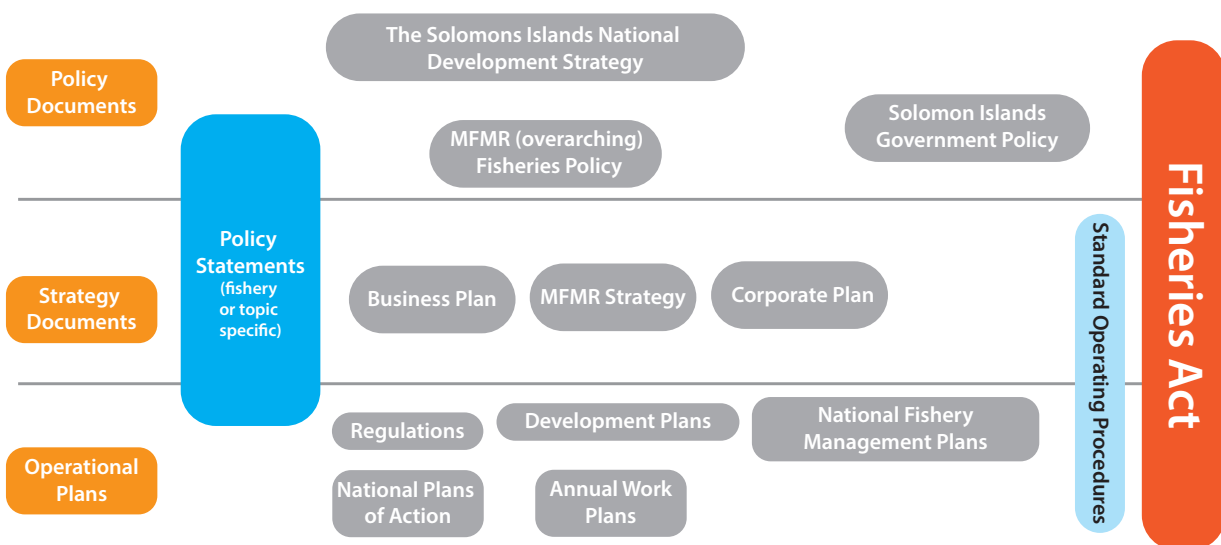


Figure 3. The MFMR policy map.

Operational context

In order to meet the vision of a “sustainable fisheries sector that contributes to the socio-economic needs of all Solomon Islanders” there are some issues that need to be addressed and ongoing initiatives that need to be supported. These include the following.

Conservation and management:

- Increased commercial exploitation exacerbated by increasing population, market demand and climate change has resulted in depletion of some inshore species such as sea cucumbers.
- Community-based fisheries management practices are supported by the FMA 2015 – the challenge is to inform communities of the process to develop effective management plans for customary marine areas.
- There is an ongoing need for improved resources, systems and infrastructure to effectively conserve and manage inshore, inland and offshore fisheries and protect the EEZ from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.
- It is projected that there will be a shrinking and moving away of tuna stocks from Solomon Islands waters as a result of climate change in 30–50 years.

Development:

- There is a need to enable wider indigenous participation in all fisheries sectors.
- Improved infrastructure and handling facilities are required to:
 - reduce fish spoilage, waste and loss; and
 - support local production of value-added fisheries products suitable for export market, thereby generating income, profits and jobs.
- Expanded and diversified markets are required for fisheries products.
- The potential for development, and management requirements, for inland fisheries are as yet unexplored.
- It is important to maintain a national team with skills and confidence in managing intense and difficult international negotiations over the sustainable use of regional tuna resources and the allocation of benefits from that use.
- There is a need for compatibility of measures for control of long-line fisheries in the high seas.
- There are opportunities for the fledgling aquaculture industry to develop to a level to meet projected fish shortfalls for food security and to increase export earnings.
- Fisheries management and development systems need to be resilient to unpredictable and potentially destabilising events in the environment that are external to the fishery and to the MFMR.

Policy vision and mission, and implementation

The Solomon Islands National Fisheries Policy 2019–2029 is a policy for the conservation, management, development and sustainable use of fisheries and aquatic resources of Solomon Islands. The MFMR, with its core business of fisheries management, development and operations, will lead the way in implementing the policy.

The policy's vision and mission are:

Vision: A sustainable fisheries sector that contributes to the socio-economic needs of all Solomon Islanders.

Mission: To provide effective services to facilitate sustainable management and development of our fisheries and aquatic resources for the benefit of the nation.

MFMR assets that underpin its ability to deliver the vision and mission include:

- the ability to secure the necessary resources;
- a capable and innovative workforce;
- creativity in exploring new opportunities; and
- an ability to respond to and deliver in a changing external environment.

MFMR is structured in technical divisions that address the regulation and compliance of fisheries management and development. It is supported by a corporate services division.

The staff of MFMR are central to its success. MFMR will provide a conducive work environment to develop committed, competent, strategic staff champions that effectively operationalise MFMR policy.

The MFMR, on behalf of the Solomon Islands Government, implements relevant international and regional fisheries measures and approaches. In implementing the National Fisheries Policy, MFMR will nurture its partners in development, work within international conventions, treaties and arrangements, and explore public–private partnerships to promote investments in fisheries.





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Policy focus areas and objectives

The policy is divided into three major fisheries policy areas, each with a strategic policy objective. There is considerable overlap between activities of the major fisheries policy areas. Delivering the policy requires MFMR staff in the different divisions to collaborate with respect to planning, resource allocation and implementation.

1. Inshore and inland fisheries

Strategic Policy Objective 1: Safeguard inshore and inland fisheries and associated ecosystems and ecosystem services, for good nutrition and increased socio-economic benefits.

2. Offshore fisheries

Strategic Policy Objective 2: Increase, improve and diversify the benefits that the nation receives from its offshore fisheries resources.

3. Aquaculture

Strategic Policy Objective 3: Develop and establish a sustainable and well-managed aquaculture sector that supports rural livelihoods, food security, economic return and stock enhancement.

Policy Area 1: Inshore and inland fisheries

Strategic Policy Objective 1: Safeguard inshore and inland fisheries and associated ecosystems and ecosystem services, for good nutrition and increased socio-economic benefits.

Statements of intent:

1. Management of inshore and inland fisheries will be through fisheries management plans platformed on ecosystem-based and gender-equitable approaches that promote climate change resilience.
2. All fisheries under customary marine tenure will be managed by community-based resource management tools.
3. All commercial species of interest will be managed through national management plans.
4. Endangered and threatened species will be managed in accordance with international management measures to which Solomon Islands is party and through targeted strategies and operational plans.
5. Management measures will include:
 - a) size limits
 - b) gear restrictions
 - c) managed and protected areas
 - d) seasonal and periodic openings and closures
 - e) quotas
 - f) moratorium export and harvest ban
 - g) limited export licences.
6. Licence conditions and a compliance, surveillance and enforcement programme will be used to enforce fisheries law to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing of inshore fisheries.
7. A central, national data repository supporting science-based decision-making will be used for management of all inshore and inland fisheries.
8. Solomon Islands will exert tighter control over the harvest, processing and marketing or exporting of inshore and inland fish caught in its waters.
9. Commercial exploitation of inshore and inland fisheries of interest will be through rights-based systems.
10. Sustainable use will be facilitated through improved preservation, market access and enhanced livelihood opportunities for rural men and women, including vulnerable and marginalised groups, that access, use and benefit from inshore and inland fisheries.
11. Strong partnerships with provincial governments and civil society partners will facilitate conservation, management and development of inshore and inland fisheries.

Policy Area 2: Offshore fisheries

Strategic Policy Objective 2: Increase, improve and diversify the benefits that the nation receives from its offshore fisheries resources.

Statements of intent:

1. Management of offshore fisheries will be platformed on precautionary and ecosystem-based approaches and through the implementation of agreed national, regional, subregional and international conservation management measures to ensure sustainability of stocks.
2. Management will be through use of zone-based management tools which aim to future-proof the utilisation of the fisheries against projected climate change impacts.
3. Enforcement of fisheries law will include the following:
 - a) the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Vessel Day Scheme (VDS)
 - b) licence conditions
 - c) a compliance, surveillance and enforcement programme to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing
 - d) an integrated fisheries monitoring programme to collect and verify data on fishing activities using observers and e-monitoring
 - e) the Niue Treaty Subsidiary Agreement (NTSA) to support regional cooperation, surveillance and information sharing.
4. Solomon Islands will apply all conservation management measures agreed by PNA, FFA and WCPFC in its fisheries waters.
5. A central fisheries information system will be established for offshore fisheries through PNA's FIMS.
6. Offshore fisheries development approaches will control the harvest, processing and export of Solomon Islands fish through appropriate public–private partnership arrangements. Development approaches will include the following.
 - a) Localising the Solomon Islands long-line tuna fishery using proven¹ rights-based fisheries management approaches where all activities relating to the fishery including harvesting, processing and marketing are done by Solomon Islanders.
 - b) 100% landing and processing of all tuna long-line catches in Solomon Islands to maximise socio-economic benefits.
 - c) Maximising the value of Solomon Islands VDS allocations through innovative approaches.
 - d) Any VDS subsidy consideration to be only for vessels tied to domestic processing and development.
 - e) Creating landing facilities, storage hubs and other support infrastructure.
 - f) Creating an efficient value chain framework which increases market size and value and wider local participation.
7. The application of internationally agreed standards in the fishery, which provide safe, healthy and fair working and living conditions on vessels and in onshore processing facilities for all involved, is required.

¹ Referring to the Icelandic model.

Policy Area 3: Aquaculture

Strategic Policy Objective 3: Develop and establish a sustainable and well-managed aquaculture sector that supports rural livelihoods, food security, economic return and stock enhancement.

Statements of intent:

1. Commodities for aquaculture development will be prioritised using the National Aquaculture Development Plan as a guide.
2. Inland and coastal aquaculture will be developed as a livelihood opportunity in a manner that provides equitable opportunities for men, women and vulnerable groups to participate and benefit, and that promotes climate change resilience.
3. Integrated strategic and legislative frameworks will support development and management of a sustainable aquaculture sector.
4. Aquaculture will be used to enhance stock of targeted depleted inland and coastal aquatic species through research and technology innovations.
5. A conducive environment for development and growth in all levels of the aquaculture sector will be created through suitable infrastructure, capacity development and technology innovation.



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