

9TH REGIONAL MEETING OF
PACIFIC HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (PHOAFS)

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Paper reference	Session 4: Agenda Item 4
Title	Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals (PNFP)
Action	Information
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Summary

The Agenda Item briefly introduces the Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals (PNFP), which was developed based on the interest from member countries who attended the 2023 Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry Side event on **“Enhancing communication and networks to promote sustainable forest management”**. Member countries strongly supported the development of a regional network to connect forestry professionals in the Pacific.

Recommendation:

PHOAFS are invited to.

- a) Note progress that is being made towards the establishment of the Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals and the development of national associations.
- b) Note the important contribution that the Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals and the national associations could make to capacity building and the professional development of forestry professionals within the Pacific.
- c) Note and support the planned activities.

Background

1. Forestry professionals in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) work in geographically isolated areas with limited resources. They are employed within governmental, private sector,

and non-governmental organisations that have highly variable and generally very limited capacity to provide programs for professional support and continuing professional development.

2. The role of a professional association is to define the skills and standards of the profession and assist members in furthering their professional development through ongoing learning and exchange of information. Professional associations are apolitical, voluntary, and independent of government and industry. They serve to promote the science and practice of forestry, as well as the expertise and knowledge of forestry professionals; they are not 'industrial unions.
3. Vanuatu and PNG established professional associations a few years ago, and Fiji, after some in-country consultations supported by SPC and FA, registered the Fiji Forestry Professionals Association in 2023. In-country consultations were also held in Tonga and Samoa, and they have shown great interest in forming their own forestry professional's associations. Vanuatu expressed interest in joining the PFPN and on the recent in-country consultation held in Port Vila, they had vowed to review their mode of operation and the re-naming of their group from Vanuatu Foresters Association to Vanuatu Forestry Professionals Association.
4. Professional forestry associations within PICs have previously struggled to remain active due to a lack of local capacity compounded by the 'tyranny of distance' for traditional means of communication. Local capacity is likely to continue to constrain the viability of professional associations within smaller PICs.
5. Forestry professionals in the Pacific, however, are now increasingly 'connected' and accustomed to working online and communicating via digital platforms. Modern communications and networks between countries can now provide a way of sharing resources and information to provide professional support to all forestry professionals in the region.

Purpose of this paper

6. This paper's purpose is to inform the meeting of the role and progress made in establishing the Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals.

Progress Update

7. At the third Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry (PWAf) in 2023, the side event on **"Enhancing communication and networks to promote sustainable forest management"** generated much interest among participants, who expressed strong support for the development of a regional network to connect forestry professionals in the Pacific.
8. Since then, the Land Resources Division (LRD) of the Pacific Community (SPC) with financial support from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR) and the Crawford Fund (Tasmania), and technical support from Forestry Australia, has been consulting and creating awareness on the formation of the Pacific Network of Forestry

Professionals and the establishment of national associations, where feasible, with interested countries.

9. Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs) are experiencing evolutionary changes in the nature of institutions and in the diversity of people that are engaged in the practice of forestry and the management of tree resources. A large number of professionals are in the government forestry systems with academic qualification outside of forestry. In Tonga for example, there are only two forestry graduates out of the twenty-four currently employed with the forestry division, similarly in Samoa, there are only two forestry graduates in the system now . Information that we have so far indicated that there are no forestry graduates in the forestry divisions in Niue, and the Cook Islands. However, the consultations we had so far indicated that there are a number of forestry graduates outside of government and are willing to assist and network as a sector. In Tonga for example, there are eight forestry graduates (3 retirees) outside of forestry division and are willing to assist, whilst in Samoa, there are seven forestry graduates (3 retirees) outside of the government system.
10. The network of forestry professionals in the Pacific will connect local forestry associations and individual forestry professionals and foster the sharing of information and access to programs for professional development, professional accreditation, exchange of information and training to enhance core forestry technical skills.
11. The planned regional network is based on the following-
 - a) *Voluntary participation* - Interested local professional forestry associations (where they exist) and individual forestry professionals will be able to be connected to a network through modern digital and traditional communication platforms
 - b) *Local ownership* - Support will be provided to encourage the development of active local associations with local projects, events and initiatives.
 - c) *Partnerships and the sharing of resources* - The network will seek to establish partnerships with organisations such as Forestry Australia, the New Zealand Institute of Forestry and the Pacific Community (SPC) to provide access to scientific and technical information, education and training.
 - d) *Collegial approach* - The network will foster communication, collaboration and professional support, including access to mentoring, professional accreditation and work-exchange programs.
 - e) *Equal opportunity* - The network will actively provide and promote equal opportunity for the active engagement and participation of all forestry professionals regardless of characteristics such as gender, culture, race, ethnicity and age. 'Forestry professionals' includes any professional involved in managing forests and tree resources, including researchers, advisers, educators and administrators.
 - f) *Independent* - The network should be valued and supported by all sectors, including governmental, private and non-governmental. However, the network

must operate and must be seen to operate as an apolitical, independent professional association.

12. A hybrid regional workshop is planned for August 2024 to discuss the network's governance structure and explore the possibility of providing technical and scientific forestry advice to HOAFS through forestry technical meetings. In addition, in-country consultations is also planned for the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea in the first half of 2024.
13. It is also envisaged that the Network will convene side events and forestry technical meetings during the PWAF 2025 to discuss forestry issues and challenges and identify actions that promote the sustainable management of landscapes and the utilization of forests, trees, and products.

Recommendations:

The PHOAFS are invited **to**.

- a) Note progress that is being made towards the establishment of the Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals and the development of national associations.
- b) Note the important contribution that the Pacific Network of Forestry Professionals and the national associations could make to capacity building and the professional development of forestry professionals within the Pacific.
- c) Note and support the activities planned