



# PART 3. DESCRIBING OUR FUTURE

## WE IMAGINE

Describing our future is about imagining our preferred vision of the future. Visioning, the futures triangle and narratives help us to create an image of the future and connect us to our vision. These tools step away from present-day challenges and allow us to imagine ourselves in our preferred future.



Learning about strategic foresight has helped me to imagine my work and what society may look like in 10, 20 and even 30 years, which I have never done before.

- SPC staff member and participant on Become a Futurist course

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### ✔ WHAT IT IS

Tools that place participants in their preferred future and enable them to imagine different versions of the future.

### ✔ WHEN TO USE IT

Use it during a consultation process.

### ✔ WHY USE IT

It ensures that a wide range of stakeholders contribute their visions for the future, which enables you to see commonalities and trends.

Tip

Present participants' contributions back to them in visible and interesting ways.

## ?! WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

Save the Children. 2019. The future is ours: strategic foresight toolkit – making better decisions, pages 79–88. ♻️ Free to download at <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/future-ours-strategic-foresight-toolkit-making-better-decisions>

SPC. 2022. A compendium of Pacific practice in strategic foresight, Motusaga, M. Designing youth futures: A Pacific recipe in foresight application. Pages 38–44.

👁️ Available at <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b47zt>

## HOW TO DO IT



**Time**  
60 minutes



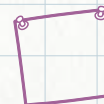
**No. of participants**  
Unlimited



**Facilitation**  
One lead facilitator



**Material**  
Print out of lightbulbs or postcards (visionary resources)



Display area to hang lightbulbs or postcards



Coloured marker pens

Time & Activity	Step	Description
Pre-exercise	1	 <b>Organise and advertise a fun event, for example, a morning tea, for participants.</b> Decide if you would like to use the light bulbs or postcard templates for your event. Print out templates.
	2	 <b>Explain the activity to all participants.</b> Make coloured pens and lightbulb cut outs available in collaborative spaces that encourage participants to share and discuss their inputs. Participants are invited to stay for as little or as long as they wish.
Post-exercise	3	 <b>Offer a small reward</b> <i>e.g., chocolate to each participant for completing their lightbulb or postcard.</i>
	4	 <b>Collect all lightbulbs or postcards.</b> Categorise findings for insights. Share the insights with all participants.

 10 minutes

 10-45 minutes



# CASE STUDY 5: CAFÉ COLLABORATION

**Café Collaboration was one of the first staff activities we ran to gather information for the strategic plan. We used an event called Café Collaboration to get perspectives from as many staff as possible on their vision for SPC.**

## WHAT WE DID

We held Café Collaboration multiple times over one month, and around 100 staff took part. We provided coffee and chocolates, and, in exchange, staff shared their visions for SPC in 2035. They also gave us ideas about how we could involve staff in developing Strategic Plan 2022–2031 (see Figure 5).

In this exercise, we gave every staff member a paper cut-out of a lightbulb and gave them this scenario to think and write about: "It is 2035. You are at a BBQ. Someone asks, 'So, what impacts are you making through your work?' What do you say?"

**Figure 5**

*Staff participating in Café Collaboration in Suva and Noumea*



Source: SPC

## WHAT HAPPENED

Staff gave us 115 contributions, which we categorised into themes. These are some of the themes that emerged:

- o Gathering data and having evidence to show that our work is having an impact
- o Understanding what we are achieving in different sectors
- o Making SPC more effective and efficient.

We validated these themes through other exercises during the strategic planning process, and incorporated them into the strategic plan.

Staff also gave us 80 ideas on how to involve them in the strategic planning process. These included frequently engaging them in genuine ways and using different modalities; consulting with staff at all levels to ensure wide buy-in and ownership of the plan; maintaining a good balance of engaging with staff and members; and helping staff understand how their work connects to SPC's strategy. These suggestions shaped our engagement plan.

We hung up the lightbulbs in staff tearooms, so staff could see what others were thinking about SPC. We also ran a roadshow to share the information with different teams, gather new insights and keep the conversations alive.

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## WHAT WE LEARNT

Keeping the visioning activity simple, and giving people multiple ways to participate, helps to gather input from a broad spectrum of people.



My intention is to have a deeper understanding of the subject of futures thinking and strategic foresight, as they are key capabilities that will ensure we survive and thrive as individuals and as organisations into the future. It is also about exploring my own indigenous concepts of futures thinking and strategic foresight so I can contextualise this learning in my own cultural context.

- Leituala Kuiniselani Toelupe Tago Elisara,  
Regional Director Polynesia, SPC

# CASE STUDY 6: YOUTH LEADERS' VISIONS

The Navosa Provincial Youth Council in Fiji used visioning to develop its five-year strategic plan. SPC's Social Inclusion Adviser facilitated the workshop and adapted strategic foresight tools to help imagine visions of the future for the youth council.

## WHAT WE DID

The youth council held a strategic planning workshop with 85 youth. It used a visioning exercise to start the workshop. It called the exercise "Love letters from the village". Each youth leader wrote a love letter to their future self. In the letter they wrote about what the youth council and their province looked like (see Figure 6).

One member of the youth council said:



We, as young people, are the backbones of our families, villages and provinces. We need to have a collective vision; we thought a strategic plan would be a great starting point.

**Figure 6:**  
Cartoon showing someone writing a love letter to their future self



Source: Tui Ledua, SPC

## WHAT HAPPENED

Through the visioning exercise, young people shared not only their own visions and views, but also those of their community elders, who were not present at the workshop. The youth participants agreed that, to design the vision for the future they needed to recognise the past. By this they mean understanding their elders' indigenous knowledge and using it to navigate future challenges.

The youth council used the love letters as one of its sources of information for the strategic plan it developed at the end of the workshop.



I made several modifications to the tool and readjusted the entire programme to adapt to this audience, and its perspectives and needs. Activities were modified from general and high-level activities to village activities, activities to which young people from the village could relate to.

- Dr Mema Motusaga,  
former Social Inclusion Adviser, SPC



## ✓ WHAT IT IS

A tool that identifies what our vision for the future is (“pulls”), what is pushing us towards the future (“pushes”) and what is holding us back from achieving our vision (“weights”).

## ✓ WHEN TO USE IT

With stakeholders or staff to develop a vision for a strategy, generate buy-in for a change or explore newfound threats or opportunities. It is most valuable in a group setting but can be used as part of an independent analysis.

## ✓ WHY USE IT

It provides a visual map of the present and future, which includes the plausible futures that emerge from the triangle’s three corners—pulls, pushes and weights.



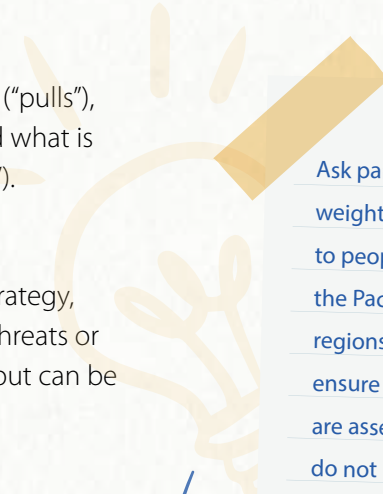
## WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

The Pacific Community. 2022. A compendium of Pacific practice in strategic foresight, pages 51–52.

👁 Available at <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b47zt>.

Motusaga, M. 2022. Designing youth futures: a Pacific recipe in foresight application, page 43.

👁 Available at <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b47zt>.



Ask participants what pulls, pushes and weights look like to different social groups; to people in urban and rural areas; and to the Pacific region; countries; provinces or regions; and local communities. This helps ensure that goals, initiatives or challenges are assessed through different lenses, and do not unconsciously or unintentionally disadvantage the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

– Rose Martin, former Team Leader, Mainstreaming & Capacity Building, Human Rights and Social Development, SPC

Allow room for participants to provide their own interpretation of the futures triangle. The Navosa Provincial Youth Council (See Case study 10), viewed the ‘weights of the past’ as positives that anchor personal identity. Participants referenced their cultures, their churches and their vanua/families. This shows a distinct Pacific culture and connection with the past.



## HOW TO DO IT



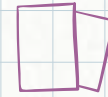
**Time**  
60 minutes



**No. of participants**  
Unlimited. Ideal group sizes are between 8–10 people



**Facilitation**  
One lead facilitator, with support facilitators to guide each group.



Butchers/drawing paper



Visual aids to inspire visions for the future

### Material



Sticky notes



Coloured marker pens



Virtual collaboration platform  
*i.e., Google Docs, Miro, Conceptboard etc. (if online)*

### Time & Activity

### Step

### Description

15 minutes

#### Introduce the activity



#### Set the scene and introduce the futures triangle exercise to the group plenary.

*Explain each of the three components of the futures triangle, using examples relevant to the group(s):*

- o Pull of the future
- 1 o Weights of the past
- o Pushes of the future





Take the time to explain the exercise. Observe participants responses, reactions and try to connect with them.

- 2 Communicate the ground rules. Ask participants to withhold judgement, be kind to each other and to be bold and creative. Remind participants that there are no wrong answers. Provide participants the opportunity to ask questions before breaking into smaller groups.

30 minutes

#### Complete the activity

- 3 In small groups, draw the futures triangle. Participants may use images to explain the pulls, pushes and weights, for example, the ocean, streams, rivers and anchors. Facilitators may choose to explore the interactions between the different corners of the triangle with participants as part of the discussion.

Time & Activity	Step	Description
<i>Table continued from previous page...</i>		
	4	Ask the group to identify their images of the future—the vision. Print outs of visual aids can be used to prompt discussion. Try not to be too prescriptive with the visual aids so they do not limit alternatives. Using sticky notes or different coloured pens, add all visions contributed by the group to the top section of the triangle.
		 <b>Next, ask the group to discuss and add the weights of the past.</b> <i>Questions to prompt discussion may include:</i>
	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o What is holding us back, or getting in our way of achieving our vision?</li> <li>o What are the barriers to change?</li> <li>o How is (geographical or organisational) culture perceived – as an anchor or as an inhibitor of action?</li> </ul>
		 <b>Next, ask the group to discuss and add the pushes of the future.</b> <i>Questions to prompt discussion may include:</i>
	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o What trends are pushing us towards particular futures?</li> <li>o What quantitative drivers and trends are changing the future?</li> </ul>
 15 minutes	7	Request all groups to present their futures triangle to the other groups. Include time to highlight the main points discussed, questions from other groups and share reflections on the findings.
<b>Reflect and summarise activity</b>		
<b>Post activity:</b>		
 15 minutes	8	Facilitator(s) to consolidate material and make it available to the participants. Offer a follow-up session with the lead organiser(s) or group representatives to see how the information may be used to support strategy and long-term planning.
<b>Consolidate information</b>		
<i>Provide to participants within 3 days of the activity.</i>		

# CASE STUDY 7: CREATING VISIONS FOR SPC'S STRATEGIC AREAS

The futures triangle was the main tool used to develop a shared vision for each of SPC's seven key focus areas (KFAs). We combined this exercise with causal layered analysis (See Case study 15) and backcasting (See Case study 16).

## WHAT WE DID

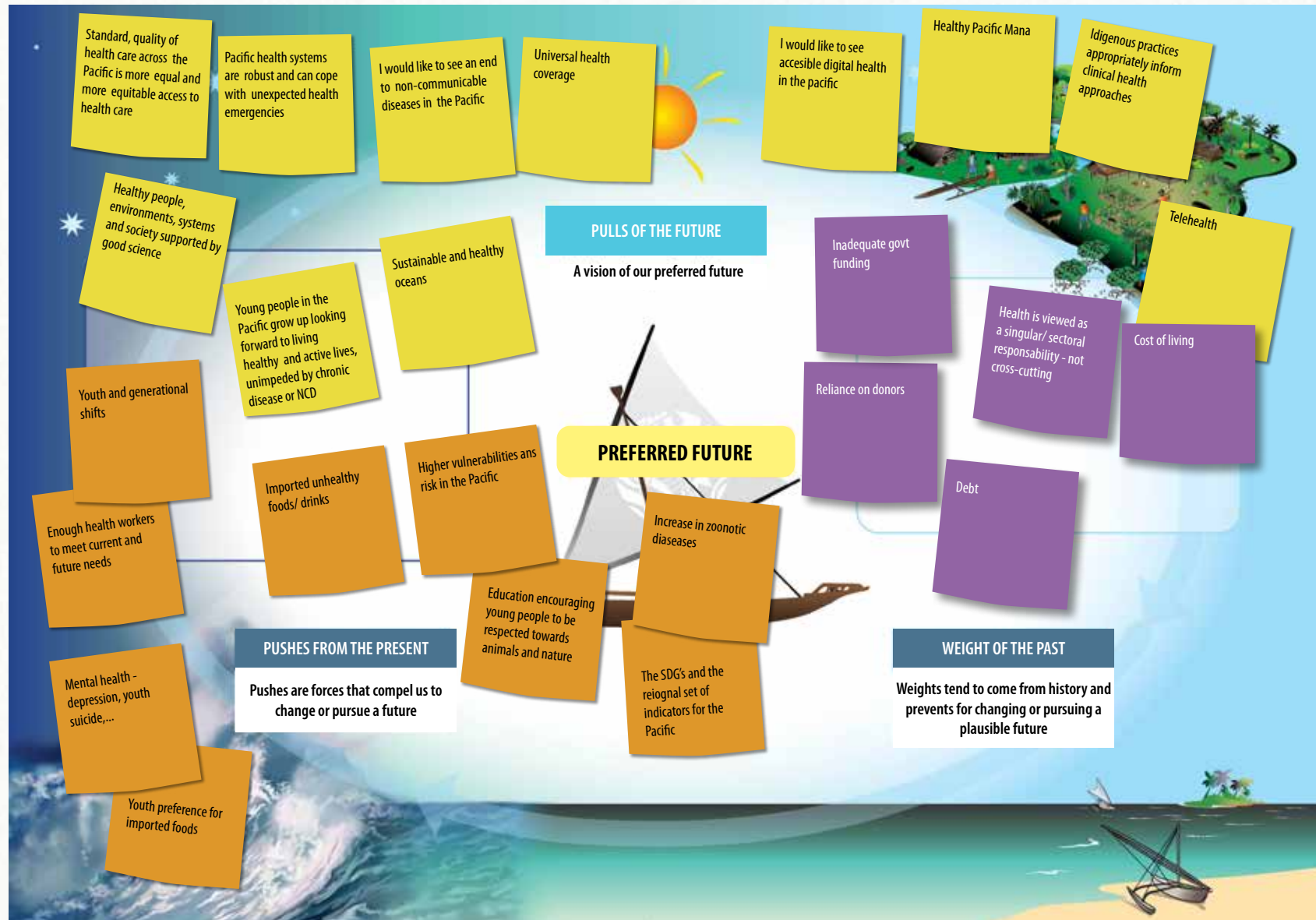
We used Conceptboard for this exercise. We ran a two-hour workshop for each KFA, which included 30 minutes to co-create a futures triangle. On average, 14 people took part in each of the seven workshops, including country and territory representatives and SPC senior leaders and technical staff.

During the workshops, participants contributed virtual post-it notes to a futures triangle. First, they added notes about their vision (the pulls); then they added notes about what forces they think are helping us achieve this vision (the pushes); then they added notes about the forces that are holding us back from achieving this vision (the weights). Figure 7 shows the futures triangle our participants created for planetary health.



**Figure 7:**  
Planetary health futures triangle

## FUTURES TRIANGLE: OUR PREFERRED FUTURE



Source: SPC

## WHAT HAPPENED

For each KFA, we synthesised the participants' vision statements, before testing them with the Drafting Committee for the Strategic Plan.<sup>9</sup> The final vision statement for each KFA became the Future State 2031 statement used in the Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2022–2031 (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8:**  
*Vision statements for the planetary health and sustainable economies and livelihoods KFAs in SPC's Strategic Plan 2022–2031.*

### Planetary health

#### FUTURE STATE 2031

Collaboration and stewardship of our Blue Pacific for healthy islands; where children and vulnerable groups are nurtured in body and mind; environments invite healthy lifestyles learning and leisure; people work and age with dignity; ecological balance is a source of pride; people maintain their cultures and traditions with the land; water and oceans are protected.



Source: Pacific Community (SPC)

### Sustainable economies and livelihoods

#### FUTURE STATE 2031

The Blue Pacific is a well-being economy through a balance of sustainable economic growth, protection and inclusive distribution of resources, energy secure, healthy and resilient communities with livelihoods sustained through trade, maritime connectivity and harmonious relationships with the land and the sea.



## WHAT WE LEARNT

The futures triangle is an effective tool for getting into a futures mindset. It helped to open participants' minds to conceive multiple futures instead of a single future (usually informed by forecasts, not foresight and futures). It supports deeper, intentional discussions on possible futures. It also provides understanding of different perspectives and cultures to assist in identifying areas of action.



It was interesting to see how just one futures session impacted on thinking and on the discussions that followed. It was obvious that that futures triangle session had a deep impact on the thinking of the team, and you knew that it was going to inform the way that they tackled activities moving forward.

– Dr Frances K. Vaka'uta, Team Leader, Culture for Development, SPC

<sup>9</sup> The Drafting Committee for the Strategic Plan was made up of SPC representatives of countries and territories.

# CASE STUDY 8: VISIONING THE PACIFIC FISHERIES AND OCEAN SECTOR

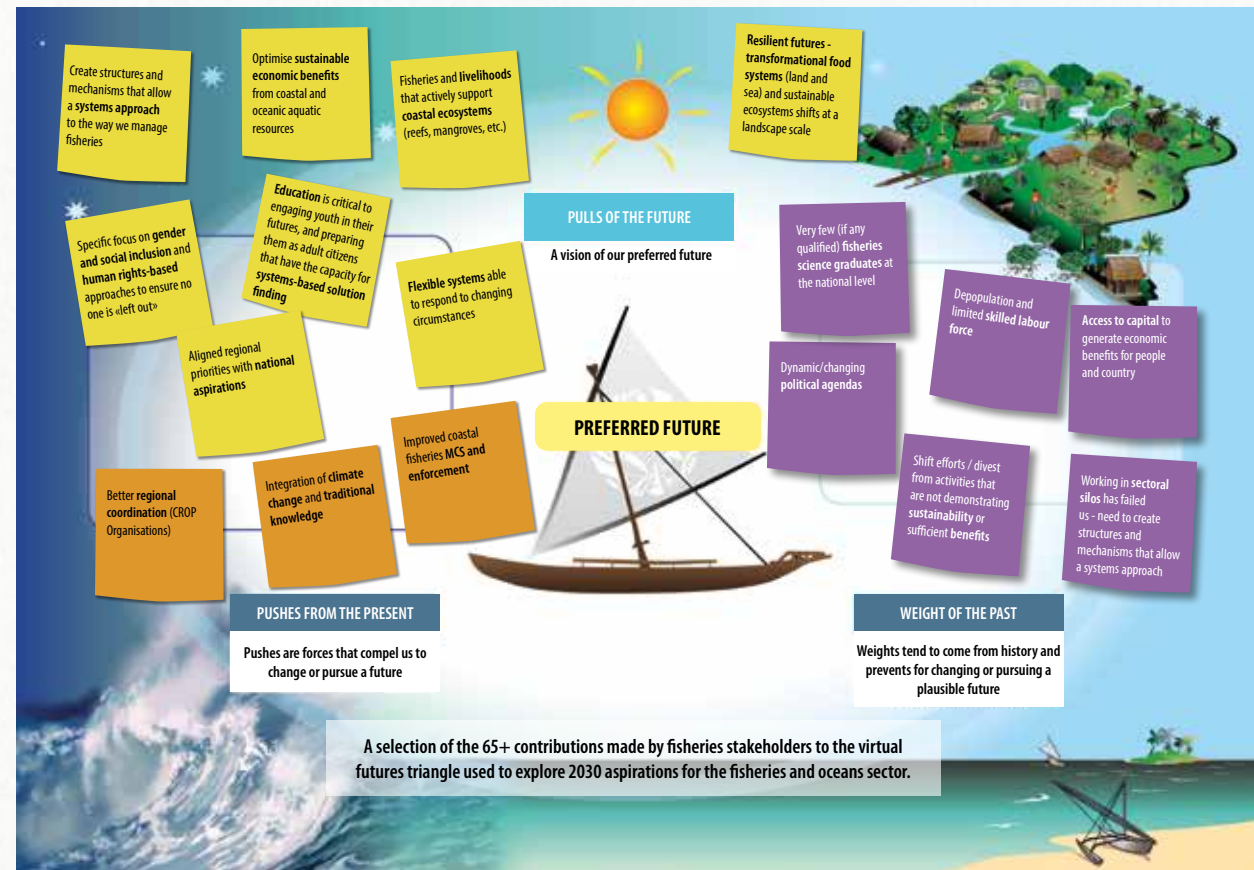
We held a special virtual session for 70 fisheries stakeholders at the 13<sup>th</sup> Heads of Fisheries meeting to discuss what investments are needed for a futures-ready fisheries and ocean sector.

## WHAT WE DID

We used Conceptboard for this one-hour exercise. After introducing strategic foresight as a concept, we asked participants to share their visions for the fisheries and oceans sector, and then identify the pushes from the present and the weights of the past that would influence the sector in achieving these visions by 2030 (see Figure 9). We invited participants to add virtual post-it notes to the Conceptboard, raise their hand to speak or contribute using the chat function.

The facilitator's role was to guide and encourage conversation as well as weave together inputs to present an emerging vision to participants at the end of the exercise.

**Figure 9:**  
Extract from the futures triangle created at the 13th Heads of Fisheries meeting



A selection of the 65+ contributions made by fisheries stakeholders to the virtual futures triangle used to explore 2030 aspirations for the fisheries and oceans sector.

Source: Pacific Community (SPC)



## WHAT HAPPENED

Participants made more than 65 contributions, which included:

- o developing interactive and interoperable web portals;
- o building national capacity in science;
- o investing in new tools and next-generation software (including artificial intelligence);
- o planning for the assets and infrastructure that the oceanic and coastal fisheries sectors need.

We used the contributions to inform the Pacific Community Strategic Plan 2022–2031 and the SPC’s Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) [divisional business plan](#). We gave the participants a copy of the co-created futures triangle that they could use for their own long-term planning and strategic work.

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## WHAT WE LEARNT

Using Zoom enabled different modes of participation, so people could contribute in a way that was comfortable for them. It was helpful to have a lead moderator for participants who wanted to speak, and two facilitators who transferred comments from the Zoom chat to the futures triangle in Conceptboard.



We found that this tool quickly and easily engaged people, as it provided a platform to share their knowledge and expertise to help define a preferred future. Contextualising the tool made it even more relevant and useful, as we explored the tensions between barriers and enablers to achieve our vision.

- Sarah Mecartney,  
Principal Strategy Adviser, SPC

# CASE STUDY 9: CO-CREATING OCEAN FUTURES

The [Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science \(PCCOS\)](#) is a regional platform hosted by SPC for coordinating and integrating ocean science knowledge and information for the Pacific. The PCCOS team coordinates Pacific satellite events—Vaka Moana webinars—as part of the Ocean Decade Laboratories, which is an initiative focused on promoting ocean science.

The first two webinars in the series were Vaka Moana: A journey to an inspiring and engaging Pacific Ocean<sup>10</sup> and Vaka Moana: Weaving traditional and modern science to understand current and future ocean conditions.<sup>11</sup> Both webinars included strategic foresight exercises to actively engage participants in designing the future they want and identifying the actions we need to implement in the next 10 years.

<sup>10</sup> The Pacific Community, 8 July 2021. Vaka Moana: A journey to an inspiring and engaging Pacific Ocean. [webinar]. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XRjahWnc3A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XRjahWnc3A)

<sup>11</sup> The Pacific Community, 24 September 2021. Vaka Moana – Weaving traditional and modern science to understand current and future ocean conditions. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOcXCrH4kik](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOcXCrH4kik)

<sup>12</sup> Sli.do is an interactive app to use during hybrid meetings. Find out more at [www.slido.com](https://www.slido.com)

## WHAT WE DID

In each two-hour webinar, we started by introducing strategic foresight and explaining its power to imagine and create positive visions for the future.

During the webinar, framed on the futures triangle concept, we used Sli.do<sup>12</sup> to ask the webinar participants some questions.

**For example, in the first webinar we asked these questions:**

1. Imagine it is 2030, what does an inspiring and engaging Pacific Ocean look like to you?
2. What waves of change are pushing us closer towards this vision?
3. What weights are holding us back from moving towards our vision?

After asking each question, we gave participants 30 minutes to respond while they continued to listen to panellists discuss their vision for the Pacific Ocean. Our facilitation team worked offline to enter the responses from Sli.do onto Conceptboard, to develop the futures triangle. Contributions were provided anonymously.



## WHAT HAPPENED

Towards the end of each webinar, we shared the consolidated futures triangle with the participants. We used the findings to shape questions for the remainder of the panel discussion—this gave the audience additional voice in the webinar.

The futures triangle exercise supported the objective to help design the future we want for the Pacific Ocean and identify the actions needed to implement in the next 10 years. The information gained from the exercise was used to design the Ocean Decade Laboratories activities for the Pacific and plan PCCOS priorities.

Our work with the Ocean Decade Laboratories created a dialogue with a wide range of participants. The webinars attracted academics, students, artists and community leaders and their contributions helped us validate the statements made by our staff and PICT representatives with regards to weaving traditional knowledge and modern science and prioritising partnerships and inclusion.

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## WHAT WE LEARNT

The webinars were an easy way to introduce strategic foresight to a wider audience. The use of the futures triangle brought dynamism to webinar by actively engaging participants, allowing them to share their visions, learn of other participants' perspectives and see their contributions used to enrich the broader discussions in the spirit of Pacific storytelling.



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# CASE STUDY 10: YOUTH COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN

In Fiji, the Navosa Provincial Youth Council used the futures triangle to explore the information that had surfaced during its visioning activity (See Case study 6).

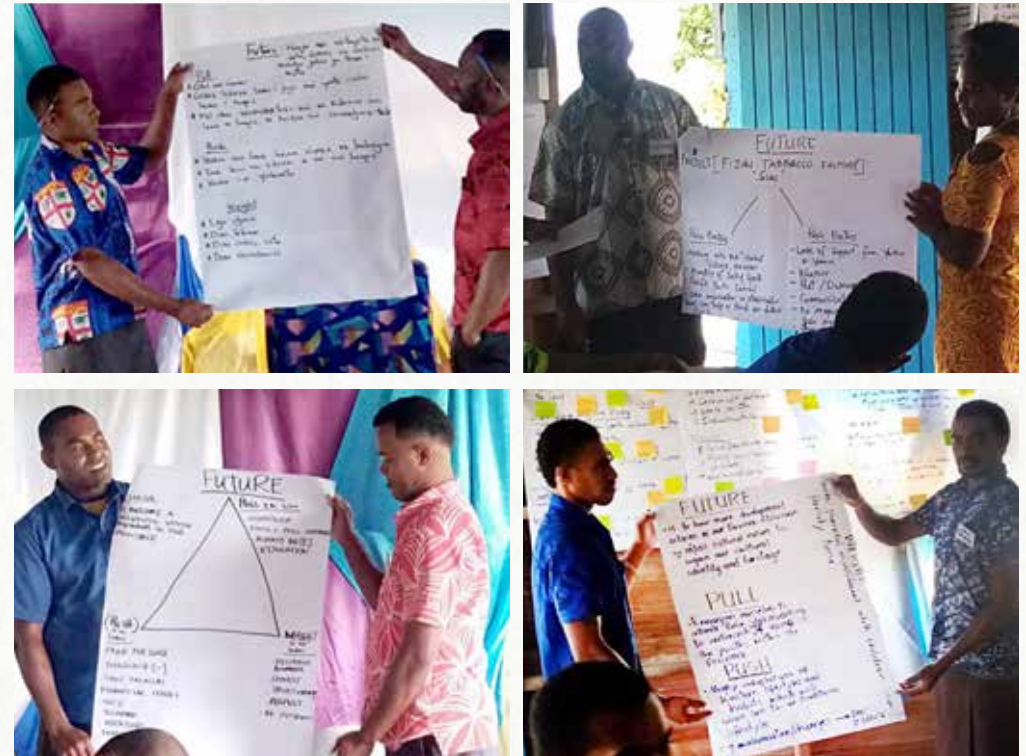
## WHAT WE DID

The youth council asked 85 youth leaders to work in small groups and develop a futures triangle inspired by their visioning ideas. They considered what would help them achieve this vision and what would hold them back. Each group presented its futures triangle to the whole workshop and collectively discussed how to navigate shared challenges (see Figure 10).

## WHAT HAPPENED

The youth council used the information in the futures triangles to develop its strategic plan. Interestingly, the group viewed the weights as anchors, providing a solid foundation to act from when they faced challenges. The participants talked about their culture, the church and their *vanua* (families) as anchors, which gave them a distinct Pacific culture, identity, faith and connection to the past.

**Figure 10:**  
Workshop participants share their futures triangles



Source: Dr. Mema Motusaga



I drew on scenarios relevant to Nadroga Navosa and to the daily lives of the participants. It was important for me to recall the person I was as a young person and to draw on that inspiration to talanoa [dialogue] effectively and to give the space for participants to interpret the triangle. I will use the futures triangle in all the youth training work that I do. I'm so glad this tool is adaptable and useful.

- Dr Mema Motusaga,  
former Social Inclusion Adviser, SPC



### ✔ WHAT IT IS

A visual image or metaphor of the desired future state that helps us mentally connect to it.

### ✔ WHEN TO USE IT

Use it to connect to strategy and the new story of collective change for the future.

### ✔ WHY USE IT

It provides a new narrative for, or vision of, the future. This is accompanied by a visual image that makes it easier for us to connect with the vision.

Tip

Use the metaphors as a starting point to create illustrations of the priorities for a strategy. Using visual images helps different stakeholders connect to your strategic plan.



### WHERE TO FIND MORE INFORMATION

The Pacific Community. 2022. A compendium of Pacific practice in strategic foresight, pages 20–27. Available at <https://purl.org/spc/digilib/doc/b47zt>

### HOW TO DO IT



**Time**  
20 minutes



**No. of participants**  
Not specified



**Facilitation**  
One experienced lead facilitator

**Material**



A vision or description of the preferred future; imagination



## Time & Activity

## Step

## Description

 10 minutes

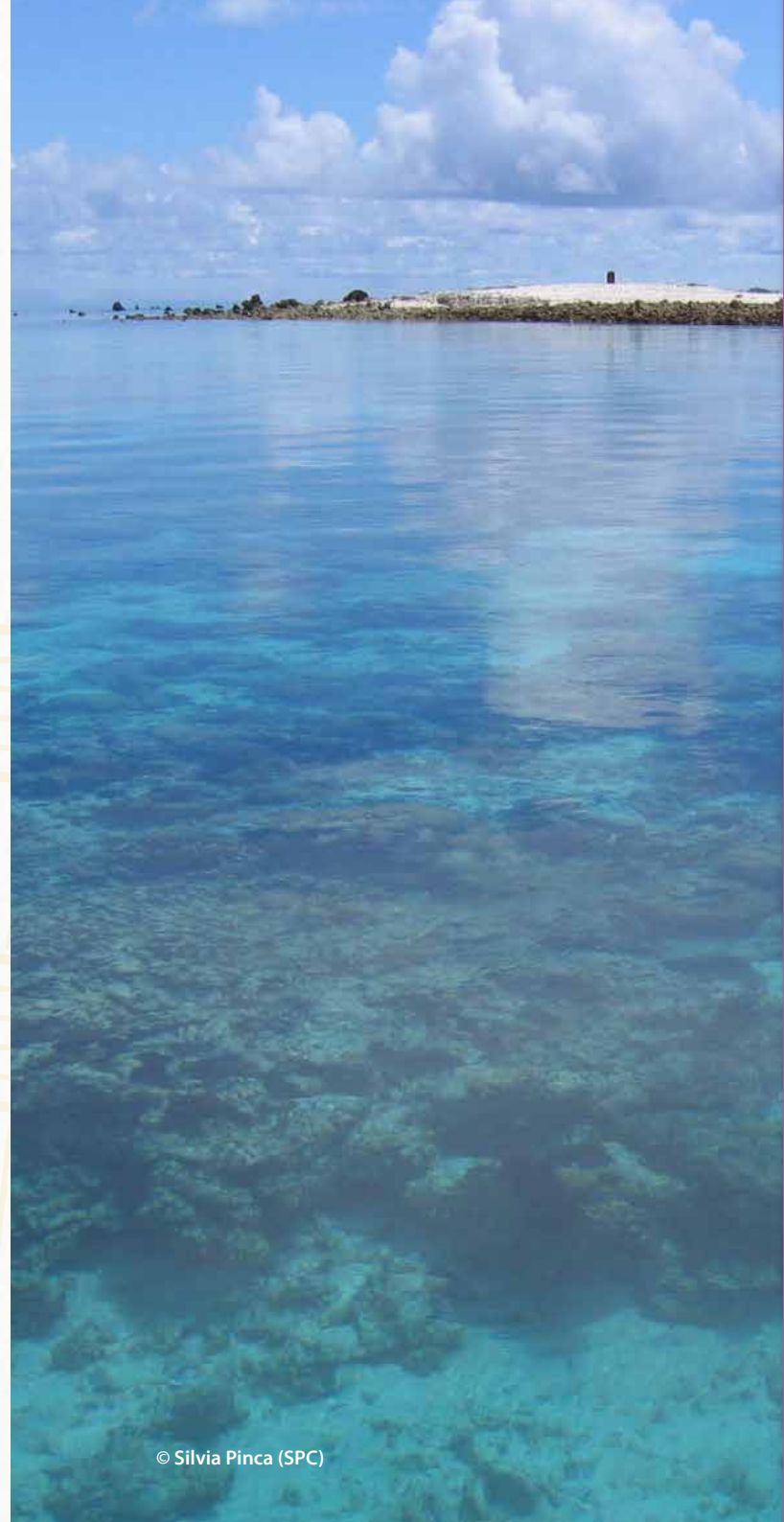
1

Identify your current metaphor for where you are now. You may take inspiration from fairy tales, nature, history, pop culture or other cultural references.

 10 minutes

2

Once you have identified your vision (see visioning) identify a better metaphor (or visual image) that aligns with your vision. Share your metaphors.



# CASE STUDY 11: METAPHORS FOR TRANSFORMED FUTURES

## WHAT WE DID

As part of seven KFA workshops (see Case study 15) using causal layered analysis, participants brainstormed metaphors for the transformed future states for each KFA.

We worked with internal and external creatives to illustrate the metaphors for each KFA to represent the transformed state, to help readers visualise the changes we want to see through SPC's strategy.

**Figure 9:**  
Illustrations of the transformed state (the vision) for key focus areas of Strategic Plan 2022–2031

**KFA 1: Resilience and climate action | Metaphor:**  
*Harmonic generosity of wisdom*



**KFA 2: Natural resources and biodiversity | Metaphor:**  
*The Earth and I are one. The ocean is us*



**KFA 3: Food systems | Metaphor:**  
*Bountiful baskets and canoes*



**KFA 4: Equity, education and social development | Metaphor:**  
*Woven basket of well-being*



**KFA 5: Sustainable economies and livelihoods | Metaphor:**  
*The tree we plant today will bear fruit for tomorrow*



**KFA 6: Planetary health | Metaphor:**  
*Healthy mana*



**KFA 7: Transforming institutional effectiveness | Metaphor:**  
*Many weavers, one fine mat*



Source: SPC



## WHAT HAPPENED

The metaphors gave our strategic plan life. They helped connect our new story of the future to the strategic plan. The CRGA Subcommittee, Drafting Committee and SPC staff inspired the images we used in Strategic Plan 2022–2031. These images are based on the metaphors for the future state for each KFA ([see Figure 9](#)). We added some elements to the draft images (for example, people in all their diversity, different Pacific landscapes and elements that demonstrate the breadth of SPC's work.)

## WHAT WE LEARNT

We found that Pacific people are particularly comfortable using narratives. They readily share their indigenous proverbs as metaphors to describe present and future states.



The used future is woven into the stories we tell about ourselves, the way we work, how we are structured, a perception that it was 'better in the good old days'. We pass these stories on to new generations of staff. We need to change the narrative, give up the used future and tell a new story.

- Emily Sharp, Director  
Strategy, Performance and Learning, SPC

