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BRIEF

# Integrated ocean management

## A pathway to a prosperous Blue Pacific Continent

Integrated ocean management (IOM) supports the long-term holistic, ecosystem-based and knowledge-based approach to planning and managing the use of ocean space, with the goal of balancing various uses and needs to achieve a sustainable ocean economy along with healthy ecosystems.[1]

IOM is not a new concept in the Pacific. Tools such as marine spatial planning (MSP), ecosystem-based management (EBM) and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) are all elements of IOM and have been used by many Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) to support integrated approaches to ocean management.[2] People of the Pacific have been ocean stewards for generations using traditional fisheries and conservation tools, such as *tabu, tapu*, special management areas (SMAs) or *bul*. A few PICTs have harnessed elements of these approaches at national and subnational levels to form locally managed areas to manage their natural resources. IOM moves away from the prevailing norms of siloed and sectoral ocean governance systems and looks instead to a more integrated and harmonised approach to ocean management bringing together various stakeholders and decision-makers.

## Background

In the Pacific, there is a growing wave of newly developed national ocean policies. These policies demonstrate an increasing desire to overhaul ocean governance and better coordinate and harmonise the management of ocean activities across multiple sectors. The development of these policies is a response to the growing recognition that the existing state of the oceans is a result of sectoral management that often fails to account for the cumulative impacts of an abundance of competing and overlapping ocean activities. These activities include fishing, tourism, development and other extractive activities.

At the international level, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), sets out a legal framework for marine activities and confers to states sovereign rights over their adjacent coastal waters. UNCLOS forms the backbone of ocean policies by creating the framework for ocean governance, maritime jurisdiction and ocean management.

Subsequent implementation agreements such as the 1994 Agreement on the Implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS and the 1995 United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement led to the expansion of UNCLOS to regulate deep-sea mining activity and fisheries management in areas beyond national jurisdictions. The most recent agreement in 2023, under UNCLOS on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), is a further expansion of regulation of activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction with a focus on area-based management tools, environmental impact assessments, marine genetic resources and capacity building and technology transfer.

Recent work on sea level rise in the Pacific has helped create norms in international law, driven in part by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) members who, in 2021, issued a Declaration on Preserving Maritime Zones in the face of Climate Change-related Sea-level Rise.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda, in particular Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14, life below water, identifies a range of targets to address ocean issues and covers a broad range of sectors and activities. The Pacific has been a strong proponent for this standalone oceans SDG at the UN and at the regional and national levels. The targets of SDG 14 demonstrate interlinked activities and impacts and are key policy goals for PICTs. Additionally, the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030) (the Ocean Decade) provides an opportunity to accelerate the use of ocean science and deliver capacity building to achieve sustained action for SDG 14 targets and nationally determined ocean priorities.

At the regional level, the above international laws and policies are linked via the *Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy* and the *Framework for a Pacific Oceanscape*. More recently, the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent (2050 Strategy)*, which builds on existing regional architecture, frames regional cooperation around key thematic areas which include the ocean and environment. The 2050 Strategy requires a regionwide approach or regional collective action, the inclusion of all key stakeholders in supporting and delivering on shared priorities and engaging as the Blue Pacific Continent in strategically beneficial partnerships at regional, multilateral and global levels.

1. Winther, J-G., M. Dai, et al. 2020. Integrated Ocean Management. Washington, DC: World Resources Institute. Available online at https://oceanpanel.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Integrated-Ocean-Management.pdf
2. Ibid. 1

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## Summary of national ocean policies

Below is a summary of the current Pacific Island national ocean policies. Table 1 details the stages of ocean policy development in other PICTs and contrasts them with ocean laws and policies.

### *Vanuatu's National Ocean Policy*, May 2016

*Vanuatu's National Ocean Policy* was implemented in May 2016 and was the first of its kind in the Pacific. It looks to achieve an ocean governance framework that supports traditional marine resource management practices and knowledge. The policy states that the existing policy framework is inadequate for supporting the integrated approach needed in ocean governance. Fundamental changes in the way the marine space is managed and regulated are required at the central government, provincial government and community levels. The policy provides that core to such change is the need to transition to a more integrated governance approach that requires all uses, users and values be considered and that empowers traditional leaders and traditional marine resource managers. The policy further notes a need to embrace global and regional initiatives and local traditional knowledge approaches that appeal to an integrated ecosystem-based approach to the management of the ocean.

### Cook Islands' *Marae Moana Policy 2016–2020* and *Marae Moana Act 2017*

In 2016, the *Marae Moana Policy 2016–2020* was launched and in 2017 the *Marae Moana Act* was passed, reinforcing the policy, and setting forth supporting structures and mandates. Integrated management is noted as a principle. Principles in the Marae Moana Policy are to be applied to all decisions and actions relating to the Marae Moana. Principle 6 (Integrated management) states that the integration of decision-making across all relevant stakeholders is necessary for the operationalisation of the Marae Moana.

### *Solomon Islands National Ocean Policy*, November 2018

In November 2018, Solomon Islands launched the *Solomon Islands National Ocean Policy* with the aim of defining and strengthening integrated ocean governance at various levels, and across sectors to achieve national, regional and global ocean-related sustainable development goals. These include socio-economic development, food security, climate change resilience and adaptation, environmental protection and conservation of biodiversity, protection from natural disasters and national security. The policy is framed as a strategic roadmap for integrated management and governance of the ocean. It defines integrated ocean governance as a cross sectoral commitment to promote and implement ocean management through an integrated framework that recognises the critical importance of goods and services provided by the ocean.

### *Samoa Ocean Strategy 2020–2030*

The *Samoa Ocean Strategy 2020–2030: Integrated Management for a Healthy and Abundant Future of Samoa's Ocean* was launched in 2020 to foster a long-term vision to guide the sustainable and integrated management of Samoa's ocean and its resources. It serves as a guiding framework for the integrated management of its sovereign waters and all marine resources. It also embraces global and regional initiatives, science-based knowledge and traditional knowledge as key management tools and resources. Samoa has developed a comprehensive strategy towards integrated management of its exclusive economic zone to support economic growth, protect important ecological habitats and safeguard important sources of protein and income for Samoans.

### *National Oceans Policy of Papua New Guinea 2020–2030*

In 2020, the *National Oceans Policy of Papua New Guinea 2020-2030* was launched. This policy serves as a framework to develop and establish a national IOM system. It also seeks to develop regional and international cooperation and collaboration in areas beyond national jurisdiction. It also highlights opportunities for Papua New Guinea to link to the UN Ocean Decade and become a key stakeholder of it within the Pacific region.

The national ocean policy framework is based on the principle of IOM. There is now consensus among different government ministries for a shift to embrace national oceans policies based on the IOM concept. The implementation of programmes and activities under the principles of good governance for an IOM policy must also include our traditional ocean communities and strive for gender, inter-generational and geographic diversity among stakeholders. The IOM is a national strategic policy document that sets out a planned system-wide approach to ocean management; and covers all sectors and all levels of governments in an integrated mode of planning, developing and implementation of policies.

### *Republic of Fiji National Ocean Policy 2020–2030*

In 2021, Fiji finalised and launched the *Republic of Fiji National Ocean Policy 2020–2030*. Following this, the *Climate Change Act 2021* was passed into law to support the implementation of the policy and any subsequent reviews and updates. The policy aims to support, synergise, promote and establish best practice standards for ocean management within government and across all relevant stakeholder groups, including community groups, non-governmental organisations and the private sector. It reinforces Fiji's commitment to integrated management of its ocean and marine resources. The policy provides a holistic framework for integrated action and partnerships on all of Fiji's national, regional and global commitments on the ocean. The policy frames a progression to the integrated management of all of Fiji's ocean by 2030, to ensure the resilience and sustainability of marine ecosystems while maximising opportunities for socio-economic benefits.

**Table 1: Ocean laws and policies contrasted with existing national ocean policies in PICTs**

| Country/territory | Fisheries legislation | Environmental legislation | Climate change | National ocean policy |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cook Islands | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Federated States of Micronesia | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |
| Fiji | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| French Polynesia | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |
| Kiribati | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ◖ |
| Marshall Islands | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ◖ |
| Nauru | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |
| New Caledonia | ✓ | ✓ | ● | ● |
| Niue | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |
| Palau | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ◖ |
| Papua New Guinea | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Samoa | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Solomon Islands | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Tokelau | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |
| Tonga | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ◖ |
| Tuvalu | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |
| Vanuatu | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Wallis and Futuna | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ● |

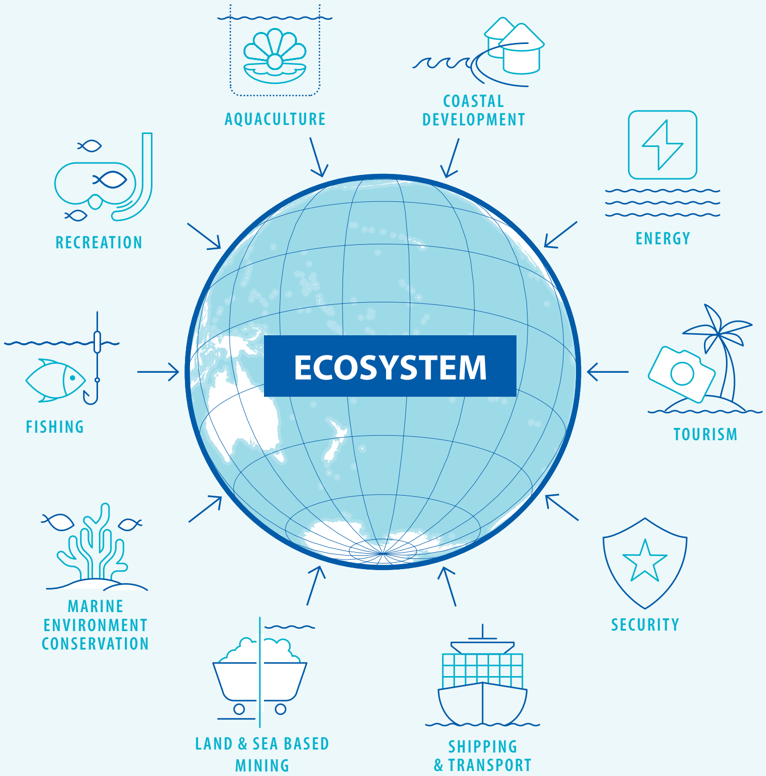
✓ Existing laws and policies ◖ Currently under development ● Yet to be established

## Benefits of IOM for the Pacific

IOM aims to preserve the sustainable health and resilience of marine ecosystems while improving livelihoods and creating jobs and opportunities that support a sustainable ocean economy through IOM.

### The IOM ecosystem

**Integrated ocean management as the hub for balancing various ocean uses and the marine environment.** The goal of IOM is to integrate and balance various ocean uses and environmental aspects to obtain a 'healthy and wealthy' ocean: long-term, sustainable use of ocean resources in ways that preserve the health and resilience of marine ecosystems and improve livelihoods and jobs, balancing protection and production. IOM brings together relevant actors from government, business, academia and civil society from the entire spectrum of ocean-related human activities (for example, fishing, recreation, petroleum, shipping, renewable energy, aquaculture, tourism and mining) to interact toward a sustainable future for our ocean environment. A key to successful IOM is the use of a knowledge-based and ecosystem-based approach. Stakeholder engagement and coordinated decision-making, particularly with ocean businesses, is another central aspect of successful IOM.




Credit: Centre for the Ocean and the Arctic

## Implementing IOM

Implementing IOM is specific to the region, and to each PICT and context, however, some lessons can be drawn from existing examples. A high-level blue paper on IOM undertook an analysis of several IOM case studies and synthesised their results into a succinct list of the components defined as success.[3]


### 1. Institutional structures

Legal institutional and governance structures are important for providing direction for IOM within a nation and as IOM is implemented across multiple sectors like fisheries, environment and mining. The absence of clearly legislated roles as to the operationalisation of IOM can lead to conflict and uncertainty that results in poor implementation. National ocean policies in the Pacific have recognised the need for strong cross-sectoral institutions with the mandate to implement IOM. For example, *Vanuatu's National Ocean Policy* notes that the existing policy framework is inadequate for supporting the integrated approach needed in ocean governance. It further adds that fundamental changes are required in the way marine space is managed and regulated. Central to this is the need to transition to a more integrated governance approach that supports traditional marine resource management as well as government-led management and requires all uses, users and values be considered. Vanuatu's Oceans Division under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have a clear legislative mandate which poses budgetary and personnel issues as it seeks to realise their national ocean policy.

3. Winther, J.-G. et al. (2020) 'Integrated Ocean Management'. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-020-1259-6

| National ocean policy | Agency with mandate |
|---|---|
| Cook Islands' *Marae Moana Policy 2016–2020* | Marae Moana Coordination Office and Marae Moana Council |
| *Republic of Fiji National Ocean Policy 2020–2030* | Prime Minister's Office, National Ocean Policy Steering Committee |
| *National Oceans Policy of Papua New Guinea 2020–2030* | Ministry of Justice |
| *Samoa Ocean Strategy 2020-2030* | National Ocean Steering Committee |
| *Solomon Islands National Ocean Policy, 2018* | Ocean12 National Steering Committee |
| *Vanuatu's National Ocean Policy, 2016* | Ministry of Foreign Office - Ocean Affairs Office |

## 2. Ocean and coastal data and use of science

A key tool for policy-making is having the right science and data in a suitable format for making decisions. The resources and capacity for this component are sorely lacking in many of these policies and demonstrate a clear opportunity for development across the region.

The Ocean Decade demonstrates an opportunity to accelerate the use of ocean science and deliver capacity building to achieve sustained action. The Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS) has a connected project for this purpose and would be an integral conduit to support members implementing IOM as supported by their national ocean policies.

Data relevant to policy-making could include:

- Marine spatial planning
- Ocean observation
- Lack of data at the national level, awareness of what is available
- Capacity constraints and building
- Science-policy-interface: Connecting science and ocean data to policy
- Data sharing across ministries
- Traditional and local knowledge integration with science for ocean management

In the Pacific, we have regional data portals such as the Pacific Ocean Portal, which features data on tourism, ocean monitoring, coral reefs, sea level, fisheries and shipping. IOM has the potential to further progress the development of localised data portals that connect to such regional data portals.

## 3. Engaging stakeholders and local communities

In developing IOM, it is key to engage with local communities and stakeholders. The ocean is a central fixture of Pacific cultures and livelihoods and why co-designing ocean solutions and opportunities is key for successful implementation. Successful IOM implementation requires stakeholders who buy into the process and engage with a common vision for a sustainably managed ocean.

The implementation of IOM, as well as national ocean policies, are considerable undertakings. The Pacific Community (SPC) is in an early phase of assisting PICTs with the implementation and integration of their ocean policies. At the end of 2023, SPC hosted the Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management (PICOSOM) to bring together Pacific Island ocean stakeholders and explore opportunities for shared learning and the cross-pollination of ideas.


Mangrove plantation in Kiribati.

## Needs, gaps and opportunities

In 2021 and 2022, SPC organised consultations with five PICTs on their respective national ocean policies, namely Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The following gaps, needs and opportunities were identified following these consultations.

### 1. The lack of science and knowledge in decision-making and capacity building

PICTs are blessed with a wealth of ocean resources, however large maritime jurisdictions with conversely low levels of resources and science make science-based decision-making almost impossible. However, with the holistic, multi-sectoral and cumulative nature of IOM, there needs to be a corresponding level of science and data to guide decision-making. For example, designing a management plan for a reef system will require an understanding of the state of the reef systems, stakeholders, stressors that affect the reef, how these all interact and the cumulative impact of the users and stressors on the ecosystem.

There are opportunities for dialogue across sectors and stakeholders, knowledge exchanges and forums where policymakers and scientists can engage in the interactions between ocean science and data and the policy and management needs to react to this information. There are also potential opportunities to co-design scientific projects and the associated resource mobilisation, including joint research projects.

### 2. Develop regulatory frameworks

National ocean policies provide a policy framework to begin efforts towards achieving IOM. However, in some jurisdictions the lack of clear institutional appointment and mandate makes working across sectors, that likely have well-established institutions and clear hierarchy, difficult to overcome. Furthermore, policy frameworks can often fail to allocate funds for implementation and organisation.

A gap that is clearly emergent is the lack of legislative mandates for IOM that appoint a legally recognised entity to support the coordination and implementation of IOM activities. Developing regulatory and legislative support of IOM and its implementing agencies would provide the impetus and mandate to accelerate IOM deployment. Furthermore, there are opportunities here to harmonise national ocean policies in line with regional frameworks.

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### 3. Engaging stakeholders

A solely top-down approach to IOM is ineffective. There is a need to actively engage communities and leverage local and traditional knowledge in building projects and achieving IOM. Working collaboratively with both a top-down and bottom-up approach achieves an equitable solution and community buy-in. There are also opportunities to engage with international programmes and initiatives such as SDG 14, the Ocean Decade, and other international ocean forums.

### 4. Promoting public-private partnerships

To achieve IOM there is a need to promote public-private partnerships. With the emergent blue economy, there is a need to leverage these relationships while ensuring the balance between societal and cultural equity, ecological sustainability and resilience, and economic development. These partnerships can also promote sustainable ocean-centric businesses that demonstrate the promised benefits of IOM, i.e., healthy, productive and resilient marine ecosystems.

### 5. Develop adaptive solutions

The ocean is dynamic in nature and this dynamism is further amplified by climate change. Many parts of the Pacific are already suffering from the effects of climate change, especially low-lying atoll states, where coastal communities and even entire populations are threatened. Climate projections suggest that forward-looking, adaptive solutions where risk is explicitly considered will become an even more important element of IOM.

## 2023 in review

In 2023, there were several ocean policy-related meetings held in the Pacific. They include the regional Marine Spatial Meeting held in Nadi, Fiji from 7 to 11 August, the Regional Ocean Policy and Governance Dialogue hosted by the Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner, the PICOSOM hosted by SPC in November, and the PIF Leaders Meeting in Rarotonga in November. Ocean policy remains a key priority for the Pacific in multiple forums.

The 2023 PICOSOM Conference Outcomes Document Report[4] identified the following key priority areas for the Pacific:

1. Traditional and Indigenous knowledge and practices and governance
2. Ocean policy and management
3. Capacity strengthening and community involvement
4. Science and decision support system
5. Communicating ocean science, traditional knowledge and ocean management
6. Financing ocean science and ocean management
7. Advancing the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development in the region

4. PCCOS (2023), 1st Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management Outcomes Document https://www.spc.int/digitallibrary/get/qewhf

## Next steps

Over the next few years SPC, together with key stakeholders, including CROP agencies and CSOs, will conduct surveys and engagement with member PICTs as we work towards further strengthening their national ocean policies.

This is part of the Pacific Solutions Integrated Ocean Management programme which is a UN Ocean Decade programme, and aims to leverage the spate of national ocean policies launched in the Pacific in recent years to address the need for greater IOM. This programme seeks to increase scientific capacity and create opportunities for ocean science to feed into decision- making. This will be achieved by focusing on three major components:

- Develop robust legal and governance frameworks to implement national ocean policies.
- Improve decision support systems so that policies are informed by science.
- Integrate Pacific traditional knowledge, culture and wisdom to support inclusive, consultative decision-making and improve decision support systems.

Recognising and implementing regional priorities through a co-design PICT-led implementation process will contribute to the goals of national ocean policies and ocean governance and management initiatives in member PICTs while supporting the SDGs, the Ocean Decade and the 2050 Strategy.