

PRESS RELEASE

Fisheries Minister from Tonga, Hon. Lord Vaea visits Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency



Tevita Tupou (Executive Officer), Lamiller Pawut (Acting Director Fisheries Operations), Dr. Sione Matoto (CEO for Agriculture & Food, Forests and Fisheries), Hon. Lord Vaea (Minister for Agriculture & Food, Forests and Fisheries), James Movick (FFA Deputy Director-General), Peter Philipson (REI Manager), Len Rodwell (Director, Fisheries Development), Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen (Legal Counsel), David Rupokets (Director, Corporate Services)

“No other regional organisation has been as successful in the delivery of its objectives as the FFA...”

These were the words of Hon. Lord Vaea, Minister for Agriculture & Food, Forests and Fisheries, accompanied by Dr. Sione Vailala Matoto CEO for MAFFF, during an official visit to the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) in Honiara, Solomon Islands from the 2-6 December 2011.

Hon. Lord Vaea was welcomed by the Officer in Charge and Deputy Director-General, James Movick whom welcomed the Minister to the FFA and where they discussed the importance of Tonga as a member and partner to the FFA. Movick also noted the significance of such visits to the FFA in ensuring that ministers and leaders have a thorough understanding of the FFA and its work. In response the Minister advised of the importance of the work of the FFA and fisheries to Tonga especially with the economic challenges that Tonga is facing.

The Minister then attended presentations from the three technical divisions of the FFA, the Fisheries Development Division, Fisheries Management Division and Fisheries Operations Division. The presentations largely focused on the recently signed Country Service Level Agreement for Tonga which outlines the fisheries priorities for Tonga including details on tasks to be implemented, specific responsibilities (of the FFA and Tonga), and indicative timeframes for delivery. In discussions the FFA confirmed that the significant projects for the first half of 2012 include:

- A review of the fishery investment environment and development of a Fisheries Investment Framework which will ensure coordinated consideration of investment proposals across government and the private sector,
- a regional workshop on development of a National MCS Strategy
- an institutional review to focus on opportunities for long term capacity building in Tonga Fisheries
- short-term attachments from Tonga Fisheries to the FFA
- regional and national training programmes held in Tonga
- annual governing bodies meetings, Officials and Ministers, Forum Fisheries Committee Meetings, held in Tonga on May and July respectively.

Hon. Lord Vaea visited the Regional Surveillance Centre, and was briefed on the Monitoring, Compliance and Surveillance (MCS) activities including the most recent successful surveillance operations, Operation Kurukuru, which was the first operation to involve all 15 Pacific Island FFA members including Tonga. The Director for Fisheries Operations also thanked Tonga for signing the data sharing agreement that enabled Tonga to access the regional data as well as share data on vessels within its EEZ.



Hon. Lord Vaea with Fisheries Operations Division staff following the briefing at the Regional Surveillance Centre.

The Minister also met with the three Tongan nationals currently working at FFA namely Dr. Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen (Legal Counsel), Sione Havea (Property Manager) and Tevita Tupou (Executive Officer).

Following the FFA presentations, the Minister expressed his sincere appreciation to the FFA for arranging the visit which was important for him in his role as the Fisheries Minister and in ensuring that Tonga's objectives and activities are aligned to the region's. He therefore urged that FFA not only continue its successful implementation of activities but also just as important,

to promote its work to ensure the membership's public awareness of its work and the importance of the FFA to the region.

Hon. Lord Vaea also called on his counterpart from the Solomon Islands Ministry of Fisheries, Hon. Bradley Tovosia, and met with senior staff from the Ministry. At the meeting, the Ministers agreed that Tonga and Solomon Islands work closer together through the establishment of bilateral agreements between Tonga and Solomon Islands Fisheries.



Hon. Lord Vaea visiting the Ministry of Fisheries and viewing Sea Cucumber farming tanks with the Solomon Islands Minister of Fisheries, Hon. Bradley Tovosia (on the right of the Minister)

Hon. Lord Vaea also took the opportunity to meet with the Tonga Defence Services and Tonga Police Force personnel at the Base for the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). There, he was met by the Leader of the Police Force contingent, Police Insp. Talamai and the leader of the Tonga Defence Services contingent, Lt. Tu'itavuki before being introduced to the respective teams.

Hon. Lord Vaea departed Solomon Islands on Tuesday, 6th December 2011.

The visit was funded under the FFA's Regional Economic Integration of Pacific Islands Tuna Fisheries (REI) programme which was established to assist governments in taking valid investment proposals through to the stage when they can become tangible developments, delivering benefits to their domestic economies in terms of employment, exports, government revenues, and beneficial linkages to other local commercial and government activities.