Sustainable Sea Transport Research Programme:
Toward a Research-based Programme
of Investigation for Oceania

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Abstract

This paper sets out the background, rationale and aims of a newly-established University of the South Pacific (USP) research cluster programme investigating the role that renewable energy might play for sustainable sea transport in the region. Immediate and pressing challenges besetting Pacific Islands Countries (PICs) include the effects of climate change and high dependency on imported fossil fuels. Despite transport being the region’s single largest user of imported fossil fuels by sector, the focus of programmes within the region to date to reduce such dependency has been on the use of renewable energy for electricity generation. Global interest in alternative energy technologies for shipping is growing, but renewable energy–powered sea transport at the small-scale level appropriate to the domestic needs of PICs has not yet been seriously explored. Past lessons and recent research indicate strong potential for such technology to provide practical and multiple benefits to PICs as a viable alternative.

USP’s current current one-year interdisciplinary Sustainable Sea Transport Research Programme focuses on micro- and macroeconomic analysis of selected case studies and on maintaining momentum of a collaborative network of stakeholders and expertise established in 2012. It describes the need and potential for a longer-term programme of research, including practical trialling of two designs of renewable energy vessels in a ‘real world’ commercial scenario in the Pacific Islands.