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### From Locally Managed Marine Areas to Indigenous and Community Conserved Oceans

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# From Locally Managed Marine Areas to Indigenous and Community Conserved Oceans

**The importance of the work carried out by local communities across the globe in coastal resources and fisheries management cannot be underestimated - and communities in the Pacific islands are no exception<sup>1</sup>.** Coastal waters represent less than 1.5% of the waters under national jurisdiction but produce most of the marine food and half the fisheries' contribution to GDP in the Pacific Islands (see Figure 1 below). These resources are currently sustained largely because communities still exert the right to control access to them through forms of traditional stewardship. These rights and the collective action possible in communities are the two main reasons that coastal resources, threatened though they may be, are still able to sustain livelihoods in Pacific island countries. Successful management of marine areas boils down to two things; rights to control the resource and functioning as a community.

## Coastal fisheries in Pacific Islands

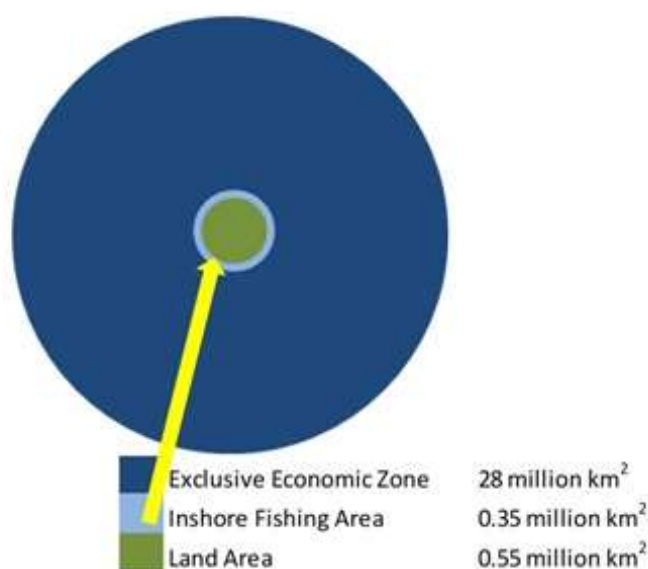


Figure 1: Proportion of inshore fishing areas compared to land mass and offshore areas under national jurisdiction of Pacific Island Countries and Territories.

What happens when we move from inshore fisheries to the wider ocean? What about the nearly 30 million Km<sup>2</sup> of the oceanic waters under the jurisdiction of Pacific Island countries and the famously valuable tuna resources that swim through them? These tuna are ultimately worth more than USD20 billion to the global community and between USD3 to 4 billion to the, mostly distant water, fishing vessels that land them. For decades the small proportion of the value of these resources that have stayed with the island countries and the tendency towards overharvesting of the industrial fishers have been bones of contention.

## From international instruments to community management

The United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (UNCLOS) and other international instruments certainly provided a basis for management and exploitation but long term benefits and sustainability have not seemed likely. That is, until recently. Indeed a remarkable phenomenon has occurred; in the last decade the rights and traditional strengths of the countries through which the majority of the Skipjack tuna swim have served as a basis for improving the returns to countries by as much as eight times to nearly half a billion US dollars

<sup>1</sup> Govan et al. 2009, Rocliffe et al. 2014.

in access fees since 2010<sup>2</sup>. Indications are that at least for Skipjack tuna this approach does not undermine sustainability and if anything improves the chances of it.

Just like the management of inshore fisheries, successful management of the offshore tuna relies on the clear rights of coastal states over resources – even migratory ones that pass through their zones. So far these rights have been guaranteed by UNCLOS. However, success also relies on the existence of a community, not a local one in this case, nor a global one, but a community of those countries in the Pacific islands that share the majority of the resource and thus similar risks and benefits – these are the countries that are Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA).

Improved management of tuna in the Pacific has taken some doing. Just as in a local community, there are diverse interests and many temptations to stray from the collective good, but the PNA countries (for now) stand together and are able to operate more or less as a cartel in the face of the foreign fishing nations to set their own terms and conditions. This approach has even achieved a holy grail of being able to control fishing effort in the high seas - to be precise high seas pockets - by controlling access to these “areas beyond national jurisdiction” through licence conditions.

Despite some clear successes in collective management in the Pacific, concerns for some major stocks of tuna remain. This is because much of the fishing pressure on these stocks occurs outside of national jurisdiction, in the High Seas under the oversight of international bodies and regional fisheries management organisations. Ironically, it is under a broad definition of community that includes global powers where you have very poor management of ocean resources.

### **The community of Pacific Island countries**

From the data now available to us, it seems clear that fishing effort can be controlled inside national Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in Pacific island countries. However it is worth noting that the much-promoted large scale Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) within national EEZs seem to have little, if any, added value for the management of migratory species. Indeed they may even push fishing outside the areas of national jurisdiction, where it is less regulated. It is clear that in the High Seas, fleets are able to concentrate on catching fish entering or leaving national jurisdictions (see Figure 2.).

There seems little chance of tackling sustainable management of these stocks unless there are major changes in the management of migratory species; which falls squarely under the remit of regional and international fisheries management organisations. It should be noted that the limitations of international management of tuna bodes ill for management of other transboundary or high seas impacts such as waste or seabed mining.

### **Fishing pressure**



*Figure 2: Map of the Pacific showing the national jurisdictions (EEZ – blue lines), marine protected areas (red lines) and fishing pressure (bright dots). Source: <http://globalfishingwatch.org/>*

<sup>2</sup> M. Brownjohn pers. comm. See Govan 2017 for trends.

The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea may confer rights to the 30 million square kilometres within the national jurisdiction defined by that law, but it seems that Pacific island countries have demonstrated a degree of Oceans stewardship which far outstrips that of other international bodies, to say nothing of other regional organisations dominated by foreign commercial interests. The community of Pacific Island countries seem amply and morally justified in seeking increased rights of stewardship that extend far beyond the areas allocated them under UNCLOS. Indeed they could reasonably assert claims to stewardship over a massive ocean area which they traditionally voyaged and called their own, namely the High Seas from Aotearoa to Rapa Nui to Hawaii and to Papua – this is the Pacific’s 100 million sq km challenge (see Figure 3).

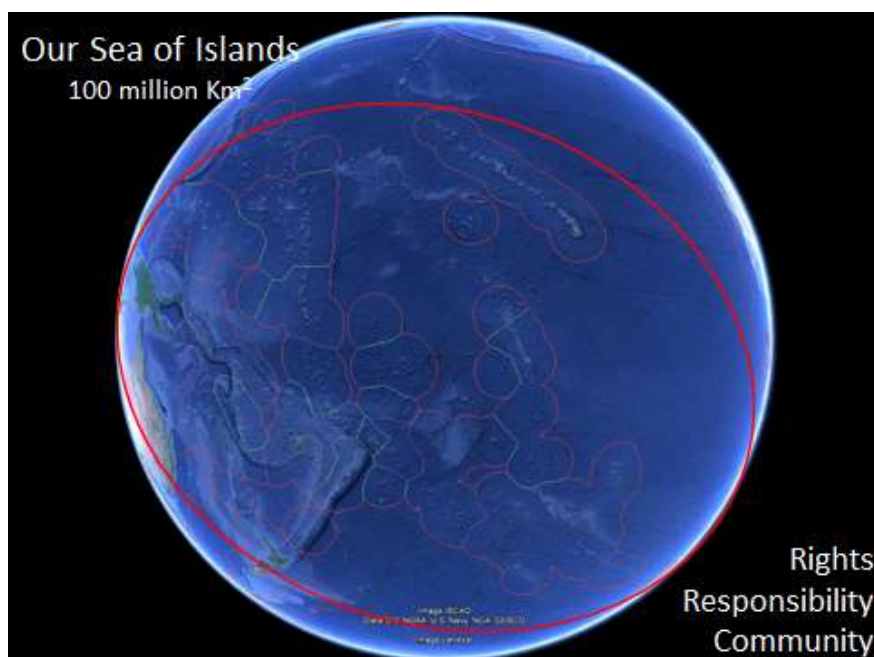


Figure 3: Map of the Pacific Ocean with jurisdictions under UNCLOS and the proposed 100 million Km<sup>2</sup>

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