



# *Mid-term review of the SPC-FAME Business Plan 2022–2027*

Final Report

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**sustineo**

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## List of acronyms and abbreviations

Acronym	Description
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CBFM	Community-based fisheries management
CFAP	Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FAME	Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division
FFA	Forum Fisheries Agency
GEDSI	Gender Equity, Disability and Social Inclusion
HoF	Heads of Fisheries
IP	Implementation Planning
KRQ	Key Review Question
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MRMS	Member Request Management System
MTR	Mid-term Review
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	OECD Development Assistance Committee
OFP	Oceanic Fisheries Programme
PCCOS	Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIRMO	Partnerships, Integration and Resource Mobilisation Office
SPC	The Pacific Community
SDD	Statistics and Development Division
WCPFC	Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

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# 1 Executive Summary

The Pacific Community (SPC) Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems (FAME) Division supports Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) to manage their fisheries and aquaculture resources sustainably by generating scientific knowledge and innovation, building individual and institutional capacity and working through trusted, culturally responsive partnerships. Its 2022–2027 Business Plan sits under SPC’s *Strategic Plan 2022–2031* and regional frameworks such as *Future of fisheries: A regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries*, *New song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change (The Noumea Strategy)* and the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*. The Business Plan sets out SPC-FAME’s priorities, its role within One SPC, and its contribution to sectoral planning, resource mobilisation and monitoring, with a strong emphasis on strengthening systems, collaboration, data and evidence use to support sustainable fisheries and resilient Pacific communities.

Sustineo was commissioned to conduct a mid-term review (MTR) of the Business Plan covering the period 2022 to 2025. The review has both summative and formative purposes – assessing implementation, progress and performance to date (summative) as well as providing formative advice comprising:

- recommendations to update and / or improve delivery of the Business Plan
- recommendations for the next Business Plan, including gaps to address
- insights to inform ongoing SPC-FAME structural evolution.

The review is structured around Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) criteria (effectiveness and impact, relevance, efficiency and sustainability) and cross-cutting issues (gender equality and social inclusion, climate change and oceans which were specified in the Terms of Reference). The intended audience is primarily SPC-FAME, with secondary audiences including other SPC divisions, member governments and key development partners.

A mixed methods approach combined document review, semi-structured interviews, and two online surveys, supported by ethical frameworks and Pacific values including Talanoa Principles. Analysis focused on stakeholder perceptions of the Business Plan and its execution, with attention to themes emerging across stakeholder groups as well as document analysis. Draft findings were validated and recommendations co-developed through a workshop with SPC-FAME senior staff in Noumea. Two case studies – community-based fisheries management (CBFM) and the Ikasavea app – were used as ‘deep dives’ to illuminate key aspects of performance and learning.

Specific recommendations for improvement on an already-strong track record were made by both staff and external stakeholders during interviews. The review team considered and synthesised these recommendations and assessed how they matched the main areas for improvement in the final review findings. The team added additional suggestions based on the review team’s experience and observations to develop draft recommendations. These were shared as inputs into the validation workshop with senior SPC-FAME staff on 6 November 2025 in Noumea, where significant co-design of the final recommendations occurred.

It was highlighted during the validation workshop that some of these actions are already underway in some form. But there is scope to sharpen and deepen them as well as communicate them better to staff, members and partners – all of whom may have gaps in their awareness of the full positive trajectory of SPC-FAME.

A summary of findings and associated recommendations follows. Section 3 (Findings) provides more detail on the context and data that informed the recommendations. Each recommendation includes additional text to guide its implementation in more nuanced ways based on the discussions at the November workshop. The recommendations are either operational or strategic in focus – operational recommendations to improve implementation and strategic recommendations to reposition SPC-FAME for the future. A final table of all the recommendations indicates the focus and suggested priority level for each one to guide implementation.

## 1.1 Key findings

The mid-term review findings regarding the implementation of the SPC-FAME Business Plan (2022–2025) are strongly positive. SPC-FAME’s work is relevant, effective, efficient and sustainable, underpinned by world-class applied science, highly valued technical support and strong, trusted relationships with members and partners. SPC-FAME is also recognised for its regional convening role and its position as a first point of call for investment advice, creating important opportunities to direct resources towards PICTs’ priorities. The main area with the greatest scope for improvement is the integration of cross-cutting themes, which should be a focus for 2026–2027.

At the same time, the review highlights the need for a clearer change agenda to ensure SPC-FAME stays at the leading edge in a rapidly changing context shaped by climate change, population growth and technological change. SPC-FAME faces a number of challenges such as improving cross-cutting integration, addressing CFAP’s resources gap relative to need and managing the perceived occasional blurring of SPC-FAME’s role. These point to the importance of accelerating organisational agility in focused and tactical ways, including through transparent member engagement and stronger cross-agency collaboration in the remaining years of this Business Plan and in the next one.

The findings and recommendations for each of the review criteria are summarised below.

### Effectiveness and impact

SPC-FAME is widely perceived as effective in delivering against its Business Plan objectives, with monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) data, reports to Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meetings and stakeholder consultations all pointing to strong performance and tangible results. Stakeholders cited successes in the areas of leadership in gender equity, diversity and social inclusion (GEDSI) including gender-based violence in fisheries, sustained influence on the health of Pacific tuna stocks, innovation in fisheries data systems and accelerated resource mobilisation. SPC-FAME is widely recognised as delivering world-class applied science and as a trusted adviser. Effectiveness is particularly evident in the Oceanic Fisheries Programme (OFP),

including through its role supporting the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Programme (CFAP) faces resourcing constraints which some stakeholders perceive affect its overall impact despite notable successes in particular areas of work.

While the Business Plan and associated Implementation Plan (IP) provide a clear and coherent framework for guiding SPC-FAME’s work, staff survey results indicate limited awareness and use of the Business Plan beyond reporting. This suggests an opportunity to strengthen internal engagement and use of the Business Plan and IP as a more active tool for prioritisation, coordination and impact across the organisation.

In addition, there is an opportunity for more explicit communication of the way in which the Division is evolving, which also links to later discussion about SPC-FAME’s repositioning for the future.

**Recommendation 1: Better communicate SPC-FAME’s evolving capabilities and approach**

*Ensure that SPC-FAME’s reporting and communication conveys its evolution, including the growing multidisciplinary skills of staff, strengthening of GEDSI expertise and focus, the decentralisation of staff into multiple countries, successes in resource mobilisation and more.*

At an operational level, better synergies between OFP and CFAP, through improved linkage and shared resources, could contribute to increased effectiveness and partly address resource limitations.

**Recommendation 2: Continue to strengthen whole-of-Division ways of working**

*Consider opportunities to further build a whole-of-Division approach to delivery by explicitly linking different pieces of work to achieve larger, shared outcomes.*

This will include encouraging staff to link their different skill sets and pieces of work, which can better align existing elements of the SPC-FAME portfolio to tell the story of how they complement each other to achieve greater outcomes collectively. This may also involve encouraging staff to work across programmes (where appropriate and feasible) to help improve SPC-FAME's operational efficiency.

## Relevance

SPC-FAME’s work is strongly aligned with SPC’s Strategic Plan and key regional fisheries and aquaculture strategies, and this alignment contributes to its high relevance to members, partners and regional governance processes. Relevance is most clearly demonstrated in OFP, where a specific technical focus, mature regional institutions and stable funding pathways enable SPC-FAME to deliver world-class scientific advice that is in high demand. In contrast, while the CFAP is aligned with regional priorities, the inherent complexity and diversity of inshore fisheries, combined with comparatively limited resourcing, makes it more difficult for some members to see their specific national priorities reflected.

SPC-FAME has improved its agility in responding to emerging and changing needs through member request systems, new technologies and flexible modes of engagement. Some internal and external stakeholders suggested that SPC-FAME’s anticipation of and planning for rapid onset shocks and disasters, technological transformation and emerging risks can be strengthened, particularly in relation to natural disasters such as cyclones and volcanic eruptions.

SPC-FAME’s role requires a balance between reactive, request-driven support and proactive, medium-term strategic engagement with members. This is a theme across the review and suggests that relevance could be strengthened by clearer mechanisms for increased agility and ways to balance regional priorities with country-specific needs.

**Recommendation 3: Articulate the Business Plan’s long-term vision for the Division**

*Develop a member-driven 10-year outlook using expanded foresighting processes to establish a vision of what a successful SPC-FAME of 2050 will need to look like and map out actionable opportunities to work towards it.*

This should include a strategic approach to the sustainability of CFAP and consideration of how major changes like population growth / mobility, growing inequalities, climate change, potentially heightened geopolitical competition and digital technological transformation will be reshaping the region from a fisheries and marine resources perspective.

**Recommendation 4: Articulate the Business Plan’s medium-term priorities**

*Drive a 3-year rolling annual prioritisation process with members, ideally sitting under the 10-year vision and underpinning the annual Working Paper 3 (Annual priorities), presented to the Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meetings.*

This should include a focus on enhancing the ability of SPC-FAME to help members achieve their intermediate outcomes across offshore and inshore contexts.

This can institutionalise collaborative, proactive, multi-year planning with member countries to ensure priorities are jointly established to meet common needs, comparable to the certainty provided by the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) Service Level Agreements. This should include a focus on enhancing the ability of SPC-FAME to meet individual member needs across offshore and inshore contexts.

**Recommendation 5: Align organisational structure, capabilities and processes with future needs and priorities**

*Consider SPC-FAME’s future organisational structure, capabilities and skills-sharing and collaboration processes, including the potential for cross-divisional / cross-programme shared scientific and technical capabilities and working toward the long-term, future skills needed for the fisheries sector.*

This could include mapping the long-term future skills needed to support the fisheries sector based on the 10-year outlook, and the core job types needed to deliver programmes now *and* into the future.

**Recommendation 6: Plan for the continuing evolution of SPC-FAME**

*Based on the three actions above, specify a clear set of strategic changes that will be incorporated in the next Business Plan to deliberately evolve SPC-FAME to meet the changing needs of members and explicitly communicate these changes.*

**Efficiency**

SPC-FAME demonstrates a strong commitment to cost-efficiency by maintaining lean administrative resourcing and prioritising scientific and technical delivery. Many staff perceive its core scientific work as making efficient use of available resources. However, efficiency is increasingly constrained by the scale and geographic spread of its operations, suggesting greater administrative support could increase efficiency and make SPC-FAME more comparable to other regional scientific and research agencies. SPC-FAME also relies on SPC-wide corporate systems that are perceived as outdated and inefficient, particularly for recruitment, procurement and project management.

Mechanisms such as the Member Request Management System (MRMS) have improved transparency and responsiveness to member requests, although, there are opportunities to improve use and understanding of the MRMS. However high demand (including increased demand for coastal fisheries and aquaculture support) combined with limited resources can lead to reactive delivery and missed opportunities for coordination and longer-term prioritisation.

**Recommendation 7: Increase understanding and use of the member request system**

*To further improve the use and understanding of the member request system, continue socialising it with members and communicating the criteria against which requests will be prioritised.*

SPC-FAME has taken practical steps to improve implementation efficiency, including decentralised staffing, remote engagement, programme-level management structures and greater use of technology. Further improvements are likely to depend on structural adjustments, clearer internal integration, and more strategic coordination with members, donors and regional partners.

**Recommendation 8: Strengthen Digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) frameworks**

*Given SPC-FAME’s existing engagement with digital change, advocate for an SPC-wide AI corporate policy and guidance on the use of AI specifically to support the management of Pacific fisheries.*

This guidance should establish governance protocols that resolve member concerns regarding data sovereignty, intellectual property rights and ethical implementation of new tools as well as highlight ways in which engaging in the digital and AI age could be transformative for SPC and its members. This can be a contribution to the Digital Flagship as well as an entry point to more comprehensive consideration of the future of digital technologies in the region and the capacity development needed (part of the next Business Plan).

### **Recommendation 9: Improve donor coordination**

*Further leverage SPC-FAME's recognised convening power to coordinate donor and development partner investments and consider developing a more formal coordination mechanism.*

This could include:

- discussing strategic directions and priorities for fisheries development in the region
- identifying and managing complementarity of current and planned donor activities (at country and regional levels), including earmarked projects
- identifying the size and timing of future funding allocations, including the strategic focus of donors
- identifying opportunities to leverage / integrate with temporary and ongoing donor programmes.

## **Sustainability**

SPC-FAME demonstrates a strong commitment to sustainability through its emphasis on long-term programmes, capacity building and the production of enduring outputs, particularly in oceanic fisheries science, CBFM and regional data systems.

Stakeholders noted positive shifts toward longer-term capacity development for both staff and members, growing Pacific leadership and increased country capability to manage data, tools and infrastructure with reduced reliance on SPC-FAME support. There are opportunities for SPC-FAME to build on its strengths in capacity building to drive further sustainability outcomes.

### **Recommendation 10: Continue to strengthen capacity building**

*Build on SPC-FAME's capabilities and knowledge of what works in capacity building to strengthen targeting and innovative delivery.*

This involves enhancing tailoring (targeting training on skills that members require and that members agree they could sustain long into the future), building off evidence of what works and using / trialling more novel cost-effective delivery modalities. Future approaches to capacity building will need to recognise and adapt to members' capacity challenges such as staff retention, the impact of seasonal worker schemes and other factors.

This also includes putting into practice lessons learned from multiple previous capacity building reviews, engaging with the upcoming research on capacity building for behaviour change and sourcing sustainable funding for training.

Sustainability is understood differently across the Division, with greater emphasis placed on sustaining activities, funding and institutional capacity than on the long-term sustainability of outcomes. While the Business Plan supports continuity and alignment with regional priorities, it can provide more guidance on how SPC-FAME will proactively adapt its capabilities, mobilise resources or reassign focus in response to rapid

demographic, climate and technological change. In this context, there is scope to for the Business Plan to strengthen the focus on the strategic foundations that will contribute to long-term sustainability. Shifting the balance between project-based and programmatic funding will be a key element of sustainable resourcing for SPC-FAME.

**Recommendation 11: Further increase programmatic funding**

*Continue to build and strengthen SPC-FAME’s programmatic investments by strategically combining and linking diverse funding sources so they collectively constitute a programmatic investment approach to achieve sustainable on-ground outcomes.*

This should be done in close collaboration with the Partnerships, Integration and Resource Mobilisation Office (PIRMO), and should include the potential to tap into evolving sources of climate finance, the role of philanthropy, resource allocation, legal developments and cost-sharing / co-funding arrangements. This could be informed by a stocktake of (current and potential) diverse funding sources and use of levers such as a shared services model and greater collaboration across SPC-FAME programmes in its resource allocation, particularly in back-end and support functions like finance, events and project management.

**Cross cutting themes**

This review involved a deep-dive into three cross cutting themes: GEDSI, climate change and oceans. While these are the focus of some SPC flagships, other SPC flagships were not within the scope of this review because they are less mature.

In general, SPC-FAME has strengthened its engagement with cross-cutting priorities through targeted investments, specialist expertise and increasing leadership commitment. Progress has been strongest where dedicated resources have been applied, with SPC-FAME now widely recognised as a leader within SPC on integrating GEDSI into fisheries, particularly in inshore fisheries, and as a regional leader in climate science for oceanic fisheries. Internally, SPC-FAME has made notable progress in gender balance, shifting from a historically male-dominated technical workforce to overall gender parity. However, women remain under-represented in senior positions.

Awareness and understanding of the SPC flagship framework remain limited among staff, with engagement often perceived as one-way or tokenistic and unclear in its relevance to day-to-day work. While SPC-FAME’s GEDSI work has delivered substantial gains in gender equality and Pacific leadership, further effort is needed to embed disability inclusion, extend GEDSI more consistently into aquaculture and offshore fisheries, and build technical staff capability so GEDSI becomes business as usual.

**Recommendation 12: Continue to strengthen integration of GEDSI across SPC-FAME**

*Build on substantial GEDSI leadership success by securing GEDSI staff investment long-term and increasing focus on deeper topics.*

Areas of focus can include working to mainstream GEDSI integration in the sector while also addressing the newer and more evolving topics such as disability inclusion, gender in labour mobility and climate displacement of coastal fishermen and rights-based / people-centred approaches to inclusion.

This includes identifying the sustained resourcing that will embed this capability beyond project funding, noting that the focus is not just on the volume of capability, but on what is done to keep advancing thoughtful work in the GEDSI space.

Climate change integration has delivered high-impact science and funding outcomes in the oceanic fisheries sector, but applied adaptation, resilience and disaster risk considerations in coastal fisheries and aquaculture remain underdeveloped, with limited integration of GEDSI into climate strategies.

**Recommendation 13: Continue to strengthen integration of climate change in CFAP**

Revise and finalise the Coastal Fisheries and Climate Change Strategy to ensure it integrates the implications and recommendations from the 2025 book ‘Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region’, includes GEDSI considerations and provides clearer guidance on shifts in management approaches and emerging tools to support climate integration including down to community level.

Engagement with the Oceans Flagship has improved coordination and alignment at senior levels, but its full potential has yet to be realised due to limited resourcing and unclear value for many staff.

Overall, SPC-FAME’s cross-cutting work would benefit from clearer articulation of flagship purpose, stronger integration across themes and more practical, action-oriented guidance to support consistent uptake across programmes and countries.

**Recommendation 14: Deepen integration of SPC Flagships within SPC-FAME**

Clarify and communicate the purpose and structure of SPC flagships (Climate Change, Oceans, Gender, Food Systems and Digital) across all levels of SPC-FAME.

This is important given the success of the Flagships depends entirely on how the Divisions use and work with them. Pick one flagship to engage with more deeply to actively and adaptively work to make it a success in bringing benefits to members.

## 1.2 Prioritisation of recommendations

Table 1 lists the recommendations and identifies their focus (strategic or operational) and suggested priority. The focus for recommendations was confirmed at the validation workshop. The suggested priorities are indicative and are provided for further discussion and consideration by SPC-FAME as part of implementing the review recommendations.

**Table 1: Recommendation focus and priority**

Review Criteria	Recommendation	Focus	Priority
<b>Effectiveness and impact</b>	1 Better communicate SPC-FAME 's evolving capabilities and approach	Strategic	High
	2 Continue to strengthen whole-of-Division ways of working	Strategic	High
<b>Relevance</b>	3 Articulate the Business Plan's long-term vision	Strategic	Medium
	4 Articulate the Business Plan's medium-term priorities	Strategic	High
	5 Align organisational structure, capabilities and processes with future needs and priorities	Strategic and Operational	Medium
	6 Plan for the continuing evolution of SPC-FAME	Strategic	Medium
<b>Efficiency</b>	7 Increase understanding and use of the member request system	Operational	Low
	8 Strengthen Digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) frameworks	Operational	Medium
	9 Improve donor coordination	Strategic	Medium
<b>Sustainability</b>	10 Continue to strengthen capacity building	Operational	Medium
	11 Further increase programmatic funding	Strategic	High
<b>Cross cutting themes</b>	12 Continue to strengthen integration of GEDSI across SPC-FAME	Operational	Medium
	13 Continue to strengthen integration of climate change in CFAP	Strategic and Operational	Medium
	14 Deepen integration of SPC Flagships within SPC-FAME	Operational	Medium

## 2 Background and purpose

Sustineo was commissioned by SPC to undertake the MTR of the SPC-FAME Division Business Plan 2022–2027.

SPC-FAME supports PICTs in the sustainable management of regional and national fisheries and aquaculture resources through:

- generating scientific evidence and knowledge and innovation
- enhancing individual and institutional capacity
- building trusted relationships in culturally and contextually responsive ways.

### 2.1 SPC-FAME Business Plan 2022–2027

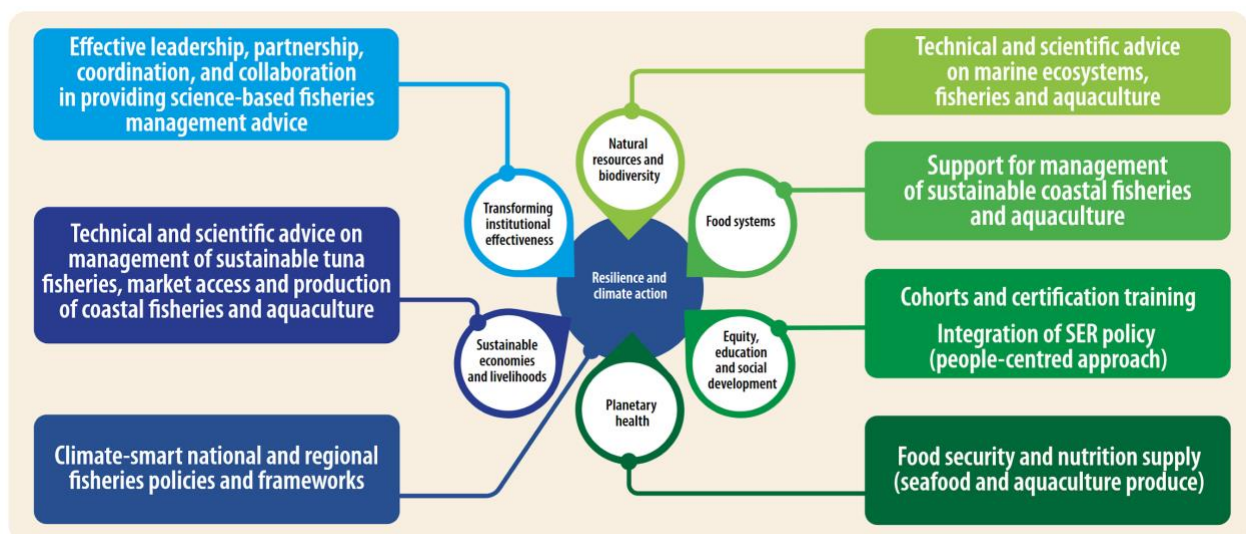
The SPC-FAME Business Plan 2022–2027 is nested under SPC’s Strategic Plan 2022–2031 and guided by member priorities expressed in regional fisheries strategies including *Future of fisheries: A regional roadmap for sustainable Pacific fisheries* and *New song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change (The Noumea Strategy)*, as well as broader ocean frameworks including the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent*.

The purpose of the Business Plan is to:

- outline key ongoing priorities for SPC-FAME in supporting its members’ needs
- define its role in One SPC through integrated programming and related work
- inform partners and stakeholders of ongoing and emerging priorities
- serve as a tool for sectoral planning, resource mobilisation and monitoring progress towards implementing SPC’s Strategic Plan 2022–2031.

SPC-FAME aligns its work and Business Plan to all 7 key focus areas in the organisation’s Strategic Plan (Figure 1).

Figure 1: SPC-FAME alignment with the Key Focus Areas in SPC’s Strategic Plan



The 7 core objectives of the SPC-FAME Business Plan provide the strategic framework for the workplans and operations of the two programmes in SPC-FAME – CFAP and OFP. These programmes are supported by the Fisheries Information and Knowledge Section and the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Communication units in the Director’s Office.

SPC-FAME’s Business Plan 2022-2027 describes a broad remit for the Division and an overall goal of ‘strengthening’ its work to improve its operational efficiency, collaboration and knowledge sharing to support sustainable fisheries, aquaculture and marine ecosystems in the Pacific. This includes:

- enhancing internal systems and partnerships
- improving access to and the use of scientific and technical information
- advancing data collection and management services.

The Division prioritises evidence-based research and advice for sustainable resource management, focusing on improving the well-being and resilience of Pacific communities through better management and utilisation of their marine and aquatic resources.

## 2.2 Purpose of the review

The MTR assessed the implementation, progress and performance of the SPC-FAME Business Plan in relation to review criteria and related questions described in Section 3 (Methodology). The review has both summative and formative purposes. The summative components involved assessing implementation, progress and performance to date based on SPC-FAME data and reporting as well as perceptions of staff and a wide range of members and other stakeholders.

The formative components involved exploring the relevance and sustainability of the plan itself and providing the advice in relation to:

- recommendations to improve the current Business Plan
- recommendations for developing the next Business Plan
- insights to inform ongoing SPC-FAME structural evolution beyond 2025

The overall intent is to support SPC-FAME to make strategic and operational decisions that capitalise on its strengths and support continuous improvement in its support to members under the SPC Strategic Plan.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Review scope and criteria

Based on the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)<sup>1</sup> evaluation criteria, the review covered five key areas and associated key review questions (KRQs):

- **Effectiveness and impact:** To what extent has SPC-FAME achieved progress and results against its Business Plan?
- **Relevance:** How relevant is the SPC-FAME Business Plan to the needs and priorities of Pacific Island Countries and Territories?
- **Efficiency:** How efficiently has SPC-FAME delivered on its Business Plan?
- **Sustainability:** To what extent, are the outcomes achieved by SPC-FAME likely to be sufficiently sustainable and enduring?
- **Cross-cutting issues such as GESI, climate change and oceans:** To what extent is SPC-FAME’s approach appropriately addressing cross-cutting issues?

The sub-questions to explore each of those KRQs are listed in Appendix C. These criteria provided a structured framework to assess the performance, value and strategic contribution of SPC-FAME’s Business Plan. The cross-cutting themes were identified in the Term of Reference and refined through discussions with the SPC-FAME MEL team.

While SPC-FAME is the primary audience, this review is also intended for a secondary audience constituting:

- other divisions of SPC
- SPC member PICTs
- donors and development partners, particularly the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

### 3.2 Data collection methods

A mixed methods approach was used for the collection and analysis of data and information, using both qualitative and quantitative techniques to answer the review questions. This approach utilised a range of data sources and analytical approaches, including substantial consultation with a wide range of stakeholders to strengthen the reliability of data and the validity of findings. As highlighted in Figure 2, the mixed-methods approach consisted of:

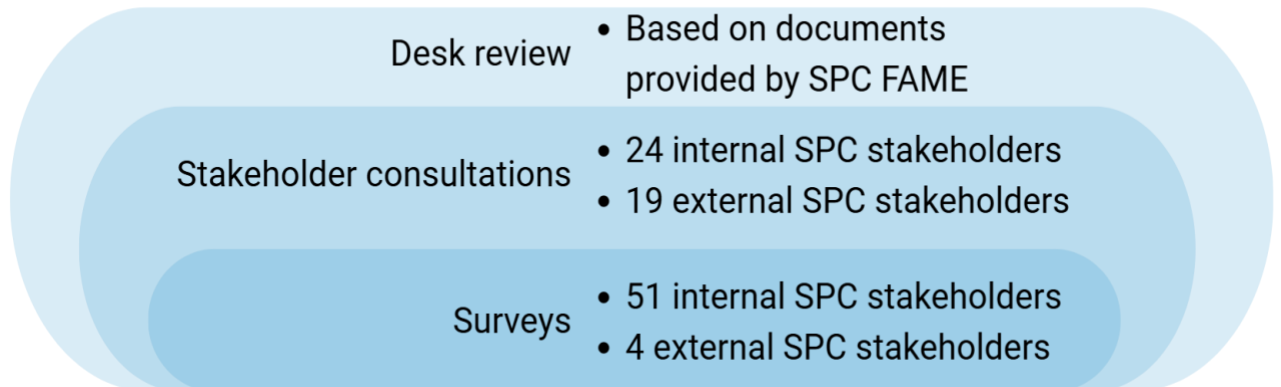
- review of documentation (see Appendix A for the full list)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/development-co-operation-evaluation-and-effectiveness/evaluation-criteria.html>

- interviews and surveys with key stakeholders about their perceptions of the appropriateness of the Business Plan and its execution over the last three years (see Appendix B for the stakeholders consulted through interviews).

Figure 2: Summary of data collection methods and sample sizes



The review was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles for research and evaluation, guided by the Australasian Evaluation Society’s Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations (2013) and the Australian Council for International Development’s Principles and Guidelines for Ethical Research and Evaluation in Development (2017). These frameworks informed the approach to assessing potential risks, ensuring informed consent, maintaining privacy and confidentiality and upholding cultural appropriateness. The review also reflected Pacific values of respect, reciprocity and mutuality, drawing on Talanoa Principles to promote open, trust-based dialogue with stakeholders.

### 3.3 Analysis and reporting

#### Analysis

To prepare for analysis, recordings of interviews were converted into transcripts which were then summarised using AI tools (Fathom and NotebookLM). Information from these interview summaries was mapped against KRQs, with cross-validation back to transcripts. Quotes were extracted from interview transcripts and tagged to KRQs and the various cross-cutting themes. Thematic coding was also used to combine different interviewee views about gaps in SPC-FAME’s work and recommendations going forward. The online surveys were administered using Qualtrics. Survey data was mapped against KRQs, alongside relevant information extracted from documents.

Both the number of stakeholders sharing similar sentiments and their stakeholder category (such as staff, member country representative) were considered to synthesise the data into more consistent findings and recommendations. Where stakeholders are

quoted in this report, quotes are de-identified, with only the stakeholder category mentioned.

Note that the majority of data gathered reflect stakeholder *perceptions* of the appropriateness of the Business Plan and its execution over the last three years. Also, due to variable response rates from people asked to participate, more data are available on staff perceptions than on the perceptions of members and other external stakeholders. Findings and recommendations were developed taking this into account, noting that perceptions can sometimes arise from incomplete knowledge by stakeholders and thus highlight opportunities for improved communication and engagement in addition to improved delivery of the Plan.

## Validation workshop

Following this data analysis, draft findings and recommendations were shared with senior SPC-FAME staff (in particular the Senior Management Team). The draft findings were validated through an in-person workshop in Noumea in November 2025. This provided an opportunity for staff to share their feedback on the high-level findings and help shape the directions of the review. Draft recommendations were high-level and were taken through a co-design process at the workshop to substantially revise and refine them.

## Case studies

The review also includes two case studies selected by the review team during the data collection and analysis process, identified based on their connection with the review criteria and being a key area of interest for a 'deep dive'. Case studies are intended to illustrate findings and recommendations in a more granular way, connected directly to specific areas of SPC-FAME's work. The two case studies focus on CBFM and the Ikasavea app.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Overarching findings

**Overall, the mid-term review findings are very positive about the implementation of the Business Plan in its first phase (2022-2025). The work of SPC-FAME has been relevant and effective, as well as efficient and sustainable (at least in terms of capability and outputs).** The cross-cutting themes have the greatest scope for better integration with the Business Plan's implementation. As such this Review suggests that deepening their integration should be a focus for the remaining two years of the life of the plan (2026-2027).

It is clear that SPC-FAME produces excellent, world-class applied science and technical support and is highly respected and trusted by members and stakeholders. The quality of relationship management also stood out in the review as a key area of strength. SPC-FAME's strong connections to its members mean that it is viewed by potential partners and donors as the first point of call for advice on activities that would benefit from donor support. This provides a unique opportunity for SPC-FAME to direct resources (for example new funding) to specific PICT's needs and priorities. SPC-FAME was also recognised for playing a strong regional 'convening role', bringing countries together around fisheries issues, and contributing to convening work by other organisations such as FFA.

**The review also raised questions about whether the current Business Plan is sufficiently focused on proactive, strategic change to stay at the leading edge of applied fisheries and marine resource science and management given major trends in the region beyond the control of members and SPC-FAME.**

Both internal (staff) and external stakeholders commented that the pressures and problems faced by Pacific fisheries and marine resources are intensifying and changing. Many of the drivers such as population increase, climate change and the rapid evolution of technology are beyond the ability of fisheries managers or policymakers to influence. This demands that science, technology and management deliberately evolve to be able to better assist members to achieve goals *despite* these changes.

The current Business Plan was seen as relatively static, with little articulation of how SPC-FAME itself will evolve to keep improving the value it delivers in a rapidly changing Pacific. Two specific issues reinforced questions about whether the Division is proactively adapting: the potential for much greater integration of cross-cutting themes, and the challenges of adequately resourcing all its programmes to be equally effective across the whole portfolio. While the next Business Plan presents the best opportunity to address these strategic questions, actions taken within the next two years could lay important groundwork.

## 4.2 Effectiveness and impact

### Key review question

To what extent has SPC-FAME achieved progress and results against its Business Plan?

### Positive results against the objectives

SPC-FAME’s MEL data and reporting as well as reports to HoF meetings document its achievements in delivering against its Business Plan objectives. This information highlights both the volume and diversity of work delivered by SPC-FAME as well as the results achieved. The 2024 SPC-FAME Annual Report (presented to HoF) details the work carried against the Business Plan, covering 40 separate projects and 5 programme grants, as well responses to the large number of requests received from members, regional organisations and partners. This report is underpinned by comprehensive MEL data collection which measures the results achieved by specific activities. This MEL data is available on the SPC-FAME online results reporting platform. Both the online platform and the Annual Reports detail activities and results in relation to each of the 7 Business Plan objectives.

SPC-FAME has been very effective in delivering its Business Plan. Stakeholder consultations confirmed that SPC-FAME is perceived as effective in its role and member country representatives in particular were each able to cite several clear results that demonstrated the effectiveness of SPC-FAME’s work. These examples included ‘amazing leadership’ in GEDSI and raising awareness on the need to address gender-based violence in fisheries, direct influence on keeping Pacific tuna stocks among the healthiest in the world and driving innovation in electronic data collection and integration that allow many people and partners to contribute to significant regional public goods datasets.

SPC-FAME’s effectiveness is also evident in a number of indirect ways, including:

- recognition for its world class *applied* science capability
- retention by the WCPFC as the preferred provider of scientific advice
- recognition as the primary point of contact for donor and development partners on fisheries development in the Pacific
- continued and substantial annual growth through donor funding
- completion of foundational assessments of climate change impacts that contributed to securing significant funding through the Green Climate Fund
- acquisition of research infrastructure including a research vessel and labs.

Underpinning these strong results in the delivery of SPC-FAME’s work has been a continued evolution in SPC-FAME’s capability and ways of working to respond to the challenges and priorities of the region and individual PICTs. While this evolution is implicit in SPC-FAME’s reporting there is an opportunity for more explicit communication of the way in which the Division is evolving, which also links to later discussion about SPC-FAME’s repositioning for the future. This need reflects the review team’s advice for a stronger acknowledgment of the progress SPC-FAME has made.

## Recommendation 1: Better communicate SPC-FAME 's evolving capabilities and approach

*Ensure that SPC-FAME's reporting and communication conveys its evolution, including the growing multidisciplinary skills of staff, strengthening of GEDSI expertise and focus, the decentralisation of staff into multiple countries, successes in resource mobilisation and more.*

## Resourcing of its two programmes

For the OFP, SPC-FAME's work for the WCPFC is acknowledged to contribute to the health and sustainability of the region's tuna fisheries, and this is a clear sign of the effectiveness and impact of its work. SPC-FAME's reporting documents a range of outputs linked to demonstrable outcomes underpinning this impact, including the following categories:

- foundational frameworks and strategies that guide PICTs in developing fisheries management
- advice and support to PICTs to strengthen the legislative and regulatory environment
- capacity development programmes to support improved practices
- leadership development programmes to strengthen PICTs' capability
- support to improve data collection and monitoring including technological applications.

However, there are some differences between the effectiveness and impact of OFP and CFAP which several stakeholders attributed to the limited funding to support CFAP. It also likely relates to the different types of funding sources available for the two programmes, given the link between OFP and commercial interests, the highly distributed and locally contextualised nature of the work in CFAP and inherent difficulties in assessing impact of community-based change.

CFAP has attracted increased funding in recent years, but this has not translated into a comparable resourcing position to OFP and is compounded by an uncertain pipeline. Funding to SPC-FAME and its divisions over the period 2020-2025 is shown in Table 2<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>[https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/SPC/Annual\\_Reports/Green\\_Book/English/39006\\_SPC\\_BUDGET\\_FINANCIAL\\_YEAR\\_ENDING\\_31\\_DECEMBER\\_2026\\_1.pdf](https://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/SPC/Annual_Reports/Green_Book/English/39006_SPC_BUDGET_FINANCIAL_YEAR_ENDING_31_DECEMBER_2026_1.pdf)

Table 2: FAME budget allocations 2020–2025

	2020 (EUR)	%	2025 (EUR)	%	% change in total funding	% change in non-project funding
DO	2,689,900	20.0	7,432,094	25.8	176.3	199.4
OFP	6,948,000	51.6	15,134,230	52.6	117.8	179.2
CFAP	3,817,400	28.4	6,206,931	21.6	62.6	93.4
Total	13,455,300	100.0	28,773,255	100.0	113.8	159.3

CFAP’s budget increased from EUR 3.82 million to EUR 6.2 million over this period; however, OFP’s budget expanded much faster over the same period, meaning CFAP’s relative share of the SPC-FAME budget fell from 28.4% to 21.6%. In addition, while there was an increase in the level of non-project (core and programme) funding directed to CFAP, CFAP’s share of SPC-FAME’s total non-project funding still declined (from 29.8% to 25.2%), further tightening flexible resourcing for coastal work. These funding dynamics align with CFAP’s reported operational constraints – particularly the persistence of an uncertain funding pipeline and the unexpected suspension of a key project grant in early 2025 – which continue to limit CFAP’s ability to meet the breadth and complexity of member requests in a timely manner.

CFAP’s resourcing is challenged by limited access to project funding, and this suggests that SPC-FAME could be more proactive in working with donors to highlight the specific need for additional CFAP funding.

Some staff suggested that because funding differences have led to differences in the number of scientific staff in the two programmes, SPC-FAME might be able to help in a more immediate and flexible way by integrating science capacity across the Coastal and Oceanic teams and enabling the tuna-focused staff to diversify the application of their scientific skills. One of the staff from OFP shared the following view.

*For SPC-FAME, the coastal team has been trying to build their fishery science capability for a very long time and has always struggled. Whereas in OFP, we've got heaps of fishery science capacity and because we have money to employ, we've got to do all this stuff. But there's not a lot of interaction between the science capacity in OFP and coastal.*

SPC-FAME OFP staff

SPC-FAME staff identified barriers to increased skill sharing including the distinct programme structure, the volume of work (and limited resources) and accountability for deliverables. However, some staff also acknowledged that structure alone is not necessarily the primary barrier, and other factors such as culture, communication and behaviour also need to be addressed. This can also be supported by clear processes and responsibilities and could be considered as part of the planned organisational review. Any implementation should be supported by a change management strategy.

## **Recommendation 2: Continue to strengthen whole-of-Division ways of working**

*Consider opportunities to further build a whole-of-Division approach to delivery by explicitly linking different pieces of work to achieve larger, shared outcomes.*

This will include encouraging staff to link their different skill sets and pieces of work, which can better align existing elements of the SPC-FAME portfolio to tell the story of how they complement each other to achieve greater outcomes collectively. This may also involve encouraging staff to work across programmes (where appropriate and feasible) to help improve SPC-FAME's operational efficiency.

Demonstrating and communicating this operational approach would complement the sustained efforts on the part of senior leaders to secure more flexible, programmatic funding because donors will be able to see it in action.

## **Is the Business Plan itself effective?**

The Business Plan structure and content appear effective in driving the work of SPC-FAME in a targeted way. The plan provides a clear framework for the delivery of a programme of work in relation to its 7 objectives, and SPC-FAME develops annual priorities and work plans to support the implementation of the Business Plan. The operationalisation of the Business Plan is supported by the IP, which is an online platform that identifies specific priorities for each Business Plan objective. The IP provides public visibility of SPC-FAME's implementation planning and adaptation and communicates current and planned activities, resourcing considerations and internal and external coordination arrangements.

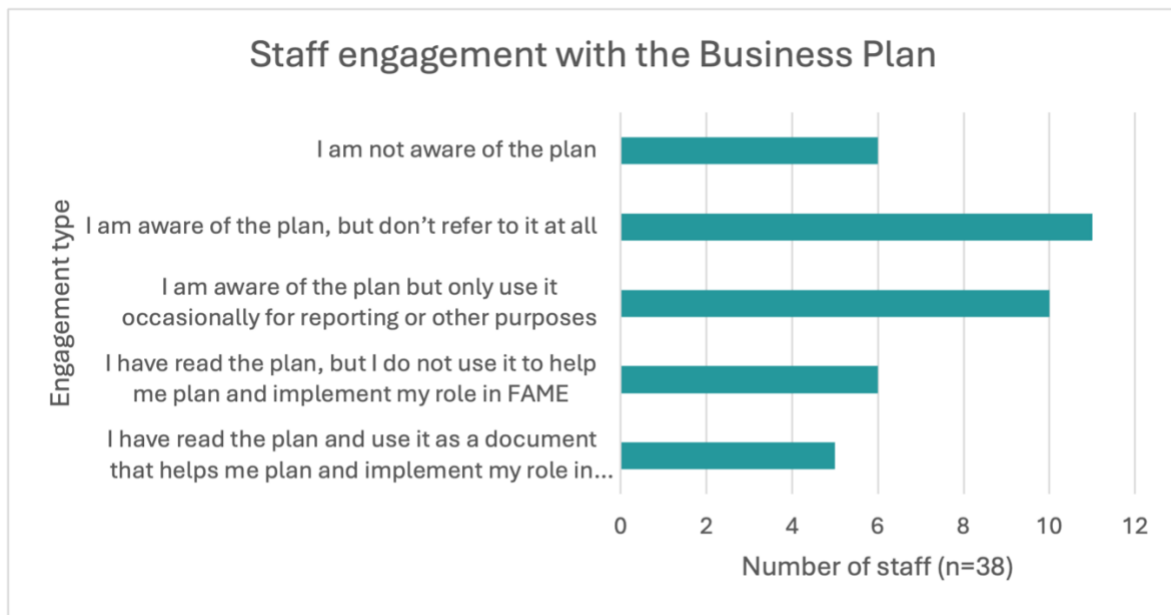
SPC-FAME's focus on effectiveness is also supported by a robust MEL framework to monitor and measure progress, as well as reporting and priority setting at the Annual HoF meetings.

However, there is some evidence that the Business Plan may not be helping staff target their workplans, member conversations and donor and partner collaborations as well as it could. In the survey for staff, respondents were asked about overall staff knowledge and use of the Business Plan. As shown in Figure 3, 85% (n=33) of survey respondents did not use the Plan in their work (except for some reporting) and many had limited to no awareness of it, as was clearly noted by one staff member.

*Does the Business Plan drive the work programme? I'm sure it does, but I do not see direct visibility between the two.*

SPC-FAME staff

Figure 3: Staff engagement with the Business Plan as reported in the staff survey



Some staff may benefit less from using the Business Plan in their work and thus might be expected to have more limited engagement with it. For example, about 36% of respondents came from detailed technical areas of SPC-FAME such as Fisheries and Ecosystem Monitoring and Analysis and Stock Assessment and Modelling. They might be expected to be aware of the plan but not necessarily use it regularly in their work. Some cross-cutting support functions (who were 26% of respondents) might use it regularly for reporting while others (e.g. in operational finance roles) may not need to. So high numbers of staff actively using the plan may not be needed, but these numbers still reflect relatively low levels of general engagement. If it is to be used effectively to help SPC-FAME as a whole focus and evolve itself to achieve greater impact, more widespread staff engagement would be helpful.

### 4.3 Relevance

**Key review question**

How relevant is the SPC-FAME Business Plan to the needs and priorities of Pacific Island Countries and Territories?

#### Alignment with regional and SPC strategies supports relevance

SPC-FAME's work is strategically aligned with priorities identified in SPC's Strategic Plan and key regional policies - *Pacific Roadmap for Sustainable Fisheries* ('Pacific Roadmap'), *A new song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea strategy* ('New Song') and the recently launched *Pacific Regional Aquaculture Strategy* ('Aquaculture Strategy'). Feedback from staff, member countries and partners confirm that this alignment ensures SPC-FAME's scientific advice, capacity-building and technical support are highly relevant.

The OFP benefits from a narrower focus (primarily four tuna species) and well-established regional governance bodies, for example FFA, Parties to the Nauru Agreement and WCPFC, enabling its work to concentrate on specific, defined areas such as science, stock assessments, monitoring, data management, information systems and training. Some senior SPC-FAME staff emphasised that the OFP structure and work have evolved to meet the demands of these regional governance bodies over decades with secure and clear funding pathways. Furthermore, the OFP and to some degree CFAP are poised to expand significantly with a USD107.4 million grant from the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

*In terms of oceanic fisheries, there's no doubt that SPC-FAME delivers far above the expectations, and it's a world class service that's provided to not only Pacific Island countries, but also a scientific service provider to WCPFC also. I don't think there's too much doubt, and you can measure that impact just by the demand for OFP advisory services to the WCPFC scientific committee, to FFC and to smaller sub regional groupings, like the South Pacific albacore group.*

SPC-FAME senior staff

While there is alignment in CFAP with priorities identified in regional policies, this is done more broadly to reflect the inherent complexity in the inshore sector. This complexity arises from the multitude of ways Pacific communities use coastal fisheries (such as for food security, livelihoods and cultural purposes), high species diversity involved (with more than 1,000 species of finfish targeted), different scales of fisheries operating (for example single or multi-species fisheries) and the need to address direct pressures (for example fishing pressure) and indirect pressures (for example land-based pollution and loss of habitats).

Despite these challenges, SPC-FAME's CBFM programme and the *Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030* ('CBFM Framework') offers a promising, holistic approach to tackling these issues, and has been well-received by several member countries who are developing their own national CBFM policies. And while aquaculture is lightly covered in the New Song, the recent Regional Aquaculture Strategy provides strategic guidance that was lacking previously.

## Balancing regional and national relevance

The review findings suggest that the broad language in the Business Plan means regional relevance is straightforward and individual members can see where most of their priorities align. Several SPC-FAME staff highlighted that because the Business Plan is so broad, any work they do can be classed as results.

However, 3 of the 7 members consulted stated it was hard to see where their priorities aligned because it was difficult to match their national strategic needs with SPC's broader regional programs. They noted that unique or context-specific issues were sometimes overlooked when regional priorities dominated. Perhaps unsurprisingly, members wanted SPC-FAME to address the needs of individual countries (for example

deep-sea research, specialised aquaculture development and tourism sports fishing), even if the need is not shared as a regional priority.

Several members also advocated for far greater resourcing (including human and financial) for CFAP to meet their demand and needs. The difference in resources between CFAP and OFP was also raised by some staff and senior leaders and constitutes a consistent theme throughout this review. It will be important for SPC-FAME to consider how the large injection of GCF funds into specific areas (such as FADs and climate modelling) will affect wider fundraising and staffing of CFAP. While CFAP will receive approximately a third of the funding, it is focused on offshore species (Output 1. Increased access to tuna and other pelagic fish for coastal communities) and GCF funds cannot support the broader scope of CFAP’s work.

*One issue is funding, and the second is staffing. If you compare SPC’s coastal and offshore teams, offshore has far more staff, yet they are dealing with four or five tuna species while we are dealing with thousands [of species]. That needs to be improved, and I’m not sure if the Business Plan is adaptive enough to help.*

SPC-FAME senior Staff

## Agility to respond to emerging and changing priorities

Relevance is sustained when SPC-FAME can be agile in the face of member requests and needs.

*SPC-FAME business or programme is quite relevant [to] national priorities . . . they are also very flexible in adjusting to the country’s request.*

Member country official

Several investments have improved SPC-FAME’s *operational* agility and responsiveness to its members, including:

- establishing a request system to track member and partner needs
- saying ‘no’ to a request which cannot be actioned (which manages expectations)
- encouraging members who have resources from other sources (for example the World Bank) to co-fund SPC-FAME assistance (for example fund SPC-FAME staff travel to countries)
- developing tools so that fewer in-country visits are needed (for example Ikasavea<sup>3</sup>)
- providing virtual support where possible.

## Aligning to emerging and changing needs

In addition to operational agility, the specific examples below show SPC-FAME has aligned with emerging and changing regional and member needs at more *tactical* or *strategic* levels.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://fame.spc.int/resources/tools/ikasavea>

- Shifting from simple output requests (for example posters) to understanding the underlying objectives, issues and challenges members are trying to address, leading to more impactful knowledge products
- Helping members respond to new international conventions or decisions that will affect Pacific fisheries (for example CITES listings of fisheries species)
- Drafting a Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture Climate Change Strategy to integrate scientific findings from the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, and lessons from past initiatives (see section on climate change in 4.6 below)
- Incorporating new technologies, for example AI and mobile phone tools, into SPC-FAME work, which begins to address previous technological gaps and needs in the region

FAME was one of the first divisions to embrace new and emerging technologies and has made significant progress in this area – such as Ikasavea using AI to process images, flagship applications developed by OFP including TUFMAN and Ollo, and recent development and rollout of the Member Request Management System. In terms of the strategic challenges, this is an organisation-wide issue and currently, under the Organisational Transformation Programme (OTP), SPC is developing guidelines around AI.

However, there are opportunities for SPC-FAME to enhance its strategic consideration and adoption of new technologies and some stakeholders suggested that SPC-FAME’s approach could benefit from additional focus. While progress has been made on using AI operationally as noted above, there are some areas that could be further addressed. These include the governance surrounding the introduction of AI as well as how to make the most of other new technologies in the Pacific while actively managing their risks. These include the positive and negative impacts of technological transformation, such as navigating information rights, the substantial capacity building needed, the potential for job displacements and more.

Some stakeholders also suggested that SPC-FAME was not always in a position to respond to rapid onset disasters (for example volcanos and cyclones) and emerging health issues (for example COVID-19 and mercury in tuna). This is also acknowledged by some senior SPC-FAME staff.

*... the next time we write a Business Plan, we're going to have to be much better prepared in terms of thinking about shocks and or significant, external changes.*

SPC-FAME senior staff

Overall, it was clear that SPC-FAME faces a tension between taking ‘reactive’ or ‘proactive’ approaches (another theme throughout this review), recognising its members need both. Feedback from SPC-FAME staff, members and partners commented on these two approaches.

## Reactive Approach

SPC often operates in a reactive mode, where staff assume strategic decisions are all very broad and made at the One SPC level such that all they need to do is wait for member countries to submit formal requests for assistance. This approach is often

seen as inefficient because of the high volume of requests, the lack of clarity on internal prioritisation and the tendency to perform work that perhaps the country should be doing themselves. The reactive nature means staff are constantly trying to catch up.

## Proactive Approach

A shift to a proactive approach would involve SPC-FAME initiating strategic conversations with members to outline multi-year priorities, enabling better planning for resources and funding. Proactivity will be required for delivering meaningful outcomes on complex issues and adapting in anticipatory ways to emerging shocks and stressors, including international policy changes.

SPC-FAME ultimately needs to be able to do both — be reactive *and* proactive – to serve member needs now and into the future. While reactive approaches can be beneficial for responding to new issues and taking advantage of opportunities, more structured medium- or long-term strategic planning with member countries would allow for better funding preparation and more strategic delivery. While this may have been trialled in some ways in the past, the validation co-design workshop with senior staff as part of this review highlighted that finding a workable model for this is still viewed as a priority.

However, SPC-FAME will need to ensure its structures, processes, staff and funding models enable this, and that is not straightforward. For example, the flexible funding provided by New Zealand should in theory support greater proactivity, however the fact that it is now delivered as an annual allocation will likely restrict SPC-FAME’s ability to commit to work that requires an investment of two or more years.

These future directions build on feedback from a number of stakeholders and were confirmed by SPC-FAME senior staff during the validation workshop discussions.

### **Recommendation 3: Articulate the Business Plan’s long-term vision for the Division**

*Develop a member-driven 10-year outlook using expanded foresighting processes as a participatory tool with members to establish a vision of what a successful SPC-FAME of 2050 will need to look like and map out actionable opportunities to work towards it.*

This should include a strategic approach to the sustainability of CFAP and consideration of how major changes like population growth / mobility, growing inequalities, climate change, potentially heightened geopolitical competition and digital technological transformation will be reshaping the region from a fisheries and marine resources perspective and how SPC-FAME can support members to create positive outcomes in the context of changes like these that they cannot fully control.

### **Recommendation 4: Articulate the Business Plan’s medium-term priorities**

*Drive a 3-year rolling annual prioritisation process with members, ideally sitting under the 10-year vision and underpinning the annual Working Paper 3 (Annual priorities), presented to the Heads of Fisheries (HoF) meetings.*

This can institutionalise collaborative, proactive, multi-year place-based planning with member countries to ensure priorities are jointly established to meet common needs, comparable to the certainty provided by the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) Service Level

Agreements. This should include a focus on enhancing the ability of SPC-FAME to meet member needs across offshore and inshore contexts.

**Recommendation 5: Align organisational structure, capability and processes with future needs and priorities**

*Consider SPC-FAME's future organisational structure, capabilities and skills-sharing and collaboration processes, including the potential for cross-divisional / cross-programme shared scientific and technical capabilities and working toward the long-term, future skills needed for the fisheries sector.*

This could include mapping the long-term future skills needed to support the fisheries sector based on the 10-year outlook, and the core job types needed to deliver programmes now *and* into the future.

**Recommendation 6: Plan for the continuing evolution of SPC-FAME**

Based on the three actions above, specify a clear set of strategic changes that will be incorporated in the next Business Plan to deliberately evolve SPC-FAME to meet the changing needs of members and explicitly communicate these changes.

## Case Study: Ikasavea

Ikasavea is a digital fisheries data system developed by SPC-FAME to help member countries strengthen and streamline coastal fisheries monitoring, enabling more consistent, reliable information for management decisions. Ikasavea has been identified as a crucial data system and application developed and supported by SPC-FAME, designed to enhance coastal fisheries management and data collection across the Pacific. First released in 2020, Ikasavea has enabled efficient and streamlined data entry and analysis. Initially focused on market surveys, it has evolved into a multiple use tool with market, landing, socioeconomic and biological surveys. A key feature is its ability to work offline with data synchronisation to a central server when connectivity is available.

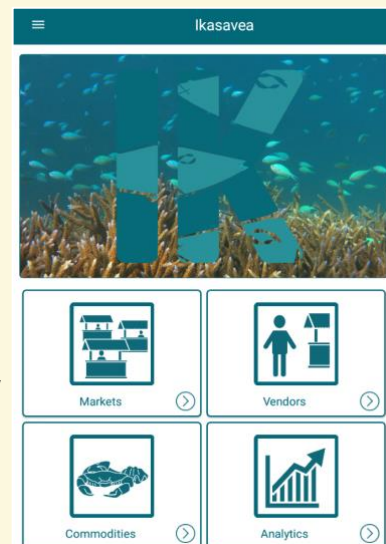
The application allows surveyors to collect fish and invertebrate measurements via photos on a measuring board, scale, or calibrated mat. Collected data can then be synchronised with the web portal for further analysis and reporting. The tool includes species identification based on an AI system which has automated identification for over 600 finfish species and measured more than 80,000 specimens. The AI system simplifies data collection for non-specialists and alerts users of outliers – flagging potential data validation issues.

Shortly after release, 3 member countries adopted the system for their data entry, and by 2024, 17 members were using the tool in their coastal fisheries management, highlighting its successful uptake. The implementation of Ikasavea has informed changes to national fish maturity limits. Ministry staff are now able to use and roll out the system with minimal external support. Using a train-the-trainers model has proved effective, enabling in-country capacity building and smoother adoption.

These features illustrate strong alignment with the SPC-FAME Business Plan, particularly in advancing data management and technology integration (Objective 3), supporting evidence-based management (Objective 4), and strengthening national capacity through training initiatives (Objective 7).

However, while the online and in-person training opportunities have been helpful, some members noted cases where this has not been effective. They emphasised the need for ongoing training and refresher sessions to strengthen capacity and ensure robust data quality and interpretation. Many attributed this issue to the high turnover rates within ministries and the associated loss of trained staff and institutional knowledge.

Another emerging challenge identified by both members and staff was that members do not necessarily understand how best to use the data. In response, SPC-FAME is developing new communication strategies and key messages for Ikasavea and adding an information component to trainings. Other challenges included the limited access to appropriate devices (tablets) for the data collection, with some staff relying on personal devices due to members’ resource constraints. Users reported technical glitches and the need for further customisation to better reflect national contexts and fisheries needs.



*Ikasavea app. Image: © SPC-FAME (<https://fame.spc.int/resources/tools/ikasavea>)*

## 4.4 Efficiency

### Key review question

How efficiently has SPC-FAME delivered on its Business Plan?

### Overall time- and cost-efficiency strained

FAME has intentionally kept its administrative resources low to maximise resources devoted to scientific and technical roles. SPC-FAME estimates that 10-15% of Divisional staff resources are dedicated to implementation support and administration. However, SPC-FAME's work involves in-country implementation across a large geographic region with logistical challenges in the movement of staff, equipment and resources, as well as increasing expectations of cross-SPC as well as cross-agency collaboration. This is exacerbated by limitations in SPC's organisational systems (see below). As a result, scientific and technical staff end up taking more responsibility for administrative tasks they are often not trained in or efficient at executing.

Senior staff and external stakeholders suggested that approximately 25% of dedicated staff resources for support and coordination is considered appropriate for regional scientific and research agencies addressing complex challenges. This estimate was based on based on specific experiences of stakeholders and was shared at the validation workshop where SPC-FAME senior staff reflected that this was their experience as well. To the review team's knowledge, there is no available measurable data or benchmarking on this ratio, though it corresponds with the allowable management fees typically paid by DFAT when they procure development support (usually between 25 and 35%). It may an area for further exploration for SPC-FAME.

Aspects of the SPC-FAME structure are also seen to limit efficiency. This is the case with the large Fisheries and Ecosystem Monitoring and Analysis (FEMA) team, where both the number of staff and the volume of work results in some inefficiencies in terms the management of staff and work. Some staff commented that inefficiencies can come from siloing.

*... [lack of] integration of SPC-FAME divisions / personnel and resources. At the moment everything is fragmented and siloed, that is OFP only work on OFP work.*

SPC-FAME staff

Considering SPC-FAME's future structure may thus provide an opportunity to yield some efficiencies through a clearer alignment of capabilities *across* programme areas and mechanisms to better share cross-divisional resources in both scientific/technical and operational areas. More detailed insights are not possible at this stage given this mid-term review did not include a functional review.

## Improving responses to member requests

SPC-FAME receives a significant number of requests for data, information and support and is very responsive to these requests. Requests are received from individual members and from partners as well as regional and international organisations.

### Member Request Management System

The implementation of the MRMS has provided an efficient method for member requests to be logged and for SPC-FAME to monitor requests and manage and prioritise responses. Individual members have full visibility of their requests and SPC-FAME's prioritisation and feedback on the progress of each request. At its 2023 meeting, HoF endorsed 4 criteria for the prioritisation of requests logged in the MRMS. These criteria are:

- strategic alignment with the SPC-FAME Business Plan, SPC Strategic Plan and regional mandates
- member need, urgency and risk
- collective benefit and leverage across multiple members and partners
- feasibility and resourcing in terms of skills, staff time and funding with particular attention to long-standing gaps in coastal fisheries and aquaculture.

The MRMS is a platform for monitoring country-specific requests, while regional requests are managed separately by SPC-FAME, often through WCPFC processes which have a significant focus on oceanic fisheries. As result, a large proportion of requests logged in the MRMS relate to coastal fisheries and aquaculture.

Member requests increased significantly in the last several years. For 2025, the MRMS has logged 117 requests (as of December 18), compared to a high of 163 in 2023. Noting that responses to requests can extend beyond the reporting year, overall SPC-FAME has completed 60.4% of requests for the period 2021–2025 with some requests outstanding from earlier years. However, the completion rate is not a reflection of timely delivery of outputs – it reflects demand and limited resources, particularly as there is high demand for the smaller CFAP team (which covers 70% of requests), as well as other factors. These include the closure (termination) of a request by the member or SPC-FAME and completion awaiting member review or follow-up action. Discounting the closed requests, the completion rate rises to 65.3%. There are currently 40 open requests awaiting member review or action which are delaying completion. The status of member requests logged over the period 2021–2025 is summarised in Table 3.

**Table 3: MRMS progress 2021–2025**

Year	Requests	Completed	Open	Closed	% Completed
2021	45	34	7	4	75.6
2022	65	41	11	13	63.1
2023	163	122	26	15	74.8
2024	108	54	52	2	50.0
2025	117	50	64	3	42.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>60.4</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>7.4</b>	

This information relates to actionable requests. Over the period 2021–2025, 36 requests were categorised as ‘unactionable’, representing 6.7% of total requests. Unactionable requests include requests that are outside the scope of SPC-FAME’s work or expertise or are superseded by newer requests.

The system is an efficient way of lodging requests, though it still requires socialisation with members to encourage them to use it. Some Member stakeholders also commented that they do not have a clear understanding of the processes for decisions and prioritisation of requests. Its primary use to date has been to serve as a recording and communication system, but there is potential to strengthen transparency and efficiency by further developing and communicating prioritisation criteria on the MRMS and ensuring all staff and members are aware of the prioritisation process.

Staff are mindful of the time spent managing the tension between being member-led and science-led.

*We respond to member requests and our work is directed by the politics of members, sometimes at the expense of scientific or technical advice. SPC should be able to push back when requests are nonsensical or have no clear purpose . . . It's not healthy and will impede the achievement of SPC-FAME's objectives.*

SPC-FAME staff

In being responsive to members, it is possible to be too *reactive* such that opportunities for efficiency may be missed. A longer-term and overarching, proactive or strategic approach to defining priorities with members could enable economies of scale through the potential to consolidate individual requests into a larger and more strategic response around similar themes or interventions. This can also build transparency and trust among members about the scientific integrity and mandate of SPC.

## Informal Request System

In addition to member requests for country-specific assistance, SPC-FAME receives requests from regional and international organisations and partners, and SPC-FAME staff are encouraged to log these requests in this system. For the period 2022–2025, 460 requests have been logged. Information of the status of these requests has not been accessed.

### **Recommendation 7: Increase understanding and use of the member request system**

*To further improve the use and understanding of the member request system, continue socialising it with members and communicating the criteria against which requests will be prioritised.*

## Inefficient systems and processes

Almost 60% of survey respondents (SPC-FAME staff) agreed or strongly agreed that SPC-FAME’s scientific work makes efficient use of available resources. However, 75% of respondents felt that SPC-FAME’s internal systems (grouped in the survey as project and financial management, procurement and MEL) did not support efficient delivery. However, while consultations indicate that the internal finance, procurement, travel and recruitment systems and processes are seen to be less efficient, this was not the case for the MEL system, although one stakeholder acknowledged the resource implications.

*. . . there is a strong emphasis on MEL requirements, and, although understandable, this process consumes considerable resources.*

SPC-FAME staff

While there have been dedicated efforts to improve SPC-FAME’s internal efficiency, it is limited by the fact that it works with SPC corporate systems, particularly for recruitment and procurement where most of the commentary about inefficiencies was concentrated. While these systems assist in satisfying the accountability requirements of donors, they are seen as outdated and inefficient, impacting SPC-FAME’s delivery, diverting SPC-FAME resources from scientific and technical tasks to administration and struggling to keep pace with SPC’s growth and needs. Several SPC-FAME staff commented on the associated additional administrative workload and delays in recruitment and procurement that impact delivery. There was general agreement that SPC-FAME is being as responsive, flexible and adaptable as it can in the face of these institutional limitations.

## Project implementation efficiencies

SPC-FAME has been working to achieve greater efficiencies in its project implementation. In its larger programmes, SPC-FAME has been able to harness economies of scale to resource dedicated implementation support and administration roles to improve externally-facing efficiency (for example a Programme Management Unit). This is not possible with smaller projects.

Distance, and the increasing cost of air travel, also impacts the efficiency of SPC-FAME's delivery. SPC-FAME has addressed this through practices affirmed by stakeholders such as:

- locating staff outside Noumea (Suva and in SPC subregional offices)
- liaising with subregional offices on trip planning and preparation to make efficient use of time in-country
- engaging with members remotely pre-and post-trip on elements of implementation to minimise time in-country.

SPC-FAME is also increasingly leveraging technology to gain efficiencies, particularly in data capture and management and in the use of AI. However, some stakeholders suggested that this has been hindered by the lack of SPC-wide approaches and guidance for its use.

**Recommendation 8: Strengthen Digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI) frameworks**

*Given SPC-FAME's existing engagement with digital change, advocate for an SPC-wide AI corporate policy and guidance on the use of AI specifically to support the management of Pacific fisheries.*

This guidance should establish governance protocols that resolve member concerns regarding data sovereignty, intellectual property rights and ethical implementation of new tools as well as highlight ways in which engaging in the digital and AI age could be transformative for SPC and its members. This can be a contribution to the Digital Flagship as well as an entry point to more comprehensive consideration of the future of digital technologies in the region and the capacity development needed (part of the next Business Plan).

## Insights into SPC, regional and donor coordination

While internal coordination and integration across SPC divisions (such as Land Resources Division, Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division, Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Division and Statistics for Development Division [SDD]) is improving, it is variable and often the result of individual relationships rather than formal processes and structures. A strong example of positive collaboration with other divisions is how SPC-FAME and SDD collaborate closely in matters relating to data management, with SDD appreciating SPC-FAME's sharing of technical expertise in R and Python (programming languages) and building a 'community of practice'.

Similarly with regional bodies, coordination occurs in areas of complementarity and is often based on individual projects and relationships rather than formal institutional processes. Coordination is seen to be patchy and there is a need for greater clarity around roles, noting that each CROP agency has a distinct 'mandate' which can limit the opportunities for integration.

SPC-FAME maintains close and productive engagement with donors and development partners and is seen as the 'first point of contact' in relation to fisheries development in the region. While relationships with individual partners are effective, it may be more

efficient to also have a formal donor and development partner coordinating mechanism to streamline areas of focus and avoid duplication of efforts.

*[They] try as much as possible to coordinate, but there's so many stakeholders, so many partners that are involved, we don't have the full view and SPC would be well-placed to create that [roundtable].*

Multilateral donor

### Recommendation 9: Improve donor coordination

*Further leverage SPC-FAME's recognised convening power to coordinate donor and development partner investments and consider developing a more formal coordination mechanism.*

This could include:

- discussing strategic directions and priorities for fisheries development in the region
- identifying and managing complementarity of current and planned donor activities (at country and regional levels), including earmarked projects
- identifying the size and timing of future funding allocations, including the strategic focus of donors
- identifying opportunities to leverage / integrate with temporary and ongoing donor programmes.

## 4.5 Sustainability

### Key review question

To what extent are the outcomes achieved by SPC-FAME likely to be sufficiently sustainable and enduring?

From the perspective of evaluating development investments, the sustainability criterion is intended to consider the degree to which *outcomes* (or on-ground benefits and impacts) created during the life of an investment are likely to be self-sustaining long into the future without the need for additional intervention.

However, it was clear that both staff and stakeholders were primarily considering other interpretations of 'sustainability'. Comments from staff and stakeholders about sustainability related to:

- members' and staff capacity to carry out the work
- SPC-FAME ability to maintain current activities and outputs
- SPC-FAME organisational ability to keep funding its current areas of work and expanding as needed.

It is important to note that some of these interpretations of ‘sustainability’ do not inherently align with each other. For example, sustainable outcomes should not require sustained activities and inputs from SPC-FAME. In reality, a mixture of these different types of sustainability is probably needed across the areas of focus for the Business Plan, but most staff and stakeholders were focused on only one or two of these rather than on the strategic balance required.

At a basic level, several stakeholders felt that sustainability is dependent on SPC-FAME continuing to ‘keep members happy’ and being ‘responsive to members’ needs. On this basis, of the SPC staff surveyed, 56% (n=18) agreed / strongly agreed that SPC-FAME’s approach ensures that it is sustainable.

The following subsections present review results for the above three interpretations of sustainability, followed by brief consideration of the sustainability of on-ground outcomes generated through SPC-FAME’s work.

## Capacity building is an evolving strength

A core element of sustainability is the capacity building and training that SPC-FAME has undertaken to ensure that members and staff are well equipped to implement the actions in the Business Plan in an ongoing, sustainable manner. SPC-FAME’s capacity building initiatives have been well received and are starting to shift focus from building short-term to long-term capacity.

For its staff, SPC-FAME has a noticeable dedication to raising capacity of Pacific Island staff, which promotes sustainability. For its members, partners have anecdotally perceived that national agencies are now much ‘more competent in huge numbers of areas than they were’, and that in recent years they have an increased sense of agency and greater tendency to ‘do their own thing’.

One of the possible reasons for this is that SPC-FAME is always seeking to ensure that at least 2 or 3 people from each ministry of fisheries are involved in capacity building initiatives so that knowledge is retained even if there is turnover. However, staff still comment on the need to focus capacity building more on the PICTs.

*More effort could be put into developing PICTs’ capacity to own and sustain initiatives instead of relying on us.*

SPC-FAME staff

Some key success areas in SPC-FAME’s capacity building initiatives for staff and members have included:

- tuna data workshops
- empowering Pacific people to gain higher-level education
- training regional SPC staff in technical tasks such as data audits
- transferring both equipment and knowledge to countries (for example funding labs)

- Pacific Fisheries Leadership Programme, SPC-FAME Academy and internship programs
- ‘train the trainer’ principles underpinning design and delivery.

Upcoming SPC initiatives such as the Integrated Capacity Development (ICD) programme for phase two of the Pacific Women Lead flagship show promising trajectories for capacity building in cross-cutting areas as well as technical areas.

With these successes in mind, it was also clear that SPC-FAME could better target the content of capacity building to the audience and better capitalise on innovative delivery modalities. Both staff and partners noted that capacity building initiatives with government could be better tailored to focus on areas of SPC-FAME’s technical competence, capabilities that need to sit within governments and filling gaps not filled by others such as the University of the South Pacific.

*[SPC-FAME] probably do a pretty good job of training. I think the important thing there to an extent is making sure you're focused on the right thing. For example, doing the sort of stock assessments that SPC does, it's pretty hardcore maths. You know, there might be 50 guys in the world that can do that sort of stuff really, really well.*

*We don't need people in every single SPC member country to be able to do that stuff. It's completely unachievable. It's completely impractical. What we need to do is make sure that they can interpret those stock assessments well for their own circumstances.*

Partner organisation

SPC-FAME could also better leverage institutional programmes such as the Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS) which has an early career ocean professionals programme, to help bolster the long-term talent pipeline. SPC-FAME might also consider developing closer partnerships between SPC-FAME and other CROP agencies for training, as done in the past for harvest strategy workshops.

Finally, the modality of how training can be better delivered and sustained for long term results could be examined. Member countries proposed that capacity building models could better utilise technology to enable hybrid trainings. Social media and greater access to smartphones can be used to create more ‘communities of practice’ that facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges across the region.

Recommendations from previous evaluations of capacity development, along with the new research project examining capacity building, training and behaviour change within the Sustainable Pacific Fisheries Programme, could be further embraced to help ensure training is aligned with needs and priorities and can scale out more efficiently.

### **Recommendation 10: Continue to strengthen capacity building**

*Build on SPC-FAME’s capabilities and knowledge of what works in capacity building to strengthen targeting and innovative delivery.*

This involves enhancing tailoring (targeting training on skills that members require and that members agree they could sustain long into the future), building off evidence of

what works and using / trialling more novel cost-effective delivery modalities. Future approaches to capacity building will need to recognise and adapt to members' capacity challenges such as staff retention, the impact of seasonal worker schemes and other factors.

This also includes putting into practice lessons learned from multiple previous capacity building reviews, engaging with the upcoming research on capacity building for behaviour change and sourcing sustainable funding for training.

## **Focused effort sustains activities and outputs**

### **Research and technical activities**

In general, SPC-FAME staff reported being specifically encouraged to ensure all initiatives are sustainable and to avoid 'one-shot' projects, with funding being pooled and channelled to longer-term programmes where possible. This has included establishing sustainability plans during the design phase of projects such as 'Echoes of Oceania' which focuses on scaling up community-based fisheries management in the Pacific Islands region.

The OFP has stood out as the most 'self-sustaining' in terms of being a science leader and provider (for example regional tuna stock assessment) for tuna fisheries in the Pacific with a steady stream of core work / activities (for example from WCPFC). The CBFM initiative is another strong example of designing for sustained, long-term effort because the required expertise for implementation is distributed across national agencies and partners, with SPC-FAME providing the convening role and strategic direction rather than being solely responsible for providing all the on-the-ground expertise. Developing the CBFM work is considered one of the key paths to sustainability in the coastal sector, because its management measures are accepted and agreed upon by the community, enabling them to own and take responsibility for identifying and implementing best practices using guidance materials SPC-FAME has developed. Thus, CBFM can eventually operate without sustained technical inputs.

The use of a Memorandum of Understanding with partners like The Nature Conservancy on tuna and University of Wollongong on CBFM is an effective mechanism for ensuring sustained collaborations. They have provided frameworks through which funding and expertise can be channelled for sustained delivery of key areas of applied science.

### **Outputs**

In addition to sustaining areas of work, staff and stakeholders commented that outputs (including data sets and reports) and technology continue to remain available and continue to be used by member governments and partners. SPC-FAME's use of technology and data as a means of ensuring long-term work was considered a real strength. Stakeholders praised the Fish Labs, the research vessel and the way that OFP curates data for members. The investment in country-specific labs has allowed countries to develop their own data sets (for example Cook Islands) which SPC-FAME

can then integrate into its broader regional understanding, promoting shared and sustained scientific leverage. One Pacific Island country shared how they are confidently carrying out Ikasavea data collection (see Case Study) with minimal SPC-FAME supervision and securing their own funding for tablets. Other tools such as the PacificDataHub.stat tool and TUFMAN2 have played similarly instrumental roles in making data available in a long-term, standardised way.

## Sustaining staff and skills

Internal staffing may be both a major contributor and barrier to sustainability. Positively, stakeholders acknowledged the decentralisation process (moving technical staff to sub-regional offices) is making delivery more sustainable and efficient. Some concerns were raised in interviews about high staff turnover, but according to SPC-FAME human resource data, SPC-FAME staff serve an average of 7 years 5 months, higher than the SPC general average of 5 years 6 months. While turnover is thus relatively low (11% in 2024), some member countries perceive that there is a heavy reliance on key ‘linchpin’ staff which can cause significant implications and disruptions when they depart.

## Potential trade-off with ability to innovate

The strong emphasis on sustaining areas of science long-term may be linked with some concerns raised over SPC-FAME’s ability to innovate and pivot toward more emerging member needs. In any organisation, staff time and resources will inherently be limited, making it difficult to simultaneously sustain and continue to grow existing areas while also building up new areas of work. Feedback to the review broadly suggested that the former may be currently prioritised over the latter, aligned with the challenge raised about balancing reactive and proactive modes of operating. Both staff and external stakeholders identified missed opportunities to develop skills and new work to address emerging challenges and opportunities in the region which may require some growth in proactive agility to make strategic decisions about shifting to new areas of focus (raised in previous sections).

In particular, some member countries have identified aquaculture, mariculture and the blue economy as a missing investment strategy which could allow SPC-FAME to assist with sustainable commercial projects which can be self-financing.

*[FAME] probably [needs] to focus on some issues like, you know, we're moving towards this blue economy approach. Focus on those kind of areas, blue economy and aquaculture, because most of us are now into aquaculture. On the mariculture, we've endorsed our regulations and Aquaculture Development Plan, so we need that support, probably more consultation with us as members.'*

Member country official

Some staff suggested there is a missed opportunity to work on inclusive and sustainable value chains and economic empowerment as a means of helping deliver greater benefits directly to Pacific peoples, especially into a future of more severe, uncertain and complex challenges. Similarly, one partner suggested the need to support communities to find sources of income using resource by-products, as seen with trochus shell ornaments in Samoa. To strengthen this, SPC-FAME could build new skills to enhance its work with the private sector (for example in informal coastal fisheries or financial literacy training such as that delivered by ANZ Bank).

Several other specific areas for necessary innovation were highlighted, including:

- leveraging climate finance and large GCF investment opportunities
- adopting AI technology for institutional and operational purposes (for example for measurement and information dissemination)
- funding data generation and management as core capabilities rather than relying on project-level funding
- improving data accessibility for members to reduce significant time currently spent on data queries
- leveraging the basis of the Ikasavea infrastructure to go beyond data collection and share insights and lessons in a network structure
- leveraging scalable computer resources (cloud) and the Pacific Data Hub to join fisheries data with datasets from other sectors.

## Sustaining funding is a perpetual need

Stakeholders recognise that raising funds for applied science in a low-population area like the Pacific is ‘super complicated’. Despite this challenge, SPC-FAME has been on an upward trajectory, expanding and being better funded than it has been in many years. Staff were positive about how SPC-FAME has been able to link endorsed strategies such as national management strategies (that they also helped develop) with funding opportunities (for example the Pathways Project for Tonga and Nauru). Its pursuit of diverse funding modalities has been well received by staff, commenting that SPC-FAME ‘doesn’t settle for just one modality of funding’. The Business Plan has been serving as a strong indicator of SPC-FAME’s alignment with regional priorities which has enabled certain donors (for example Australia) to provide untied annual support based on confidence in the Business Plan, rather than earmarking funds for specific projects.

Despite the alignment with regional priorities and positive response in terms of flexible funding from some donors, some staff and members noted that there has still been a general shift away from flexible, multi-year programme funding to more restricted project-based funding, which puts some areas of science at more risk.

In terms of key programmes, sustainable funding is ‘not there yet’ for coastal fisheries, and this requires clear communication to donors. SPC-FAME has been less successful in attracting sufficient funding for this sector despite strong efforts and the fact that it is a high priority for members. Donors who wish to support member priorities for locally-

led development could be encouraged to understand this is the priority area with the greatest gaps in funding.

Although the Implementation Plan (IP) is intended to include resource mobilisation, one senior SPC divisional staff outside of SPC-FAME suggested that the Business Plan needs a section on resource mobilisation that clearly articulates the resource gaps (particularly for coastal fisheries) and strategies for leveraging funding into complex spaces. Such a section has been included in SPC business planning guidance.

*The only thing that I would suggest would be useful, and I guess that's not really in the business plan, per se, is a section on resource mobilisation. It might be helpful to align with the Key Result Areas and the objectives that are set in here, partly because I look at this as a really important articulation of the region's priorities. However, we get funding for the tuna side of things and, but we are not getting anywhere near the type of funding necessary for the complexity of the coastal fisheries management side, right, which is the part that affects the lives of all Pacific people.*

SPC staff

Whilst resource mobilisation pipelines and gaps are articulated in the IP, the above comment suggests it is not necessarily known or used by others outside of SPC-FAME to get the full picture of SPC-FAME's funding arrangements. More strategically, it lacks the mapping of potential new and innovative funding sources and opportunities. For example, SPC-FAME could leverage the impact of new international legal developments, such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ruling on the obligation of states under the law of the sea, to justify resource needs. Another strategy raised by a donor is the preference to see members cost-share activities, co-investing cash, not just in-kind resources. This would help members prioritise their focus areas, improving country ownership and sustainability and utilising SPC-FAME's strength as a partnership broker. Resource mobilisation should also carefully manage the risks that can come from large injections of funds (for example from GCF) as they can lead to temporary growth and inadvertently detract from core functions.

There is a need to increase SPC-FAME's programmatic funding, which has been identified by stakeholders and was confirmed by SPC-FAME senior staff during the validation workshop discussions.

#### **Recommendation 11: Further increase programmatic funding**

*Continue to build and strengthen SPC-FAME's programmatic investments by further driving the combination of diverse funding sources so they collectively constitute a programmatic investment approach.*

This should be done in close collaboration with the Partnerships, Integration and Resource Mobilisation Office (PIRMO), and should include the potential to tap into evolving sources of climate finance, the role of philanthropy, resource allocation, legal developments and cost-sharing / co-funding arrangements. This could be informed by a stocktake of (current and potential) diverse funding sources and use of levers such as a shared services model and greater collaboration across SPC-FAME programmes in its

resource allocation, particularly in back-end and support functions like finance, events and project management.

## Sustainability of outcomes is less clear

SPC-FAME has been focusing on sustaining its areas of work, producing enduring outputs and equipping institutions in member countries to continue the work that is appropriate to transfer to them. However, several staff and external stakeholders mentioned rapid drivers of change across the Pacific such as large projected population increases, accelerating effects of climate change, disruptive shocks and a rapidly evolving technological landscape. These drivers change the context such that the actions that can deliver outcomes today are unlikely to be the actions that will sustain those outcomes through the next 10 or 20 years.

The Business Plan highlights some of the rapid drivers of change but says little about how SPC-FAME is considering the strategic and proactive shifts it needs to make in its own capabilities, skills and key result areas in response to this changing context. Instead, it emphasises sustaining and enhancing ongoing work, delivering broadly to all Key Focus Areas in the SPC Strategic Plan 2022-2031. This links to Section 4.3 in this review on relevance, where there was some evidence, particularly from senior SPC-FAME staff, that the balance between reactive and proactive approaches may need some adjustment, particularly to allow for more tactical agility and better prepare for significant external changes.

## Case Study: Community-based fisheries management

Community-based fisheries management (CBFM) is an initiative within the CFAP programme. CBFM is a way for fishing communities to address issues of overharvesting and environmental degradation. It involves supporting communities to establish their own management plans, processes for monitoring changes in stock and decision-making processes for management actions such as setting taboo areas. CBFM can also include the introduction of alternative economic activities to increase livelihoods whilst limiting harvests.

CBFM is an exemplar of SPC-FAME’s skills in sustaining activities and capabilities. Its solid partnerships with technical providers (University of Wollongong, University of the South Pacific) and donors (the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and DFAT) have led to sustained investment and over 20 years of applied research. More recently, frameworks and dialogues are building the enabling conditions and political support required to scale the approaches both up (into policy) and out (to a larger number of communities).

Importantly for sustainability, CBFM has a strong locally led agenda. CBFM is designed so that communities themselves develop and own the approaches and apply them long-term, with support from dedicated staff within member ministries. Thus, once CBFM is established, it can continue without substantial ongoing support from SPC-FAME. SPC-FAME’s use of modern approaches such as the Echoes of Oceania knowledge hub and Facebook community of practice have been essential in setting CBFM up to be so self-sustaining. CBFM has also been commended for embracing other tools such as Ikasavea and integrating GEDSI into its toolkits.

CBFM was intended to address the problem of overfishing due to modest increases in population size. However, the problem context is changing. Population size in the Pacific has increased more substantially – by 50% since SPC commenced work on CBFM in the early 2000s, and projected to reach a 100% increase in the next 20-25 years according to the Pacific Data Hub’s Population Dashboard. Climate change alone may reduce Pacific coastal fisheries catches by an average of 23% by 2050 and transform the very nature of these ecosystems, according to SPC-FAME’s 2025 publication ‘Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region’. Thus, focusing primarily on managing overfishing may not be sufficient to sustain communities that depend on coastal fisheries. And the tools available on Echoes of Oceania to assist communities with considering the implications of major drivers like climate change are often more than 10 years old and thus provide little insight into how to manage the scale of these changes.



SPC-FAME and its members are working to strengthen aquaculture and increase the capacity of offshore fisheries to cope with what appear to be inevitable reductions in coastal fisheries. There is now a substantial opportunity for SPC-FAME to support members to bring some of this work together more programmatically – to consider if and how the CBFM model can assist communities themselves to make their own decisions about responding to the accelerating and complex drivers of change in coastal systems, including decisions about transitioning to aquaculture or offshore livelihoods.

*Nanikaai Village members and stakeholders celebrate the endorsement of their CBFM plan. Image: © Kiribati MFMRD*

## 4.6 Cross-cutting themes

### Key review question

To what extent is SPC-FAME's approach appropriately addressing cross-cutting issues?

To assess cross-cutting issues, the review was directed to focus on three flagships identified as priorities for deeper analysis and to serve as examples of SPC-FAME's general engagement in flagships: the Gender Equality flagship, Climate Change flagship and Oceans flagship. While the Food Systems flagship has linkages with SPC-FAME's work given the importance of fish and seafood to food security, its implementation is less well-developed and is outside the scope of this review. The Digital flagship will also have linkages but is only just emerging.

SPC-FAME'S progress on cross-cutting priorities, namely GEDSI, climate change and oceans, has been strengthened by targeted investments, dedicated expertise and growing leadership commitment. While the Division has made notable gains in mainstreaming GEDSI internally and across member-focused work, awareness and understanding of the SPC flagship initiatives, including flagships outside the scope of this review, remain limited. Engagement with the flagships is sometimes characterised as one-way or tokenistic, with multiple staff unclear of the purpose and relevance to daily work.

### Gender equity, disability and social inclusion

The injection of funding through Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership (Phase 1) has resulted in substantial investment and progress towards integrating GEDSI principles and approaches into SPC-FAME as a division, and into fisheries and aquaculture – progress that is not so clearly evident in other sectors in the Pacific. This investment has positioned SPC-FAME as a GEDSI leader within SPC, demonstrated its alignment with the Gender Equality Flagship, and is serving as an example for other Divisions within the organisation. The successful approaches used by SPC-FAME and lessons learned on how to integrate GEDSI into sectoral spaces will be leveraged through the Gender Equality Flagship to support other SPC divisions, and for reporting progress towards regional commitments on gender equality.

Much of this leadership and success was attributed to the hiring of key staff (Natalie Makhoul, Margaret Fox) with Pacific-centric GEDSI expertise and experience, coupled with genuine commitment at the executive level. The two GEDSI advisors have, for example, provided GEDSI training for SPC-FAME staff, developed trainings for fisheries agencies in PICTs, produced key handbooks, conducted three in-country gender assessments and provided inputs into new proposals and staff technical work (where relevant and when requested).

There is some recognition that the division's leadership training programme (while not explicitly targeting women) has outcomes that are 'empowering for women fisheries officers' around the region. There have been genuine efforts to include gender and broader social inclusion (especially women and youth) in the implementation of

projects, including an investment in women’s participation and agency, particularly in inshore fisheries, with fewer examples provided for aquaculture. In the offshore sector, SPC-FAME’s engagement on labour standards and safety of observers highlights a broadening of their mandate to include human rights issues but had less of a focus on GEDSI. SPC-FAME’s investments in GEDSI have been cited as being ‘brave’ – meaning it was willing to push new ideas or areas of work that need attention. For example, SPC-FAME conducted a session to discuss sensitive topics like gender-based violence in fisheries and aquaculture at the 2025 HoF meeting.

Despite notable progress, challenges persist in fully integrating GEDSI across SPC-FAME's work. While inshore fisheries have shown positive momentum, the integration of GEDSI in aquaculture and offshore fisheries is lagging and requires increased attention and effort. Furthermore, although advancements in gender equality are evident, a stronger focus on broader social inclusion, including persons with disabilities, is necessary. While some discussion on disability inclusion at the previous HoF was acknowledged and seen as positive, some SPC staff, member countries, a donor and a partner felt more attention was required.

*I think there's a lot of good work in the gender inclusion space. I don't see as much around the disability space, and I think that's probably something across SPC as a whole.*

SPC-FAME senior staff

A critical capacity gap exists among technical staff who are still in the early stages of applying GEDSI principles. To address this, in the short-term continued investment is required to retain GEDSI specialists, provide ongoing training and mentoring for SPC-FAME staff and integrate GEDSI into both current projects and future proposals. This targeted approach is important for achieving the long-term goal of the Gender Equality flagship to transition from relying on dedicated GEDSI officers to making GEDSI ‘business as usual’ and fully embedded in divisional Business Plans, job descriptions and key result areas.

At the country level, there is growing interest and support by all members interviewed to invest in GEDSI. For example, one fisheries agency has developed a draft GEDSI strategy with SPC-FAME's support. Three countries have conducted a gender assessment of fisheries and aquaculture. One member acknowledged the value of SPC-FAME’s approach to social inclusion.

*FAME is addressing social inclusion positively, particularly regarding the inclusion of traditional knowledge, as evidenced by ongoing projects showcased at the Heads of Fisheries meeting.*

Member country official

That said, one member felt there was too much time spent on GEDSI.

*We have to work on it [GEDSI], but we have to ensure the main priority, you know, during the last fisheries meeting, we spent maybe half or more on this kind of issues.*

Member country official

However, it was highlighted by some stakeholders that that more work is needed to convince managers (in some member countries) of the relevance of GEDSI for their work, which paves the way for their staff to fully prioritise it in their work.

Internally, two SPC-FAME staff members shared that while historically its technical staff were almost exclusively male, there has been a shift to 50:50 female / male gender balance, including the hiring of female Pacific Islanders.

*[SPC-FAME] has hired fantastic female scientists, managers, and data support staff.*

Member country official

Despite this significant progress, senior managers recognised it remains challenging to get women into senior roles, as reflected in the SPC-FAME human resource data which notes just 7 women in band 12-14 roles compared with 33 men.

Overall, SPC-FAME's GEDSI approach and capability is maturing and will benefit from continued development.

**Recommendation 12: Continue to strengthen integration of GEDSI across SPC-FAME**  
*Build on substantial GEDSI leadership success by securing GEDSI staff investment long-term and increasing focus on deeper topics.*

Areas of focus can include working to mainstream GEDSI integration in the sector while also addressing the newer and more evolving topics such as disability inclusion, gender in labour mobility and climate displacement of coastal fishermen and rights-based / people-centred approaches to inclusion.

This includes identifying the sustained resourcing that will embed this capability beyond project funding, noting that the focus is not just on the volume of capability, but on what is done to keep advancing thoughtful work in the GEDSI space.

## Climate change

The integration of climate change into SPC-FAME's work has driven a major shift in how the division delivers technical, scientific and policy support to its members. This has positioned the division as a regional leader in climate information about fisheries within SPC and among its Pacific member countries. The investment in climate change expertise, strategies and modelling capability (primarily with a focus on impacts rather than adaptation or mitigation) has strengthened SPC-FAME's role in supporting the Pacific.

SPC-FAME's progress is associated with a strong alignment with SPC's Climate Change Flagship, ensuring a One SPC approach to climate action. Through this alignment, SPC-FAME's contributions are intended to be captured within SPC's broader climate reporting and strategy. It is seen as highly relevant and strategic for SPC and SPC-FAME,

primarily serving as a framework to integrate climate action, leverage funding and enhance visibility.

An example of this integration is the Adaptation Fund-supported project (approximately USD8 million), which was secured through SPC's Climate Finance Unit in partnership with a national government. The project provides a valuable opportunity for SPC-FAME to strengthen national planning and climate-informed aquaculture development. However, its implementation has been challenging due to political and administrative issues as well as the complexity of administering nearly 300 small grants through systems not currently designed for that scale.

Despite the successes, the degree of SPC-FAME's applied work in climate response and the effectiveness and operational coordination of the flagship are viewed differently by various stakeholders. Several staff and partners find that SPC-FAME is only just beginning to integrate appropriate climate adaptation into its work (initially with tuna) and that it is unclear how SPC-FAME or even SPC in general benefits from the flagship approach.

SPC-FAME's focus on climate change is seen as both timely and well aligned with regional and national priorities, given the threats faced by Pacific communities. SPC-FAME is widely recognised by partners for its leadership in modelling the impacts of climate change on tuna and this work is embedded within regional tuna management processes. Members consider this essential for informed decision making, noting the success of tools like SEAPODYM and the GCF regional tuna programme as major achievements that have strengthened the management of oceanic resources particularly in the face of climate change.

For example, a clear success story is the deep science used to understand the changing dynamics of tuna populations under climate change, which was used to support substantially revised thinking about managing the tuna industry. This work then underpinned the successful GCF funding. The same rigorous evidence base of climate-driven changes to coastal resources and resulting shifts in thinking about management do not appear to be present in the Coastal Fisheries and Climate Change Strategy ('Climate Strategy'), which instead takes a minimal approach to describing and considering impacts (despite the comprehensive 2025 SPC-FAME book 'Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region') with little direct link to the actions proposed.

The integration of fisheries and climate change is highly valued by members for its scientific contributions to oceanic fisheries, but there are significant challenges in resourcing and implementing climate actions in coastal fisheries and aquaculture. Members have highlighted that similar progress seen in the oceanic sector is urgently needed in the CFAP.

The intentional integration of climate change into coastal fisheries and aquaculture has only started to gain momentum in recent years and is still in its infancy. The most recent developments have been in the recruitment of dedicated personnel and the development of a new strategy. Dedicated anchor funding from MFAT enabled SPC-FAME to recruit a Climate Change Officer focused on strengthening the connection between coastal fisheries and the broader flagship objectives. The development of the

Climate Strategy has been an important milestone in providing a coordinated approach for member countries to integrate climate resilience into fisheries and aquaculture management.

The Climate Strategy is still in draft form but represents a positive step in the right direction. The strategy provides specific actions in areas such as climate financing and resource mobilisation (which are tools to enable action but not solutions in themselves) but lacks any new actions or approaches that relate to resilience and adaptation which are urgently needed. For example, while CBFM is often labelled as a mechanism to address climate change, CBFM itself does not specify what investments or tools will be required to do that. Several individuals shared that the climate change responsiveness within CBFM activities is sometimes implicit rather than explicit.

*While SPC-FAME excels at high-level science, the explicit articulation of near-term responsiveness to climate change within CBFM activities, beyond the general need for sustainability, is sometimes unclear.*

Partner organisation

Given the integration of climate change in fisheries and aquaculture is still fairly new, countries will benefit from more tangible actions, approaches and identification of new areas they need to consider or invest in beyond the business as usual. For example, there are emerging climate planning tools to enhance the resilience of marine fisheries to climate change. The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations has guidance, tools and online training on how to integrate disaster risk reduction and management into fisheries. The links between climate change and disasters in the Pacific Island region have not been articulated in the strategy.

Throughout, there is another notable gap – the strategy does not recognise and address the nexus between climate change, GEDSI and fisheries. For example, it does explicitly not recognise that women, people with disabilities, elderly fishers and other marginalised groups in the fisheries and aquaculture sector are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change. There is growing literature that climate change will exacerbate inequalities across multiple sectors. Without integrating GEDSI into the strategy in a more clear and meaningful way (with clear actions), there is a high risk that climate change and GEDSI are treated in siloes.

The Climate Strategy should address the concerns of member countries that they require more support in mainstreaming and embedding such strategies into their actual work plans and activities. Finally, it is worth highlighting that the New Song is outdated and only briefly acknowledges climate change, treating it primarily as an external driver of change rather than identifying it as a standalone key barrier that will demand new ways of working and new visions for a prosperous future.

### **Recommendation 13: Continue to strengthen integration of climate change in CFAP**

Revise and finalise the Coastal Fisheries and Climate Change Strategy to ensure it integrates the implications and recommendations from the 2025 book ‘Climate change implications for fisheries and aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region’, includes GEDSI considerations and provides clearer guidance on shifts in management approaches and emerging tools to support climate integration, including down to community level.

## Oceans

Given that SPC-FAME's activities are predominantly focused in the oceanic sector, it is directly linked to the Oceans Flagship. Internal feedback suggested that, as with the Climate Change Flagship, the tangible benefits of the flagship approach are not well understood among SPC-FAME staff.

*I can't really say that I've noticed anything different from having a flagship.*

SPC-FAME Staff

Senior management, however, have a clearer understanding of the purpose of flagships, viewing them as a mechanism to drive coordination and collaboration along thematic lines and communicate SPC strengths that cut across Divisions in order to leverage donor funding.

The Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS) manages the Oceans Flagship and maintains close ties with SPC-FAME. PCCOS staff often sit in SPC-FAME's regular senior management meetings showing a clear effort to ensure alignment between the division and the flagship. This includes aligning the MEL frameworks to establish common outputs and indicators. SPC-FAME collaborates with PCCOS on projects such as the Ocean Observations and the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) programme.

A common perception is that the oceans flagship has not reached its full potential, which staff have attributed to resource limitations. The Oceans flagship does not have an anchor investment and PCCOS is actively mobilising resources to secure one.

### **Recommendation 14: Deepen integration of SPC Flagships within SPC-FAME**

Clarify and communicate the purpose and structure of SPC flagships (Climate Change, Oceans, Gender, Food Systems and Digital) across all levels of SPC-FAME.

This is important given the success of the Flagships depends entirely on how the Divisions use and work with them. Pick one flagship to engage with more deeply to actively and adaptively work to make it a success in bringing benefits to members.

## Appendix A List of documents

Table 4: List of documents included in the review process

Document Category	Document
<b>FAME Business Plan and other key documents</b>	FAME Business Plan 2016–2020
	FAME Business Plan 2022–2027
	SPC-FAME priorities and emerging work areas, 2023
	Baseline assessments for SPC-FAME Division Business Plan, 2023
	FAME Implementation Plan
<b>FAME Evaluations and Reviews</b>	FAME Performance Review, 2017
	Evaluation of Capacity Development Efforts at SPC-FAME, 2021
	Evaluation of DFAT Funding Support to SPC-FAME, 2023
<b>Business Plan MEL and Results</b>	FAME Evaluation Standards
	Business Plan results framework
	2017–2022 Results (spreadsheet)
	Results dashboard (online resource)
	Head of Fisheries 11–15, 17 Results Report against SPC-FAME Business Plan
<b>Regional Fisheries Ministers Meetings</b>	Statement of outcomes (RFMM2–6, Special RFMM)
<b>Regional Technical Meeting on Coastal Fisheries and Aquaculture (RTMCFA)</b>	Community Based Fisheries Dialogue outcomes, 2021, 2022
	RTMCFA Key discussions 2022, 2023
	Outcomes and actions reports 2019, 2021 and 2022
<b>Head of Fisheries (HoF) Outcomes</b>	HoF 10 – 17 outcomes
	HoF 13 – 16 working papers
	HoF 15 key priority work areas
<b>Regional Policies and Frameworks</b>	2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent, 2022
	Blue Pacific 2025 Strategy Implementation Plan 2023–2030
	Regional framework on aquatic biosecurity, 2020
	A new song for coastal fisheries – pathways to change: The Noumea strategy, 2015
	Future of Fisheries: A Regional Roadmap for Sustainable Pacific Fisheries, 2015
	Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2025
	Pacific Framework for Action on Scaling up Community-based Fisheries Management: 2021–2030
<b>SPC-level results against SPC Strategic Plan</b>	SPC Strategic Plan: 2022–2031
	Australia–SPC Partnership final evaluation (and DFAT response), 2022
	Independent Institutional Review of the Pacific Community (SPC)
	SPC Annual Results Report, 2021–2024

## Appendix B List of stakeholders

**Table 5: Numbers of interviewees, by organisation and stakeholder group (n=43)**

*Note: Names and specific roles are omitted to maintain anonymity of respondents*

<b>Stakeholder group</b>	<b>Organisation / Country (number of individuals interviewed)</b>
<b>Donor</b>	MFAT (New Zealand) (n=1) DFAT (Australia) (n=1) European Union (n=1)
<b>PICT member</b>	American Samoa (n=1) Fiji (n=1) Kiribati (n=2) New Caledonia (n=1) Palau (n=2) Tokelau (n=1) Tuvalu (n=1)
<b>SPC Senior Leadership Team</b>	n = 11
<b>SPC Senior Management Team</b>	n = 13
<b>CROP partner</b>	WCPFC (n=1) SPREP (n=2)
<b>Implementation partner</b>	MRAG-Asia Pacific (n=1) Conservation International (n=1) University of Wollongong (n=1) The Nature Conservancy (n=1)

## Appendix C Key review questions and sub-questions

Table 6: Mid-Term Review questions and sub-questions

Criteria	Key review questions
Effectiveness and impact	<b>KRQ 1 To what extent has SPC-FAME achieved progress and results against its Business Plan?</b>
	1.1 To what extent has SPC-FAME achieved the intended results under each of its seven Business Plan objectives? – and how have these benefited SPC members and stakeholders?
	1.2 What impact has SPC-FAME achieved against its stated goal of ensuring that ‘fisheries and aquaculture resources of the Pacific region are resilient, and managed sustainably for economic growth, food security, and cultural and environmental conservation’?
	1.3 What (if any) unintended outcomes (positive and negative) were there?
Relevance	<b>KRQ 2 How relevant is the SPC-FAME Business Plan to the needs and priorities of Pacific Island Countries and Territories?</b>
	2.1 How well do SPC-FAME’s objectives and work areas align with current SPC member priorities, SPC structures (e.g. SPC Strategic Plan, Flagships, Key Focus Areas, One SPC Transformation Project), and evolving regional frameworks (e.g. the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent)?
	2.2 To what extent are the goals and objectives of the SPC-FAME Business Plan still aligned with regional and PICT priorities?
	2.3 To what extent has SPC-FAME remained responsive to changes in the operating context, including emerging challenges (e.g. climate change, regional governance shifts)?
Efficiency	<b>KRQ 3 How efficiently has SPC-FAME delivered on its Business Plan?</b>
	3.1 To what extent were outputs delivered in a timely and cost-efficient manner?
	3.2 Have there been any notable efficiencies or inefficiencies in the coordination and implementation of activities among stakeholders, including regional organisations, national governments, and local communities?
	3.3 Are internal systems (e.g. MEL, project planning, financial management, procurement) supporting efficient delivery?
	3.4 How well is SPC-FAME coordinating with SPC divisions, Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific (CROP) agencies, and partners to deliver integrated support?
Sustainability	<b>KRQ 4 To what extent, are the outcomes achieved by SPC-FAME likely to be sufficiently sustainable and enduring?</b>
	4.1 What critical success factors are in place to ensure sustained impact? (e.g. capacities, partnerships etc.)
	4.2 What opportunities are there to align the work undertaken in these two activities with broader investment initiatives (e.g. Sustainable Blue Economy; Sustainable Food Systems)?
Cross-cutting issues	<b>KRQ 5 To what extent is SPC-FAME’s approach appropriately addressing cross-cutting issues?</b>

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Criteria	Key review questions
5.1	To what extent is SPC-FAME contributing to gender equity and social inclusion including people with disabilities?
5.2	To what extent is SPC-FAME's work better equipping PICTs to respond to the impacts of climate change?
5.3	To what extent is SPC-FAME supporting an integrated and coordinated SPC approach to contributing to national and regional ocean ambitions?

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