

Towards establishing a Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee



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DEPARTMENT OF
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Executive Summary

The Pacific Islands Countries and Territories (PICTs) represent a unique scattering of islands, ecosystems and cultural diversity that is incomparable anywhere in the world. Many islands host species that have evolved and adapted to island conditions making them special from a scientific and cultural perspective but also vulnerable to threats. Human migration and subsequent settling of islands brought about major changes to the ecosystems, with dire consequences to island adapted species. The deliberate and indirect introductions of mammals contributed considerably to the decline of native and endemic species. Today, these introduced species continue to cause harm to island ecosystems and are assisted by even more deadly new introduced predators.

Invasive species are one of three leading causes of biodiversity loss at the global scale. In the Pacific Islands they are the biggest cause of species extinction. The prognosis for island endemic species, as well as island ecosystems, does not look good, as more species are being transported to islands. It is imperative that coordinated efforts at all levels must be prioritised and implemented to give native and endemic species a fighting chance against invasive species, and to safeguard the foundation of island communities and economies.

Local, national and regional efforts to safeguard island species as well as the wellbeing of communities and economic aspirations of countries are starting to make an impact in this area. Pacific Leaders have lent their voice to the global community, calling for commitments and investment towards combatting this growing problem. Establishing national cross-sector and multi-agency teams of invasive species practitioners allows for coordination, collaboration and planning on how best to manage invasive species and address biosecurity challenges brought on by trade and by being participants of the global community.

The benefit of establishing sub-regional groupings to bring home the message of better coordination, collaboration and planning has been clearly demonstrated through the existence of the Micronesia Regional Invasive Species Council. Established by the Micronesia Chief Executives of nine Micronesian jurisdictions, the Council have achieved incredible milestones by collaborating, coordinating and planning together for the benefit of their people. This is the framework and the model that if it can be replicated in Melanesia and Polynesia, will provide the much needed impact for safeguarding of unique endemic and threatened species in the Pacific. It will help motivate and mobilise communities for the caring of their environment, and contribute towards a stronger economic base for governments and countries.

Biosecurity and invasive species practitioners from around Melanesia deliberated on a framework that is suited for their circumstances over a two day workshop held in Port Vila. They agreed that in order to engage with Melanesian leaders they must work within the Melanesia Spearhead Group framework. An interim coordination committee has been formed to oversee the submission of the Melanesia Biosecurity and Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MBISAC) to the leaders. The Melanesian biosecurity and invasive species practitioners recognise New Caledonia's efforts and expertise in the management of invasive

species. New Caledonia's participation will enrich MBISAC and provides additional support to the group. An open invitation to New Caledonia remains for the foreseeable future, and MBISAC members will hold dialogue with New Caledonia once it is operational. In alignment with this process are pledges to raise awareness and the profile of MBISAC at the national level to gauge support and momentum towards its establishment. A workshop agreement was also pledge to support the outcome of the deliberations. A list of recommendations is provided to help guide the process and ensure the momentum for MBISAC's establishment continues. These recommendations are provided below:

- Melanesian biosecurity and invasive species practitioners must continue to promote the establishment of MBISAC by facilitating and leading deliberations at the national level and encouraging the setting up of national invasive species cross-sector and multiagency teams.
- The momentum built through the regional deliberations including the work of the interim coordination committee and the action plans developed by participants must continue to progress and that communications must be frequent either formally through emails, or informally through social media. These communication platforms must be established as soon as possible to ensure the momentum continues.
- Efforts to have another meeting prior to the MBISAC submission to MSG leaders should be explored, to ensure that activities are on track and that any other issues be addressed to ensure a high level of success with the submission.
- Funding opportunities for the region remain favourable and efforts should be explored to ensure that MBISAC is able to take advantage of these. The interim coordination committee working closely with the MSG Secretariat and partners should lead in developing regional proposals so that future meetings are funded and supported.
- Efforts to engage New Caledonia biosecurity and invasive species practitioners should be explored, as they weren't able to attend the regional deliberations. Their participations in MBISAC would be vital to ensure a successful regional effort. Other organisations and countries should also be included in the conversation and encourage to provide support to MBISAC.
- Closer collaboration between MBISAC and RISC should be encouraged so that lessons learnt can be shared. It is also important that SPREP and SPC be encouraged to actively participate in the establishment of MBISAC, as they can provide ongoing support and advice to MBISAC members.
- Workshop Agreement adopted by the participants be forwarded to all relevant bodies and authorities, including the Melanesia leaders to raise awareness and the profile of the group.

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Acronyms

BAF – Biosecurity Authority of Fiji

BSV – Biosecurity Service Vanuatu

CEPA – Conservation and Environmental Protection Authority (PNG)

CEPF – Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

CI – Conservation International

CNMI – Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands

DEPC – Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (Vanuatu)

DFAT – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ)

ECCTAC – Environment and Climate Change Technical Advisory Committee

ECD – Environment and Conservation Department (Solomon Islands)

FSM – Federated States of Micronesia

GEF – Global Environment Facility

HERCC - Humanitarian & Emergency Response Coordinating Centre

IAS – Invasive Alien Species

IC – Island Conservation

ISM – Invasive Species Management

IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature

IUCN-ISSG – International Union for the Conservation of Nature – Invasive Species Specialist Group

MBISAC – Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee

MCE – Micronesia Chief Executives

MFAT – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

MSG – Melanesia Spearhead Group

NAQIA – National Agriculture and Quarantine Inspection Authority

NDMO – National Disaster Management Office

NISSAP – National Invasive Species Strategic Action Plan

PBWG – Pacific Biocontrol Working Group

PICDS – Pacific Islands Capacity Development Strategy for Invasive Species Management

PICTs – Pacific Island Countries and Territories

PICTs – Pacific Island Countries and Territories

PII – Pacific Invasive Initiative

PILN – Pacific Invasives Learning Network

PIP – Pacific Invasives Partnership

PNG – Papua New Guinea

RISC – Regional Invasive Species Council (Micronesia)

SAP – Strategic Action Plan

SCS – Sub-Committee on Security

SPC –The Pacific Community

SPREP – Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

SPS – Sanitary and Phytosanitary (Measures of the World Trade Organisation)

TEOM – Trade and Economic Officials Meeting

TNC – The Nature Conservancy

USD – United States Dollar

USDA – United States Department of Agriculture

USP – The University of the South Pacific

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the various frameworks and initiatives that exist in the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) with regards to invasive species management and how they could be utilised towards the development of a coordinated mechanism by the countries in the Melanesian region in addressing biosecurity and invasive species concerns. The terms of reference for this report can be seen in Annex 1. The benefits from a coordinated region may include enhanced economic opportunities and safeguarding the unique ecological systems and species diversity for the wellbeing of the Melanesian people.

The PICTs are one of the best organised and well-coordinated regions in the world in terms of environmental management. Comprising thousands of islands, atolls and islets, the Pacific Islands are categorised in many different ways including the three sub-regions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia (generally in reference to the size and cultural context of the islands and people).

Melanesia is comprised of large land-masses located to the south-west of the Pacific Ocean encompassing Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The Polynesian sub-region refers to islands east of Fiji and is inhabited by Polynesians including eastern parts of Fiji (Lau group), Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Cook Islands and French Polynesia. Some other smaller islands such as Tokelau and Tuvalu, as well as people of New Zealand, Hawaii and Rapa Nui are also considered Polynesians. The north Pacific (extending to the south of the equator) is Micronesia comprising of Palau, Northern Mariana, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru and Kiribati.

Invasive species management is a cross cutting issue that impacts almost all sectors within island ecosystems. It is a key part of environmental and biodiversity management, which involves the protection and conservation of key species and habitats. The vulnerability of islands to external threats necessitates the need to put in place key strategies and programmes for their protection. Globally, invasive species are considered to be one of the key threats to species extinctions, economic retardation and the health and wellbeing of communities. Invasive species have been coined as the silent killers, as well as the green pollution, due to their ability to subtly and in some cases explicitly outcompete native species, take over island ecosystems and alter ecosystem functions and resilience. In almost all cases the problem becomes exponentially worse over time. Every island has been impacted by invasive species and there are many well documented cases where they have caused severe impacts including extinction of many endemic species.

It is not surprising then that the Pacific islanders are very concerned by invasive species and the impacts they have on their islands, as well as any new potential introductions. In past regional gatherings island citizens have raised their concerns to this threat and have called for assistance in managing this. The concerns are serious enough to warrant Pacific leaders to declare this as a problem for the islands and urge assistance by all. Some of the leaders have made dollar commitments to the battle against invasive species, whereas others have prioritise this issue within their national planning.

For the Melanesia region invasive species are considered a serious threat to biological diversity. Invasive plants such as the African tulip tree (*Spathodea campanulata*), Mile-a-minute vine (*Mikania micrantha*), Large leaf vine (*Merremia peltata*), false pepper (*Piper aduncum*), and lantana (*Lantana camara*) are some of the serious culprits. Whereas the giant African snail (*Achatina fulica*), Common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), cane toad (*Bufo marinus*), feral cats (*Felis catus*), black rat (*Rattus rattus*), brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) and little fire ant (*Wassmania auropunctata*) are the problematic animals. Some of the endemic species such as snails, ground dwelling birds including the Choiseul crested pigeon (*Microgoura meeki*) and the thick-billed ground dove (*Gallicolumba salamonis*) are close to becoming extinct due to feral cats and other invasive species. Outbreak of the Newcastle's disease in 2007, the varroa mite in 2008, and the coconut rhinoceros beetle 2015-2016 in PNG and the Solomon Islands caused concerns not only for the farmers but also neighbouring countries.

A number of regional and sub-regional organisations, as well as the private sector and non-governmental organisations are working with many partners to assist countries and communities in response to their call for help.

This report provides a brief overview of some of these organisations and initiatives and their work on invasive species. They are highlighted with the view of how they can contribute towards a coordinated Melanesian sub region to address biosecurity and invasive species challenges.

Invasive frameworks and initiatives in the Pacific

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP)

SPREP is the key coordination and focal point to assist PICTs on ecosystems and biodiversity management, climate change, waste and pollution control, and environmental monitoring and governance. Initially it was a programme under the SPC (then known as the South Pacific Commission); it became a separate unit to service the conservation of nature (Apia Convention) and the protection of natural resources and environment (SPREP Convention) for PICTs. SPREP currently services 21 PICTs, as well as the active participation of Australia, France, New Zealand, United States and the United Kingdom.

The Secretariat is based in Apia and has four key divisions:

- Biodiversity & Ecosystem Management;
- Waste Management and Pollution Control;
- Climate Change; and
- Environmental Monitoring & Governance.

The Biodiversity & Ecosystem Management division implements a comprehensive invasive species programme including coordination of two regional networks – the Pacific Invasives Learning Network (PILN) and the Pacific Invasives Partnership (PIP). The Invasive Species Management Programme implements regional priorities as endorsed by member countries during their annual meetings. Such priorities include providing technical, institutional and

financial support to invasive species programmes in coordination with other regional bodies. Hence it focuses on addressing the threats caused by invasive species through the development of policy, legislation and awareness information. This also includes the maintenance of networks for better regional coordination, building capacity and monitoring progress and outcomes. Another important part of SPREP's work in accelerating actions on the ground through management programmes such as eradication and biological control.

SPREP under the Waste Management and Pollution Control division handles issues relating to marine invasive species. It has a strong programme that builds capacity of countries to deal with threats posed by ballast water and hulls of ships. It works closely with international partners including the International Maritime Organisation to assist countries address capacity challenges such as inspection of vessels and learning more about their obligations under international instruments. Recently, SPREP held a number of country level trainings on the international convention for ballast water management in Melanesia.

Over the past few years SPREP has been active in the development of regional initiatives for the management of invasive species. This included the development of the *Guidelines for Invasive Species Management for the Pacific*, the GEF-PAS regional project on the management of invasive species in nine countries and the Pacific Islands Capacity Development Strategy (PICDS) for Invasive Species Management (ISM).

The guidelines for IAS management is an important document that has been endorsed by members of SPREP and SPC. It provides a comprehensive framework for developing national programmes and strategies on invasive species management. The Guidelines main components:

- Foundations: generating support, building capacity and ensuring appropriate legislation, policy and protocols
- Problem Definition, Prioritization and Decision Making: baseline and monitoring, prioritization, and research on priorities
- Management Action: biosecurity, management of established invasives, and restoration

Recently SPREP initiated a Pacific Invasive Battler series on a number of important common invasive species issues that are relevant to the work of invasive species practitioners in Melanesia and the wider Pacific. This series is available from the Battler Resource Base on the SRPEP website:

www.piln.org

Another useful regional document produced by SPREP, PILN and PII is the Pacific Islands Capacity Development Strategy for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific. This Strategy was endorsed by SPREP member countries and it contained 13 pertinent recommendations with regards to capacity building in invasive species management in the region. Some of these recommendations including long-term mentoring and advice to those who are receiving capacity building training and a trained to teach for those offering training courses.

The Pacific Community (SPC)

SPC is the first regional organisation established at the conclusion of the Second World War in 1947. One of its main purposes for establishment was to foster regional socio-economic stability and building good relations among the Pacific countries, as well as external parties with political and military interests in the countries. SPC has gone through a number of transformations and restructuring, which included some of its programme becoming autonomous (e.g. SPREP), whereas other external functions were subsumed (e.g. SOPAC). SPC remains one of the biggest regional inter-governmental organisations working across more than 25 sectors within its seven divisions: Economic Development; Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems; Geoscience; Land Resources; Public Health; Social Development; and Statics for Development.

The Land Resources Division is based in Suva, and has two major programmes: Sustainable management of forest and agriculture systems; and Biosecurity and Trade Facilitation. Expertise within the division covers plant and animal health, biosecurity and trade, forest and agriculture diversification, crop and animal production, genetic resources, information and communication including extension, and forest and trees. SPC also has a number of offices in Melanesia, one based at the MSG Headquarters in Port Vila and another in Honiara.

Pacific Invasives Learning Network (PILN)

The Pacific Invasives Learning Network was created through the SPREP Meeting in 2003 at the request of the countries to build the capacity of their people in managing invasive species. Regional experts and partners united to support the countries in developing a programme to assist with capacity building. The programme became the Pacific Invasives Learning Network with a mission of empowering countries to manage invasive species through a network that is driven by its participants to focus on their priorities, share experience, resources and skills and making connections with experts to increase knowledge through information exchange and importantly to start work on the ground in the fight against invasive species.

The key partners in the start-up of the network included SPREP, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Conservation International (CI), SPC, the Invasive Species Specialist Group (IUCN), University of the South Pacific, US Department of Agriculture (Forest Service), Palau Office of Environmental Response and Coordination. National Park of American Samoa, Pacific Invasives Initiative and BirdLife International were also key partners.

The idea for PILN started in the early 2000s in recognition of the threats posed by invasive species. The threat to community health, to the environment as well as the economy is best exemplified by the introductions of the taro leaf blight to Samoa and the brown tree snake (*Boiga irregularis*) in Guam. In Guam the cost to infrastructure damage due to power-outage caused by the snake was around USD 4 million a year (Fritts 2002). The impact to the native bird population was so severe that 80% became extinct and the remaining population seriously endangered (Rodda & Fritts 1992; Wiles et al. 2003). One of the startling realities was the lack of capacity in the islands to deal with the severity of the situation. A proposal

was put forward at the SPREP Annual Meeting for a project to establish a Pacific network to build capacity of islanders to address the invasive species challenge.

PILN held its inaugural meeting in Palau in 2006 to launch the network and also to start the process of focusing on assisting the countries. In 2007 a second regional meeting was held in Moorea in French Polynesia. This was followed by a third regional meeting in Kiritimati, Kiribati in 2012, and recently a fourth meeting was held in Samoa in 2016.

PILN has assisted in building the capacity of islands:

- managing invasive species information
- biocontrol
- weed management
- herbicide application
- invasive ants
- rat eradication
- strategic planning

The Pacific Biocontrol Working Group (PBWG)

The Pacific Biocontrol Working Group is an informal collaborations among experts in the wider-Pacific region to promote and coordinate efforts in the management of serious invasive weeds in the Islands through the use of biological control agents.

The history of using biological control agents in the Pacific began as early as the 1900s when a fly was introduced to try and manage Lantana in Fiji and New Caledonia. Since then over 62 biological control agents have been deliberately introduced to control about 21 invasive weeds. Two agents have spread naturally into the Pacific. The impacts of these agents varied from ineffective to complete control of the target weeds. Countries that are most active in releasing of biocontrol agents are Fiji, PNG, Guam and FSM.

The Pacific Biocontrol Strategy was formulated by the Biocontrol Working Group in 2009. The Strategy is yet to be fully supported and implemented, although key elements are being pursued at the national level. The strategy recognizes that many invasive weeds have a broad distribution throughout the region and a regional approach to identifying and testing biocontrol agents is the most cost-effective solution to invasive weeds. Its inception included 1) identifying common target weeds within the three primary focal points for Pacific-wide biological control of weeds - New Zealand, Australia, and Hawaii; 2) identifying other Pacific Island Countries and Territories that may have these weeds and identifying the status of those weeds; and 3) leveraging funding in one or more areas to implement appropriate programmes.

The Biocontrol strategy served as a template for a smaller scale plan, the **Cook Islands Weed Biocontrol Programme**. Developed in 2012, it included a prioritisation exercise conducted at a regional workshop attended by technical experts and representatives from the Cook Islands. This resulted in identification of the 15 highest priority invasive weeds and a 5-year plan was

prepared to address seven of these species. The plan was funded by MFAT (New Zealand Partnerships for International Development Fund). The goal of the programme is to use imported biocontrol agents to sustainably control/suppress the priority invasive weeds in the Cook Islands archipelago. Suppression of these invasive weeds will increase the availability of productive land for agriculture, lead to reduced use of chemical herbicides, and reduce potential threats to Rarotonga's water supply. The Cook Islands Weed Biocontrol Programme serves as a case study and demonstrates the effectiveness of a regional approach to these issues.

The Pacific Invasives Partnership (PIP)

The Pacific Invasives Partnership (PIP) is the umbrella regional coordinating body for agencies and experts working on invasive species issues in PICTs. PIP is the Working Group of the Roundtable for Nature Conservation. It promotes coordinated planning and assistance from regional and international agencies to meet the invasive species management needs of the countries and territories. PIP membership includes SPREP, SPC, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), BirdLife International, Conservation International, Landcare Research NZ, the University of the South Pacific (USP), IUCN ISSG, Island Conservation (IC) and another 10-12 organisations. One of PIP's key functions is to provide advice and assistance to two regional networks - the Pacific Invasives Initiative and the Pacific Invasives Learning Network. PIP is governed by a Charter and is serviced by the Invasive Species Advisor based at SPREP. Another important contribution of PIP is tracking and monitoring investment in invasive species management, including project commitments, capacity development and resource mobilisation.

The Pacific Invasives Initiative (PII)

The Pacific Invasives Initiative is based at the University of Auckland, NZ. It started as a globally endorsed initiative during the 6th Conference of Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity and was launched by the NZ Government as a Cooperative Initiative on Invasive Alien Species on Islands. PII has a multi-disciplinary team that works extensively with Pacific agencies and countries on invasive species priorities. It has contributed to the development of a number of important initiatives such as the Pacific Ant Prevention Programmes, the Pacific Invasives Learning Initiative and a number of toolkits for the management of invasive species. PII has six strategic focuses:

- Development of Pacific capacity for managing invasive species
- Provide practical training in invasive species management
- Provide invasive species management best practice tools
- Provide technical support and advice for invasive species management
- Develop and strengthen linkages and networks
- Strengthen PII as a Centre of Excellence for invasive species capacity development

The Micronesia Regional Invasive Species Council (RISC)

The northern Micronesia subregion is comprised of nine jurisdictions including Palau, Guam, CNMI, Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia with its four states (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Yap and Chuuk). Although Kiribati and Nauru are considered part of Micronesia, they are yet to be formally included in the Micronesia Chief Executives (MCE) forum.

The Micronesia region is unique by its isolation and scattered small island mass, which makes them vulnerable from external pressure. The governments lack economic resources to assist with addressing many of the challenges they face. The islands rely heavily on trade as part of their economic and social development needs. With the increase in trade, comes an increase in the risk of introducing unwanted species. This risk was the catalyst to the establishment of the Micronesia Regional Invasive Species Council in 2006 by the nine Micronesian Chief Executives (Guam, Palau, Marshall Islands, CNMI, Federated States of Micronesia and the states of Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap). RISC is a unified effort to combine limited resources and promote efficiency by sharing and capitalising on members' strengths and capabilities. Its missions are to prevent the introduction of invasive species to the islands and to control and reduce existing populations (including eradicating if feasible). Each jurisdiction has two representatives appointed by their respective Chief Executive to attend the biannual meetings. The meetings are usually held prior to the Chief Executives Summit with outcome statements to be considered by the chiefs for endorsement. RISC provides detailed and timely information to the Chief Executives on invasive species and biosecurity issues, as well as providing coordination, planning and overall leadership for invasive species programmes and collaborating with local, regional and international partners.

A charter was developed for RISC and a Strategic Action Plan (SAP) developed in 2007-2011. This was renewed in 2012-2016. Five strategic goals in the latest SAP including:

- i. Keep Chief Executives informed for effective actions
- ii. Public awareness/education
- iii. Communication and cooperation regionally and globally
- iv. Enhance biosecurity
- v. Resource enhance

Some of the key activities and impacts of RISC

- Contributing to the development of the Micronesia Biosecurity Plan
- Integrating invasive species with conservation and protected area work
- Control and eradication of invasive species including brown tree snake, coconut rhinoceros beetles, invasive weeds including mile a minute, chain of love, ivy gourd and false kava.
- Protection of endemic and native species including Ko'ko for Cocos

The reporting format between RISC and the MCE is ideal and it lacks the bureaucracy that has plagued many arrangements in the region. It is precisely this process that it was seen as a model for Melanesia, as well as Polynesia. Ideally, if invasive species practitioners can report

directly to leaders, it should provide a stronger on the ground support than currently in place. However, given that there is a lack of such a mechanism in Melanesia, proponents will need to be innovative in identifying opportunities and work within the set system to ensure that its objectives are achieved.

Regardless of the overall reporting process of the Micronesia region, there are many useful aspects of RISC, especially in terms of operations and governance that need to be considered by Melanesia. These were considered during the workshop and a framework is emerging on how Melanesia practitioners would like their new body to function.

The University of the South Pacific (USP)

The University of the South Pacific is the premier tertiary institution in the region with its main campus in Suva, Fiji and satellite campuses throughout its 12 member countries. USP provides research capacity to assist member countries in understanding some of the problems and challenges. It is an active participant to PIP and does encourage its students to undertake research with an invasive species focus. USP has taxonomic capacity and expertise and frequently undertakes floral and faunal research and surveys in many of its member countries. USP will no doubt be able to support many of the challenges faced by Melanesia countries, however, it does need funding support especially in terms of providing scholarship opportunities for the students. The advantage of USP is that it also has a herbarium and a collection of marine and terrestrial animals providing the much needed reference sources to assist with identifying native versus non-native species. Many of the current leaders throughout Melanesia are alumni of USP, making it conducive for the university to be a key partner to practical research in the region.

Melanesia Invasive Species Workshop

A two day workshop was held at the Melanesia Spearhead Group Headquarters in Port Villa from 21-22 September, 2016 bringing together 24 participants to develop a roadmap towards the establishment of an invasive species group in Melanesia (see Participants List in Annex 2). The full report of the workshop is included as part of this report (Annex 2).

The workshop was by invitation of the Government of Vanuatu, specifically the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, and it served as part of its obligations of activities under the GEF-PAS invasive species management project.

Representatives from biosecurity, environment, forestry and fisheries sectors from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu attended the workshop and assisted in developing the roadmap towards a Melanesia invasive species and biosecurity group. Participants explored options of establishing the group either under the MSG Framework or as an independent body. Other issues such as the functions, operations and governance were also discussed and key decisions were made.

Overall, there was strong support for the group to be established under the MSG Framework as it provides the mandate for its existence and it further provides opportunities for a stronger impact both at the political spectrum but also at the national level. While cognizant of the need for political engagement with biosecurity and invasive species issues, the participants agreed that the proposed body must have a strong technical advisory role to enable informed decisions at the local, national and regional levels.

Key invasive species initiatives and frameworks within the Pacific region were discussed with the view of informing how the invasive species group should be established and function. While the Micronesia Regional Invasive Species Council provided the framework for Melanesia to follow, the initial agreement of operating under the MSG framework was the influencing factor that determined how the group will operate. The participants felt that while it was preferable for the group to have a direct link to the MSG Leaders, as seen with the Micronesia model, the reality is that it needs to go through a series of protocols (or decision making process) before it can be considered by the Leaders. Figure 1 illustrates the decision making process currently under the MSG framework and also the proposed arrangement for the group. Many other aspects of RISC such as developing a regional strategy and also a charter were considered as important to the functions of the group.

While the initial understanding and discussion focused on establishing a Melanesia invasive species council, the workshop agreed that the word council may have a legal implications more so than what they were envisaging. In conformity with the MSG Framework, participants agreed that advisory committee would be more appropriate than a council. They also recognised the importance of biosecurity to the MSG leaders as well as in the region, and therefore proposed the group to be known as the Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MBISAC).

Some of the participants are active in other advisory committees under the MSG Framework, including the Environment and Climate Change Technical Advisory Committee (ECCTAC) and

the Trade and Economic Officials Meeting (TEOM). They noted that the issue of biosecurity and invasive species are superficially mentioned in these groups, and that having MBSIAC will strengthen the work and focus of the other groups.

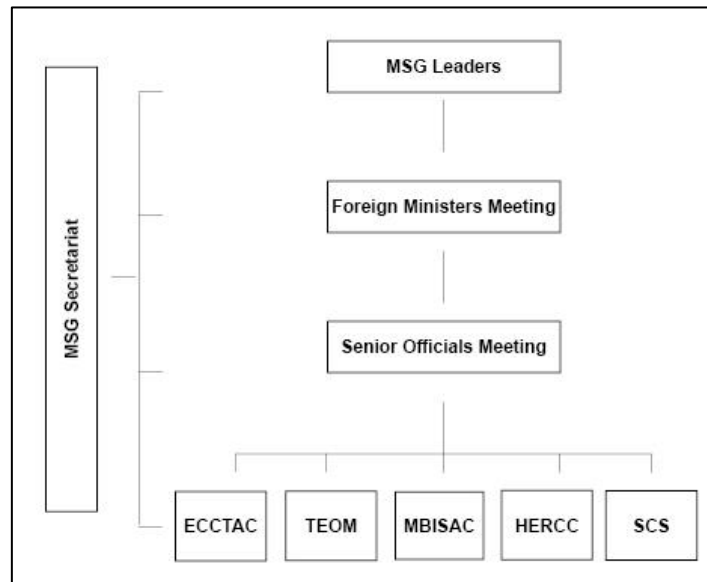


Figure 1. Decision making process under the MSG Framework and the proposed arrangement on how the Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee fits in.

The scope and functions of the MBISAC were discussed in detail providing the justification for its establishment, including benefits to trade developments and also towards climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. The alignment of MBISAC’s aspirations to the priority identified under the MSG 2038 Prosperity for All Framework (a plan endorsed by the MSG leaders), can only strengthen the implementation of this vision.

In view of other invasive species initiatives and activities in the region, there was general consensus that the timing and environment for the establishment MBISAC has never been better. The work by the Pacific Invasives Learning Network (PILN) to establish cross-sector and multi-agency national and island teams was seen as a critical component to the success of MBISAC. Mobilising national support through these teams and also through the engagement of key persons in each of the member countries will provide some security towards the function and sustainability of MBISAC. Participants noted that sorting out national arrangements is a priority for all member countries. National teams exist in Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu however, many need to be revitalised and re-energised as they have not been active for a few years. There currently is no national team in PNG, which is considered a priority by their workshop representatives.

The existence of other organisations including the SPREP, SPC, PIP, PII, PILN, PBWG and the work of organisations such as BirdLife International provides further support to MBISAC and the national teams.

Developing the Roadmap for MBISAC

The workshop participants discussed a number of key issues relating to the establishment of MBISAC.

Composition

The composition of the MBISAC was further discussed and it was agreed that it will be made up of heads of agencies and departments responsible for biosecurity and environment conservation. This will follow the existing arrangement of other MSG technical advisory committees, where it will be at the organisational head level (e.g. permanent secretary and director levels), with additional participants of technical officers. It was felt that technical officers will more likely be attending the meetings due to time constraints of agency heads. A suggested sub-group was raised under MBISAC as the Biosecurity and Invasive Species Technical Working Group but participants agreed that it was best to leave it as MBISAC in the initial phase, and leave the technical group at the national implementation level.

Governance

Participants agreed that a Chair and Vice-Chair should be selected to form the executive functions of the group. It was proposed that the Chair should follow the overall chairmanship of the MSG. Currently this is held by the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, which will be passed on to the Prime Minister of PNG in 2017. Hence, the proposal is that the Chair of MBISAC should be with the Solomon Islands and the Vice-Chair to be discussed further. The group suggested that in the future Vice-Chair should be the preceding Chair to allow for continuity and support to the new Chair. Membership of the MBISAC will consist of countries which are members of the MSG and will also consider associate members and observers. The administrative functions will be performed by the MSG Secretariat. All rules of the MSG will apply in the operation of MBISAC.

Meetings

Participants agreed that the meetings should be held annually and prior to SOM and FMM meetings. A two-day or two-session meeting was suggested with Day 1 or Session 1 comprising of technical updates from the members and discussing technical issues. Technical officers from biosecurity and environment departments and other invasive species experts will meet during this day and should provide recommendations for the senior members of MBISAC for adoption.

Discussions with the MSG Secretariat to provide secretarial support were positive and it was confirmed that this is a function that they do for other advisory committees. MSG will prepare and present the documentation for the meetings.

Functions

Participants discussed a number of functions for MBISAC and the overall agreement was that its core function would be to provide sound advice to Leaders on biosecurity and invasive species. Other functions of MBISAC include:

- **Knowledge sharing and exchange** – noting that there is a platform for knowledge management within the MSG Secretariat that could be used by the group to store and access information relating to new incursions, invasive species management information, policies and funding. Regional Database for invasive species in the region, which will be useful for trade facilitation.
- **Building capacity** – this includes learning exchanges, identifying and offering training opportunities and prioritizing sub-regional capacity needs.
- **Resource mobilization** – utilization of MSG regional resources including facilities, skilled human resources, identifying funding opportunities and assisting with preparation of concept notes and proposals. Provide advice to member countries on funding streams and applicable criteria and coordinate regional funding proposals.
- **Coordination and Planning**–including the development of regional biosecurity plans, emergency response plans, harmonization of legislations, regional pest management solutions, and other regionally driven strategic plans. Coordinate outreach and awareness programs throughout the region. Rapid response to incursions and also post-natural disasters – able to identify needs and experts to respond to community needs.
- **Communication** –coordinate communication and outreach on issues relevant to Melanesian communities and policy makers.

Scope

The MBISAC will have representation from all countries under the Melanesian Spearhead Group. It was agreed that the group is a technical one with no political overtures and it will focus on facilitating implementation of biosecurity and invasive species programs at the national and regional levels. At the regional level the focus will be on technical issues and activities, as well as sharing of information on research, expertise and facilities.

Sustainability

Funding was an issue that was not too far from the minds of participants and was heard throughout the workshop. The funding needed will focus on regional consultations and also with planning and implementation of regional activities. A number of options were explored, such as increasing the members' contributions (which is not easy), taking advantage of national and regional programs and meetings to hold side-meetings amongst the members, and engaging with the Private Sector. It was also suggested that one of the keys for sustainability is to ensure the governments and regional organisations are able to absorb invasive species positions into their annual workplans and national recurrent budgets which

for some agencies like PNG’s National Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Authority (NAQIA) is already a primary mandated and funded function. . There was strong support for countries to establish National Invasive Species Working Groups, as well as developing national instruments (e.g. National Invasive Species Strategic Action Plan - NISSAP) to help with sustaining the momentum and efforts against invasive species on the ground in the MSG member countries and territories.

Key Persons & Organisations for further engagement

Participants noted the engagement of senior government staff, such as directors, as important to garner the support necessary to push this agenda forward. The engagement of as many sectors as possible was particularly encouraging, calling for the participation of environment, biosecurity, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, trade, farmers associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in this initiative.

PNG	VANUATU	FIJI	SOLOMON IS
CEPA	DEPC	BAF	ECD/NDMO
NAQIA	BSV	SRIF	MAL
Fisheries	Fisheries	FSC	SIAQS
Agriculture	Agriculture	MOA	MFR
Forestry	Forestry	Forestry	MCT
Customs	Customs	Tourism	MFMR
Commodity Boards	Tourism	FRCA	Foreign Affairs
Health	Health	Health	Trade
Trade & Industry	Trade	Environment	Business Council
Foreign Affairs	Foreign Affairs	Trade	
National Planning	NAB	Foreign Affairs	
National Disaster and Emergency Service	Business Council	DISMAC	
Business Council		Business Council	

MBISAC – Challenges

A number of challenges were identified that should be considered and addressed to ensure that the MBSIAC moves forward in a constructive and effective way. These challenges include funding constraints, sharing of information, the need to develop memorandum of agreement between and amongst countries especially with regards to strengthening border security, gender and political will. There was a concern of competition from other interest groups that may undermine efforts to establish MBISAC. Some genuine concerns on duplication of programs and responsibilities amongst the regional advisory groups that will need to reassess to ensure a cost-effective and streamline functions of all working groups in alignment with the priorities of Melanesian countries. For this to be successful there needs to be a strong endorsement and engagement of national actors and governments to ensure that regional collaboration and coordination are a top priority.

An important challenge that was discussed was the participation of New Caledonia in an established MBISAC given the political differences between the government and the MSG framework. The participants noted that many have engaged with New Caledonian invasive species practitioners over several years and they would see this continuing under MBISAC. This is because MBISAC will focus on strategic and technical issues (not political) on how to get better and effective support for biosecurity and invasive species at the national and regional levels. The key is to ensure that MBISAC gets off the ground and then start the process of inviting and engaging with New Caledonia and regional partners.

MBISAC – Opportunities

Participants were particularly encouraged that existing under the MSG framework are various groups which address biosecurity and invasive species issues including the TEOM in relation to trade, Sub Committee on Security, Customs and Quarantine Sub Committee (CQSC), and the environment and climate change advisory group ECCTAC. Invasive species being both an environmental and a climate change issue fits nicely within the regional framework. One of the challenges and an opportunity as seen by participants, was the fact that many invasive species are shared amongst the members, and that addressing them through a coordinated approach will make it cost effective, and will help reinforce the value of the group. There is a wealth of technical experts in the region together with the excellent in country knowledge would facilitate prompt response to dealing with incursions and ongoing invasive challenges. Funding opportunities through the GEF 6 cycle is currently open and countries are encouraged to take advantage of this and ensure that invasive species are included in their submissions. In addition to the ECCTAC MBISAC will be able to support the TEOM, SCS, by providing these subcommittees a greater focus on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) matters that are identified in the revised MSG Trade Agreement but not well addressed in the existing MSG framework. This will have a wider impact from a trade perspective but also on climate change response in the region.

There is an opportunity that the MBISAC will also promote the modernization and standardization of electronic risk management systems for biosecurity management in the region to assist with facilitating trade within and outside the MSG region. Such a system if applied regionally, will save cost and the burden currently exerted on national efforts. There is an opportunity also to develop a standardize system for the region on policy matters including legislation. Overall it was agreed that with a united front that many of the problems will be much easier, faster and cost-effective to solve than going it alone.

Key Steps towards formalising MBISAC

Participants developed individual action plan (Annex 2) that they will do after the workshop to help with establishing MBISAC. They further discussed how best to formalize MBISAC and the following suggestions were proposed:

- Developing a five-year regional strategic plan

- Preparing a submission to the MSG Senior Officials Meeting for the establishment of MBISAC as a priority.
- Developing a memorandum of agreement or a charter for the members.
- Seeking endorsement by the Leaders of MBISAC in 2017
- Memorandum of agreements amongst national agencies to form multi-agency and cross-sector teams
- Establishing a committee to oversee the progress of MBISAC
- Developing an information paper and submission paper for the Leaders
- Explore linkages and synergies with other advisory group under the MSG framework

Workshop Agreement

We, the participants from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu met from 21-22nd September, 2016 at the MSG Headquarters in Port Vila, Vanuatu to form the inaugural technical advisory working group for Melanesia.

We acknowledge with gratitude the leadership by the Government of Vanuatu for convening this workshop at a critical period when biosecurity and invasive species are at the forefront of threats to national economies, communities, environment and associate biological diversity.

We also acknowledge the funding support by the Global Environment Facility and the operational support provided by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme that made this workshop possible.

We further acknowledge the support of the MSG Secretariat for making available its facilities for the meeting, as well as providing an advisory role during our discussions.

We recognise invasive species as one of the top key threats to Melanesian economies as well as the wellbeing of the biodiversity of our islands, our natural heritage and cultures. This threat will continue and will become severe due to increased movement of people and goods across our borders and further exacerbated by the impact of climate change.

For the protection of our countries and communities from the harmful impacts of invasive species, we make the following Agreement.

- *To establish the Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MBISAC) inclusive of a Biosecurity and Invasive Species Technical Working Group to provide advice to our leaders and to foster collaboration amongst the MSG member countries for the purpose of safeguarding economies, communities and our islands from harmful impacts of invasive species.*
- *To promote and strengthen the establishment of national mechanisms including establishing cross-sector and multi-agency national teams to facilitate and support the functions of the MBISAC.*
- *To invite organisations and other interested partners to join us and support our commitment to biosecurity and invasive species management in Melanesia.*

Conclusion

The foundation of a good invasive species framework relies on the concept that whatever actions taken will lead to the effective management of the issues or species. Such a framework is built on a number of key principles, which are well documented and accepted among the invasive species management community. These principles are articulated in the *Guidelines for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific* (SPREP 2009), as summarised below:

- Prioritise species to combat, starting with those causing or potentially causing the most harm. Noting that not all introduced species are invasive.
- Good science must be used to support risk assessment, prioritisation and management of invasive species. If scientific information is lacking err on the side of caution (precautionary principle) and treat the species as invasive.
- Adopt a hierarchical approach to manage invasives starting with prevention (stopping the species from getting into the area), eradication (total removal of the species), control (either through the use of biological agents, or contain in specific area) and long-term control (continuous use of baits and other chemicals).

The underlining factor that determines the success of any invasive species management framework is the commitment and the will of the people. Invasive species respect no borders, nor do they respect the jurisdictions or mandates of any agency. It is precisely this reason why it is important that combatting invasive species must be done in a collective, coordinated and united approach. Only through collaboration can the many tasks associated with creating a lasting invasive species management framework be progressed. These tasks are again iterated in the *Guidelines for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific* (SPREP 2009):

- Generating support
- Building capacity
- Developing and establishing protocols, policies and legislation
- Developing baseline and monitoring programs
- Prioritising risk and management plans
- Undertaking research for an effective management regime
- Implementing preventative measures at international and national borders
- Managing invasives through eradication and control
- Restoring ecosystems and biodiversity

In reviewing successful initiatives in combatting invasive species the recurring theme of strong partnership comes through as a key factor. Effective partnership ensures the engagement and support of as many stakeholders as possible (Generating Support in the Invasive Species Guidelines). The issue of capacity, especially in island countries, is also an important priority when developing actions against invasive species. Technical capacity is one part of the equation, the lack of human capacity (or manpower) in some of the island countries exacerbates the situation. This is why partnership not only internally within the country but also externally throughout the wider Pacific community and globally, becomes very important. This is the aspirations that we are striving to achieve for the Melanesian countries.

Over the past decade the Pacific Island region has been blessed with a number of initiatives that focus on developing and establishing partnerships for invasive species management. Supporting these initiatives has been the focus of regional and big international non-governmental organisations, through prioritising invasive species as part of their core programme (e.g. SPREP, SPC, BirdLife International, Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy). Funding support from development partners including Australia (AusAID now DFAT), New Zealand (MFAT), France (GEF), United States (through Department of Agriculture), the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) have accelerated on the ground actions to eradicate and control invasive species, as well as developing national instruments for long-term impacts.

While there has been a lot of traction gained in many parts of the Pacific with regards to coordination and collaborations to combat invasive species, particularly in Micronesia, Polynesia and French and American territories, the Melanesian region remains a step behind. The reason for this remains unclear despite the impact of invasive species being just as severe in Melanesia as it is in other Pacific islands. The Melanesian national experts that participated at the 2-day workshop held in Port Vila, hinted that the lack of national coordination and collaboration may be a factor towards the lack of a united regional approach. Another assumption is the lack of a directive from Melanesian leaders to their national governments to prioritise internal collaborations and coordination. This was seen as an important factor in the establishment and successful operation of RISC by the Micronesian Chief Executives. We also need to be mindful that the establishment of the MSG is relatively new and that it is still transforming as it adapts and absorbs the many competing national, regional and global priorities. The opportunity that is presented under the MSG framework sets the region towards a strong and united front that will only benefit the member countries. However, the existing arrangement under the MSG framework needs to be simplified as the current rate of growth puts pressure on the staff and adds unnecessary bureaucracy to the system. Sadly, this is beyond the scope of this report and also that of MBISAC. For MBISAC the challenge is to work within the current system and be ready to adapt to any changes as MSG goes through a reviewing process.

Establishing MBISAC is a straightforward process requiring a submission by the biosecurity and invasive species group. The two day workshop provided the venue where participants were able to provide the justification for the group's existence. It also provided the opportunity to work on some of the functions, the governance and operations and some of the key activities. The workshop also highlighted some of the challenges, opportunities and key steps for each participant to follow to ensure that the submission is successful. These have been highlighted earlier in the report, and can also be found in the Workshop Report in Annex 2. Some of the steps include revitalising and/or establishing national invasive species teams, providing briefings to senior officials, and generating the support of colleagues and organisations for MBISAC. Figure 2 provides a summary of next steps as proposed by the participants:



Figure 2. Summary of the Roadmap for the establishment of MBISAC.

There is no better time than now for the five countries in the Melanesia region to work closely on biosecurity issues and invasive species management. The regional frameworks and initiatives are already in place and operating to support such a Melanesian driven, led and owned initiative. This will help identify priority challenges and capacity issues unique to Melanesia and where assistance is needed.

The regional organisations including SPREP, SPC and USP exist to help their member countries address regional priority issues. Having a coordinated approach through MBISAC speaks volumes to the need of Melanesia. The technical support for biosecurity, managing invasive pests and diseases in the agriculture and forestry sectors, as well as environmental invasive species can be requested through SPC, SPREP and USP. These organisations have large global networks that could be utilised to provide additional support should there be a need for specialists assistance. PILN is a network by and for PICTs invasive practitioners. All Melanesian countries are members of this network (PNG is yet to formalise a national team), and there are opportunities under PILN to assist with building local capacities, whether through information and knowledge exchange, technical exchange or targeted training. There is also an opportunity for countries to shape and guide the direction of the network to focus on priority issues that are important for Melanesia.

An important considerations is the wealth of local experts and organisations in Melanesian countries including NARI, IRD, University of PNG, University of New Caledonia, NAQIA, SPC, SPREP and USP.

Recommendations

This report provided an overview of invasive species frameworks and initiatives within the Pacific Island region with the view of informing Melanesia countries on how best to establish a coordinated regional approach to promote biosecurity and invasive species management. While model frameworks exist especially that found in Micronesia (RISC), the influencing and determinant factor is how such a framework can exist under the MSG regime. To adopt the Micronesia RISC approach in its entirety is not practical for Melanesia; hence it became obvious following discussions with Melanesian experts that whatever framework that is needed, it needs to work within the MSG framework. On this basis the following recommendations are proposed to assist with ensuring that important issues are addressed in order for MBISAC to be successfully established.

1. Representatives that attended the inaugural meeting for the establishment of MBISAC must be the leaders within their organisations and countries and they must facilitate internal discussions to gain national awareness and support towards MBISAC's establishment. They must be cognizant of the MSG framework and process, and work within to gain the necessary agreements and endorsement by the leaders.
2. Furthermore, the representatives must strive towards attaining national coordination through establishing multi-agency and cross-sector teams in all of the Melanesian countries. It is also important that key part of the national coordination is the development of strategic plans for biosecurity and invasive species management.
3. The momentum built through the workshop including the work of the interim coordination committee and the action plans developed by participants must continue to progress and that communications must be frequent either formally through emails, or informally through social media. These communication platforms must be established as soon as possible to ensure the momentum continues.
4. Within the coming months another meeting should be explored so that progress can be discussed, and any outstanding and new actions be considered for implementation. While it would be ideal that this meeting should be done face to face, it is important to explore any opportunity such as regional gatherings, to assist with minimising cost, as this is one of the key barriers identified during the discussion.
5. Funding opportunities for the region remain favourable and efforts should be explored to ensure that MBISAC is able to take advantage of these. The interim coordination committee working closely with the MSG Secretariat and partners should lead in developing regional proposals so that future meetings are funded and supported.
6. Due to the unavailability of New Caledonia to attend the workshop, the interim committee should initiate a conversation of key invasive species practitioners in the country and explore how they can actively participate in the process. Other organisations and countries should also be included in the conversation and encourage to provide support to MBISAC.
7. Closer collaboration between MBISAC and RISC should be encouraged so that lessons learnt can be shared. It is also important that SPREP and SPC be encouraged to actively

participate in the formulation and establishment of MBISAC, as they can provide ongoing support and advice to MBISAC members and also through their annual meetings.

8. Workshop Agreement adopted by the participants be forwarded to all relevant bodies and authorities, including the Melanesia leaders to raise awareness and the profile of the group.

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Annex 1. Contract Terms of Reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Developing a Pathway for a Melanesian Invasive Species Council

Objectives

The overall aim of this consultancy is to establish a Melanesia Invasive Species Council, as a key group providing advice on invasive species management and biosecurity to the governments of countries under the collective sub-group of Melanesia, the Melanesia Spearhead Group and relevant partners in an effort to safeguard the environment, the people and economic aspirations of Melanesians. The consultancy will review existing regional and sub-regional frameworks relevant to invasive species management and biosecurity in the context of Melanesia. It will further work closely with relevant persons, groups and organisations throughout the Pacific to identify an appropriate framework that will work for countries and organisations in Melanesia. Other invasive species experts could be consulted as part of this review, which will be guided by the SPREP invasive species management team. It is expected that close communication (mostly done remotely) will be held between the consultant and key personnel in Melanesia, as well as the invasive species management team at SPREP.

Approach and Scope of the Consultancy

The consultancy shall be undertaken in agreement with the SPREP Invasive Species Adviser and in close collaboration with relevant SPREP personnel. The consultant is expected to liaise with key personnel as advised by the Invasive Species Adviser and to carry out their own investigations utilising primary and secondary information sources. Support from SPREP will be provided when and where needed. The work shall be informed through a consultative and participatory process with relevant personnel in the Pacific region.

There are three key components of this consultancy.

- I. Desk-study review – For the Desk Study Review it is expected that the consultant will identify existing invasive species management frameworks specifically in the Pacific region and their applicability to the Melanesia region. It is also expected that the consultant will seek, collate and assess the views of key invasive species management experts in the Melanesia region on how such a framework could be successfully implemented and sustained in the countries of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and Fiji. Other organisations within or with strong interest in the Melanesia region should also be part of this assessment including the Melanesian

Spearhead Group, Secretariat of the Pacific Community and SPREP, and the consultant is expected to communicate with these organisations.

- II. Workshop – A 2-day workshop is expected to be held to bring together all the key individuals and organisations to discuss and agree to the process and the way forward in the establishment of the Melanesia Invasive Species Council. The consultant is expected to assist with the logistics of this workshop, and in particular to facilitate the outcome of the workshop. A detailed agenda and expected outcomes of the workshop should be drafted, including expected costings.
- III. Final Report – Following the workshop, the consultant is expected to provide a final draft report with a clear summary of the way forward for the Melanesia Invasive Species Council.

Key Deliverables

The following deliverables are expected from the consultant.

1. Summary report on existing invasive species management frameworks with the Pacific region and their relevance and applicability for the Melanesia region.
2. Summary of discussions held with key personnel in Melanesia and overall recommendations for the way forward.
3. Workshop report – providing a summary of the workshop agenda, its implementation and key outcomes.
4. Final report – providing a succinct report of the overall consultancy and key recommendations and plans for the Melanesia Invasive Species Council.

Timeframe

This consultancy has to be completed by Friday 30th of September 2016 with all final documents submitted to the Invasive Species Adviser at SPREP.

The workshop is planned for 2 days between the 19th and 23rd of September in Vanuatu.

Annex 2. Melanesia Invasive Species Workshop Report

Towards establishing a Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee



Workshop Report

21-22nd September, 2016

Report Prepared By:

**Posa A. Skelton, Anna Bertram,
Warea Orapa & Stanley Wapot**

Melanesia Spearhead Group Headquarters

Port Vila, VANUATU

Summary

Invasive species are a serious threat to economies, communities and environments in the islands throughout the Pacific Ocean. The Government of Vanuatu recognizes the harmful impacts caused by invasive species, and acknowledges that the threat is beyond the capacity of one agency, as well as the capacity of many small island countries. Collectively and collaboratively, so much more can be achieved by pooling ideas, resources and technical assistance to help with combating invasive species. With this in mind, the Government of Vanuatu convened a 2-day workshop to facilitate the establishment of a group in the Melanesia region to coordinate efforts to secure island borders and manage the threats of invasive species. The 2-day workshop was attended by over twenty representatives from biosecurity, environment, forestry and fisheries sectors from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The workshop discussed and developed a roadmap towards establishing a Melanesia Biosecurity and Invasive Species Advisory Committee within the existing Melanesia Spearhead Group framework. The scope and functions of the committee were discussed in detail providing the justification for establishing the group, including benefits to trade developments and also towards climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts. The alignment of the group aspirations to the priority of the Melanesia region will benefit the Prosperity for All Framework, as agreed to by the regions leaders. Participants pledged to mobilise national support towards the establishment of the Melanesia Biosecurity and Invasive Species Advisory Committee and invites partners and organisations to assist with combating invasive species in Melanesian countries. A workshop agreement was agreed and endorsed by the workshop participants.

We, the participants from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu met from 21-22nd September, 2016 at the MSG Headquarters in Port Vila, Vanuatu to form the inaugural technical advisory working group for Melanesia.

We acknowledge with gratitude the leadership by the Government of Vanuatu for convening this workshop at a critical period when biosecurity and invasive species are at the forefront of threats to national economies, communities, environment and associate biological diversity.

We also acknowledge the funding support by the Global Environment Facility and the operational support provided by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme that made this workshop possible.

We further acknowledge the support of the MSG Secretariat for making available its facilities for the meeting, as well as providing an advisory role during our discussions.

We recognise invasive species as one of the top key threats to Melanesian economies as well as the wellbeing of the biodiversity of our islands, our natural heritage and cultures. This threat will continue and will become severe due to increased movement of people and goods across our borders and further exacerbated by the impact of climate change.

For the protection of our countries and communities from the harmful impacts of invasive species, we make the following Agreement:

- *To establish the Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MBISAC) inclusive of a Biosecurity and Invasive Species Technical Working Group to provide advice to our leaders and to foster collaboration amongst the MSG member countries for the purpose of safeguarding economies, communities and our islands from harmful impacts of invasive species;*
- *To promote and strengthen the establishment of national mechanisms including establishing cross-sector and multi-agency national teams to facilitate and support the functions of the MBISAC:*
- *To invite organisations and other interested partners to join us and support our commitment to biosecurity and invasive species management in Melanesia.*

Acknowledgements

Deep appreciation to all participants for making this workshop a successful one. Our sincere thanks go to the Vanuatu Department of Environment Protection and Conservation, particularly to the Director Jason Raubani, Donna Kalfatak, Molu Bulu and the staff for logistical support and for making us feel very welcome in Vanuatu.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of the MSG Secretariat their support with the workshop. The concept of a united Melanesia to combat invasive species began in 2009 with two key players Sylverio Bule (Biosecurity Vanuatu) and Warea Orapa (NAQIA, PNG) – and it was great to see these two gentlemen leading the workshop and guiding the participants towards their vision of a united Melanesia. We can only hope that the future is brighter when our collective efforts are echoed throughout the corridors of every government office and policies to safeguard the economies, communities and environments in all islands in Melanesia.

Acknowledgements also to SPREP colleagues for their advice and support leading up to and during the workshop. In particular David Moverley, Invasive Species Advisor and David Loubser – SPREP representative in Port Vila, Vanuatu.

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Acronyms

CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity

CRB – Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle

DEPC – Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation

ECCTAC – Environment & Climate Change Technical Advisory Committee

GEF – Global Environment Facility

GEF-PAS – Global Environment Fund – Pacific Alliance in Sustainability

HERCC – Humanitarian & Emergency Response Coordinating Centre

IUCN – International Union for Conservation of Nature

MBISAC – Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee

MSG – Melanesia Spearhead Group

NISSAP – National Invasive Species Strategic & Action Plan

PBI – Pacific Biocontrol Initiative

PII – Pacific Invasives Initiative

PILN – Pacific Invasives Learning Network

PIP – Pacific Invasives Partnership

PNG – Papua New Guinea

SCS – Sub Committee on Security

SOCO – State of Conservation in Oceania

SPREP – Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

SPS – Sanitary and Phytosanitary (Measures of the World Trade Organisation)

TEOM – Trade and Economic Officials Meeting

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

USD – United States Dollar

Introduction

This report provides a summary of the two-day workshop that was held in Port Vila, Vanuatu from 21-22nd September, 2016. The workshop was initiated by the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, Government of Vanuatu, as a key activity under their obligations to the regional GEF-PAS Prevention, Control and Management of Invasive Alien Species in the Pacific project. This project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and executed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, together with the Government of Vanuatu.

Over twenty Biosecurity and Invasive Species experts from agriculture, fisheries, quarantine, environment, and forestry sectors discussed the issues and opportunities for the establishment of the sub-regional Group under the MSG framework and importantly to identify key steps towards making this a reality.

Workshop Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to bring together like-minded national and regional experts from the Melanesia countries to discuss and agree on a roadmap towards establishing a group to coordinate, collaborate and plan for the long-term management of biosecurity and invasive species prevention and management in the Melanesian sub-region. An important focus is aligning and integrating the group's aspirations to existing frameworks under the Melanesian Spearhead Group and other mechanisms.

Opening & Welcome Remarks

Workshop opened with a prayer offered by Mr Sobert Gereva of the Vanuatu Fisheries Division. Welcome remarks were provided by Mr. Jason Raubani, the Director of the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, where he acknowledged and thanked the participants and their governments for responding positively to Vanuatu's request, to attend the two-day workshop. He noted that members of the Melanesia Spearhead Group (MSG) have been sensitized to the idea of a sub-regional invasive species group when Vanuatu gave a presentation at the 5th Environment and Climate Change Technical Advisory Committee (ECCTAC) meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands in October, 2015. Recommendations from that meeting agreed for Invasive Species to be included in the next ECCTAC meeting. Further agreed that MSG Invasive Species issues should be progressed in collaboration with SPREP and IUCN, and tasked the MSG Secretariat to facilitate the establishment of the invasive species network or group. Mr Raubani noted funding as a challenge that the group should consider during its deliberations, noting that Vanuatu has already factored this under their GEF 6 funding allocation and encourage other countries to explore similar opportunities. He also noted that considerations of the Group's functions and

the need to ensure that outcomes are fed into the Leaders forum for their awareness and guidance. He acknowledged SPREP's assistance with the workshop and in particular noted with gratitude's Anna Bertram's unfailing support not only to the project management side but her assistance to his staff with the workshop logistics. He further thanked local partners from the various government departments and also MSG Secretariat for the providing facilities for the workshop to take place.

Mr. David Loubser, SPREP's representative in Vanuatu, also welcome the participants and noted that the spirit of friendship and partnership amongst Melanesia countries have been forged for a long time in the region and the workshop represents the opportunity to continue these arrangements. He noted that invasive species and their impacts are common throughout Melanesia, and he iterated funding as a serious issue for the group to consider. He encouraged sharing of ideas and working together to form the invasive species group for Melanesia.

Mr Molean Kielapak, Acting Director General for MSG Secretariat provided pertinent opening remarks on the harmful impacts of invasive species to the region. These impacts are so severe and currently there is a concern in Vanuatu following a recent incursion in the Solomon Islands of the coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB), which according to report is the same biotype that is causing havoc in Guam and Port Moresby. These concerns are well founded as not addressing them can have consequences to trade and cost implications to governments. He officially declared the meeting opened.

Part 1: Defining the invasives challenge

Workshop was divided into two parts. Part 1 – Defining the Invasive Challenge provided the background information on the importance of the invasive species challenge from national and regional perspectives, and to raise awareness on some of the existing frameworks and initiatives that are currently use to address the invasive species challenge.

Participants shared experience and expectations

Participants shared some of their experience dealing with invasive species as well as their expectations from the workshop. The experiences shared ranged from the Taro Beetle in PNG and Crazy Ants, Crown-of-Thorns starfish in Vanuatu, and the subterranean termites in Fiji. Also of concern were the increasing threats of new invasive species entering the sub-region along the PNG - Indonesian (West Papua) Border. In particular the introduction of apex predators including Macaque monkeys, invasive fishes, invasive plants, insect pests of crops like coffee berry borer, Asian honey bees and their associate varroa mites, and many others that could threatened native species as well as socioeconomic wellbeing in PNG and Melanesia. These issues were exacerbated by political, capacity and financial challenges. Another species of concern was a land-breeding fish that can walk across dry lands and into lakes and rivers.

In terms of expectations from the workshop, the participants expressed learning more on what the neighbouring countries are doing to address invasive species and biosecurity issues. There were strong hopes for a coordinated and strongly partnered Melanesia region for the benefit of communities. A framework and a roadmap on how this can be progressed was seen as the positive hope for the workshop.

State of invasive species in the Pacific

The state of invasive species in the Pacific Islands with emphasis on what is known for Melanesia based on reports and assessments done through the State of Conservation of Oceania (SOCO) report and the Capacity Development Strategy for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific. Fiji had the most recorded number of invasive species alongside Guam, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia and Niue but it was also noted that more efforts are needed to document invasive species in many other parts of the Pacific including Melanesia. The Pacific Invasives Capacity Development Strategy was briefly introduced noting that of all past capacity building initiatives, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu remained the least trained countries in the region. Participants expressed their desire to redress this through this Melanesia biosecurity and invasive species working group. Some data on the presence of key invasive species noted that rats and cats were the most prevalent invasive species in all the Melanesian countries. Although the list was seen as outdated as new incursions are happening more frequently than in the past and a logical approach to addressing these are still a long way to go.

Islands represent the most vulnerable ecosystem globally with over 90 per cent of species extinction taking place on islands. Of these, over 60 per cent were caused by invasive species. Participants noted climate events also contributed to the spread of invasive species. Forestry officials from Vanuatu noted the spread of invasive vines following Cyclone Pam when forested areas opened up. This meant additional resources had to be secured to try and manage these invasive plants.

Some of the issues that have exacerbated most efforts in addressing invasive species include limited human and technical capacity especially in remote and low population islands. The lack of human power means that new incursions are detected often too late and communities feeling powerless to do anything about it. If communities are in a position to address incursions, they are often hampered by the lack of equipment, the technical know-how and lack of funds to mobilise the people and the resources. In many countries, there is also an uncertainty in terms of the department and individual responsible for addressing invasive species. There is often a competing element in who should do what, which often leads to little being done, due to 'the wait and see' approach. This lack of coordination and collaboration means there is little shared planning and therefore little work on the ground. The lack of policies, awareness, information and legislative support to invasive species practitioners was also noted as a serious impediment to addressing invasive species. Finally, the issue of geographic and professional isolation was discussed noting that this is a serious capacity

development issue that can only be strengthened through good and frequent communication amongst peers.

Responding to biosecurity and invasive species challenge

Invasive species respect no border, nor jurisdictions and it is precisely this reason why coordination, collaboration and planning must be done at all levels – from local, national to regional and global. The Pacific Islands are perhaps the most coordinated and responsive region in terms of response to regional issues such as invasive species. Invasive species are a core program for the **Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme**, which is currently administering a USD7 million project on invasive species in nine Pacific countries (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) – PNG component was dropped. The Melanesia regional workshop is one of the final activities of this project for Vanuatu, which will conclude at the end of September 2016. The project implements the *Guidelines for Invasive Species Management in the Pacific*, a regional strategy adopted by SPREP and SPC member countries in 2009. The project has many notable achievements including each of the countries having national invasive species strategy and action plan (NISSAP), invasive species surveys, eradication of rats from islands, regional database and development of regional guidelines (battlers series) and early detection and rapid response plans. These tools will remain valuable for all Pacific countries and territories as they progress towards developing their own plans and activities to manage invasive species.

The **Pacific Invasives Learning Network**(PILN) is another regional initiative established by invasives practitioners in the region to coordinate and to assist each other in addressing priority invasive species. It began in 2003 as a concept to address capacity building efforts and it progressed towards a two-year project from 2006 to 2008. PILN focuses on establishing multi-agency and cross-sector national and island teams to focus on planning, coordination and developing priority key issues to be addressed by the team. The network continued to expand and now almost all of the countries and territories in the Pacific have a team, or more than two in some countries. The network focuses on learning exchanges, sharing of information and providing technical capacity assistance to those in need. Sharing of information is very important and cost-effective. The last network meeting was held in Samoa in August and it provides the opportunity to develop a regional workplan for the network.

The **Pacific Invasives Partnership**(PIP) is the umbrella organisation that is comprised of regional and national experts on biosecurity and invasive species. Their key focus is to coordinate, collaborate and plan to ensure that invasive species remain on the agenda of all leaders and development donors. The partnership meets annually or more if the need arises. They have been instrumental in getting invasive species to Pacific leaders, where it led to the pledges by countries to invest funds to tackling invasive species. PIP is coordinated by SPREP with the current chair from the United States.

The **Pacific Invasives Initiatives**(PII) was established following a decision from the conference of parties for the 6th meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). PII has a multi-

disciplinary team that works extensively with Pacific agencies and countries on invasive species priorities. It has contributed to the development of a number of important initiatives such as the Pacific Ant Prevention Programmes, the Pacific Invasives Learning Initiative and a number of toolkits for the management of invasive species. PII has six strategic focuses:

- Development of Pacific capacity for managing invasive species
- Provide practical training in invasive species management
- Provide invasive species management best practice tools
- Provide technical support and advice for invasive species management
- Develop and strengthen linkages and networks
- Strengthen PII as a Centre of Excellence for invasive species capacity development

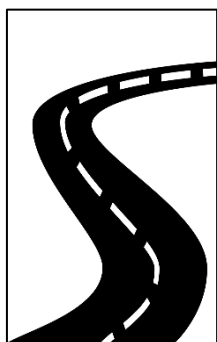
The **Pacific Biocontrol Initiative** (PBI) is an informal collaboration among experts in the wider-Pacific region to promote and coordinate efforts to use biological agents against invasive species. Some of the key countries that are supporting and working with Pacific countries include the Landcare Research in New Zealand, Queensland Government, Australia and US Department of Agriculture in Hawaii. Biocontrol agents are being researched and explored to help Pacific countries. The cost for this exploration is in thousands of dollars, which makes sense to work together at the regional level to identify agents. This will benefit the region and saves valuable resources for countries. The weed biocontrol program in Vanuatu was presented by Sylverio Bule noting the various stages of the program that needs to be followed. The origin of the invasive plant needs to be thoroughly scrutinized noting any natural enemies. Once a natural enemy is determined it is then put through a choice versus no-choice test (exposing the natural enemy to a single weed or a multiple of weeds to determine its feeding preferences). Plants from a similar family are also tested to ensure that the agent is specifically targeting the weed and no other plants. Vanuatu has benefited from research conducted in other countries like Australia by importing close to ten biological control agents which were released to control *Lantana camara* (lantana), *Mimosa diplotricha* (Giant Sensitive Weed), *Eichhornia crassipes* (Water Hyacinth), *Sida* species (*broomweeds*), *Pistia stratiotes* (Water Lettuce), *Mikania micrantha* (Mile-a-Minute vine) and *Parthenium hysterophorus* (Parthenium weed). While most have shown positive signs of being effective others remained to be followed up. What is important to note is that these agents are just a tool to help manage (reduce) invasive species populations, and they do not necessarily eradicate the problem species. The Vanuatu component of the GEF PAS Project has also contributed funding to the ongoing research in South Africa on identifying biological control agents for management of African tulip trees in the Pacific.

The **Pacific Islands Forum Leaders** is the premium forum for all Pacific Island Country leaders to discuss issues pertinent to islands and countries. While most of the issues are political in nature, the Pacific Invasives Partnership together with invasive species practitioners in host countries were successful in raising the importance of invasive species at the Forum Leaders meetings in 2013 (Cook Islands), 2014 (Marshall Islands) and in 2015 in Palau. The efforts were rewarded with many Leaders making a commitment to put funds towards combating invasive species in their countries and the region.

The **Micronesia Regional Invasive Species Council** provides the best framework and a model for regional collaboration and coordination on invasive species matters. The council is represented by two representatives from the nine jurisdictions that make up the Micronesian Chief Executives (Guam, Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Kosrae, Pohnpei, Yap, Chuuk, Marshall Islands and Northern Mariana Islands). The representatives are endorsed by the Chiefs and usually is at the director level and an invasive species officer. The council meets annually prior to the Chiefs summit, where they provide updates and prepare a report to the Chiefs on progress made and regional issues that may require the Chief's attention or support. The council is governed through a Charter as endorsed by all the members and has developed a five year strategic action plan to help guide work and monitor progress in the region. One of the biggest achievements of the council is lobbying the US Government to instigate the development of a Micronesia Biosecurity Plan in response to the impending movement of US troops from Japan to Guam. The Micronesia region is one of the most vulnerable in the Pacific due to small islands, fragile biodiversity and limited ecosystem diversity. This effectively means that invasive species can have dire consequences to the islands once they are released. Evidence of this is littered throughout history with the Brown Tree Snake being on top of the list of the most harmful invasives recorded. It was also interesting to note that Palau, Guam and Federated States of Micronesia recorded the highest number of invasive species in the region.

The **Melanesia Spearhead Group** (MSG) is the regional body for Melanesian Leaders to have common positions and solidarity on issues that are important to Melanesia countries. It is comprised of five members – Fiji, the Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu and has taken on board Indonesia and West Papua as associate members and observer respectively. The issue of invasive species is not new to the MSG Leaders having first raised during the 2012 meeting where the MSG Leaders endorsed a Declaration on Environment and Climate Change. In 2015, a Vanuatu delegation made a presentation at the ECCTAC meeting in Honiara, Solomon Islands that resulted in some key recommendations including tasking the MSG Secretariat to facilitate the establishment of a Melanesia Invasive Species group. The existence of an invasive species group for the region will strongly support the implementation framework of the Prosperity for All Plan as endorsed by the Melanesia Leaders. Key to this implementation are issues relating to effective border control (biosecurity), outreach for communities, sustainable use of natural resources, engagement of traditional system and people, holistic ecosystem management approach and instituting policies and legislation to protect the environment from degradation and loss of biodiversity.

Part 2: Developing the roadmap



The key objective of Part 2 of the workshop was to gather ideas and setting a vision where a roadmap could be built and key steps agreed to for getting the Group off the ground. From the outset there was a tacit acknowledgement that formation of a council would be the ultimate output of the workshop. After reviewing the structure within the MSG and discussions amongst the participants, it was agreed that to be in alignment with the existing structure that a committee rather than a council would be appropriate. The consensus was that a council would be far more restrictive and one that may need a legal foundation to get off the ground, whereas a committee is a less formal and yet practical arrangement that would suit the purpose and aspirations of the group. Furthermore, it felt that a committee would take less time to set up as opposed to a council that will take time. With these justifications it was agreed that the group should be referred to as the Melanesia Biosecurity and Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MBISAC), which will be in alignment of similar committees especially the Environment & Climate Change Technical Advisory Committee (ECCTAC), Trade and Economic Officials Meeting (TEOM), Subcommittee on Security (SCS), Customs and Quarantine Sub Committee and the Humanitarian and Emergency Response Coordination Centre (HERCC). The MBISAC will work alongside these Committees but in a more proactive role to address specific biosecurity and invasive species management issues in the member countries.

Participants further discussed the option/possibility of the group establishing outside of the MSG Framework and a number of reasons were given to why this was not a path that they prefer. They felt that there was more stability and legitimacy under the MSG framework, especially with issues that are pertinent to Melanesian countries. Also there is a possibility of sustainability (funding and institutional support) under the MSG framework. Gaining the support of the MSG leaders was easier under the existing framework than if the MBISAC was established outside of it. By being part of the MSG framework there is scope to engage with other networks which will see the work of the group elevated and considered in a much wider field than if it operates on its own. The buy-in of senior government officials was likely if directives are given by Ministers and Leaders. The workshop acknowledges that the technical role of the group will be inclusive of all organisations and countries wishing to be part of it for the very reason that biosecurity threats or invasive species know no manmade boundaries or borders. Hence, it plans to operate in an apolitical manner to ensure that the key purpose of its existence (i.e. regional collaboration in prevention and management of invasive species) becomes the core business of the group. This will allow the participation of other countries and organisations, such as Australia, Timor Leste, Indonesia and the New Caledonian Government.

Participants worked in two groups to discuss a number of issues as summarized below.

Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee – Structure

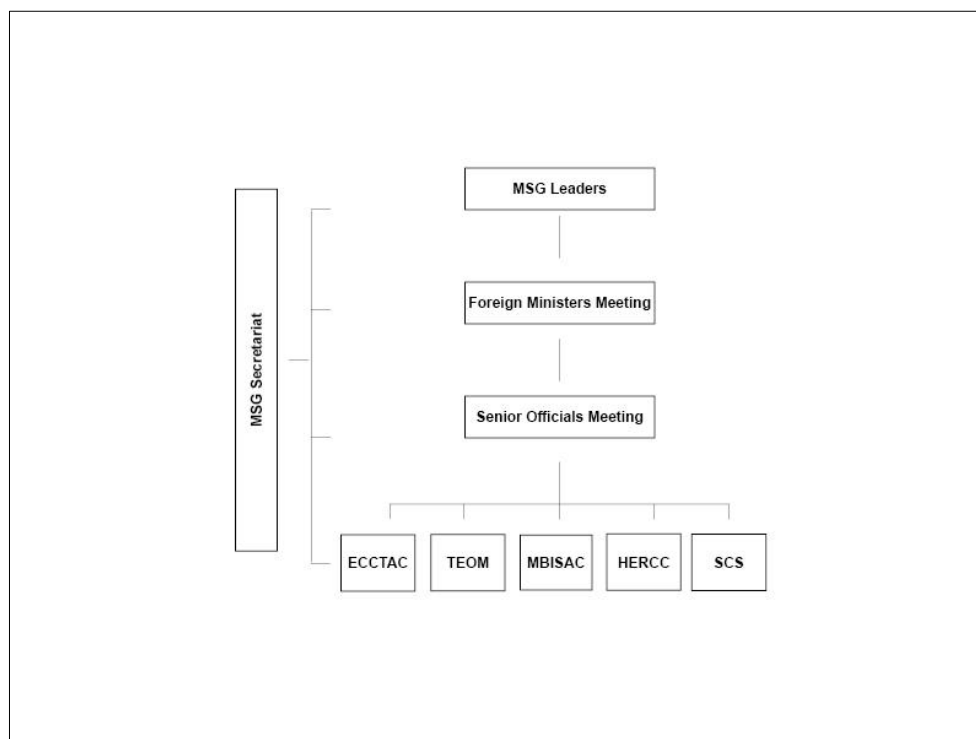


Figure 1. Proposed MSG consultative process and where MBISAC fits in as discussed by workshop participants.

Participants discussed the decision making process in order to understand the key players and those that will influence issues to be discussed by the leaders (Figure 1). The group acknowledged the involvement of foreign affairs officials including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and that efforts should be made to get their support. It is believed that for MBISAC to get up and running a submission from the group through the MSG Secretariat will be discussed by the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM). Once the submission is reviewed and endorsed, this will then be forwarded to the Foreign Affairs Ministers Meeting (FMM) for further consideration. The FMM will submit their recommendations to the Leaders Summit for approval.

MBISAC – Composition

The composition of the MBISAC was further discussed and it was agreed that it will be made up of Heads of agencies/departments responsible for Biosecurity and Environment Conservation. This will follow the existing arrangement of other MSG technical advisory committees, where it will be at the organization head level (eg. permanent secretary and director levels) with additional participants of technical officers. It was felt that technical officers will more likely be attending any meetings due to time constraints of agency heads

(directors and permanent secretaries). A suggested sub-group was raised under MBISAC as the MSG Biosecurity and Invasive Species Technical Working Group but participants agreed that it was best to leave it as MBISAC in the initial phase and leave the technical group at the national implementation level.

MBISAC – Governance

Participants agreed that a Chair and Vice-Chair should be selected to form the executive functions of the group. It was proposed that the Chair should follow the overall chairmanship of the MSG. Currently this is held by the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, which will be passed on to the Prime Minister of PNG in 2017. Hence, the proposal is that the Chair of MBISAC should be with the Solomon Islands and the Vice-Chair to be discussed further. The group suggested that in the future Vice-Chair should be the preceding Chair to allow for continuity and support to the new Chair. Membership of the MBISAC will consist of countries which are members of the MSG and will also consider associate members and observers. The administrative functions will be performed by the MSG Secretariat.

All rules of the MSG will apply in the operation of the MBISAC.

MBISAC – Meetings

Participants agreed that the meetings should be held annually and prior to SOM and FMM meetings. A two-day or two-session meeting was suggested with Day 1 or Session 1 comprising of technical updates from the members and discussing technical issues. Technical officers from biosecurity and environment departments and other invasive species experts will meet during this day and should provide recommendations for the senior members of MBISAC for adoption.

Discussions with the MSG Secretariat to provide secretarial support were positive and it was confirmed that this is a function that they do for other advisory committees. MSG will prepare and present the documentation for the meetings.

MBISAC – Functions

Participants discussed a number of functions for MBISAC and the overall agreement was that its core function would be to provide sound advice to Leaders on biosecurity and invasive species. Other functions of MBISAC include:

- **Knowledge sharing and exchange** – noting that there is a platform for knowledge management within the MSG Secretariat that could be used by the group to store and access information relating to new incursions, invasive species management information, policies and funding. Regional Database for invasive species in the region which will be useful for trade facilitation

- **Building capacity** – this includes learning exchanges, identifying and offering training opportunities and prioritizing sub-regional capacity needs.
- **Resource mobilization** – utilization of MSG regional resources including facilities, skilled human resources, identifying funding opportunities and assisting with preparation of concept notes and proposals. Provide advice to member countries on funding streams and applicable criteria and coordinate regional funding proposals.
- **Coordination and Planning**–including the development of regional biosecurity plans, emergency response plans, harmonization of legislations, regional pest management solutions, and other regionally driven strategic plans. Coordinate outreach and awareness programs throughout the region. Rapid response to incursions and also post-natural disasters – able to identify needs and experts to respond to community needs.
- **Communication** –coordinate communication and outreach on issues relevant to Melanesian communities and policy makers.

MBISAC – Scope

The MBISAC will have representation from all countries under the Melanesian Spearhead Group. It was agreed that the group is a technical one with no political overtures and it will focus on facilitating implementation of biosecurity and invasive species programs at the national and regional levels. At the regional level the focus will be on technical issues and activities, as well as sharing of information on research, expertise and facilities.

MBISAC – Sustainability

Funding was an issue that was not too far from the minds of participants and was heard throughout the workshop. The funding needed will focus on regional consultations and also with planning and implementation of regional activities. A number of options were explored, such as increasing the members’ contributions (which is not easy), taking advantage of national and regional programs and meetings to hold side-meetings amongst the members, and engaging with the private sector. It was also suggested that one of the keys for sustainability is to ensure the governments and regional organisations are able to absorb invasive species positions into their annual workplans and national recurrent budgets which for some agencies like PNG’s National Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Authority (NAQIA) is already a primary mandated and funded function. . There was strong support for countries to establish National Invasive Species Working Groups, as well as developing national instruments (e.g. National Invasive Species Strategic Action Plan - NISSAP) to help with sustaining the momentum and efforts against invasive species on the ground in the MSG member countries and territories.

MBISAC – Key Persons & Organisations for further engagement

Participants noted the engagement of senior government staff, such as directors, as important to garner the support necessary to push this agenda forward. The engagement of as many sectors as possible was particularly encouraging, calling for the participation of environment, biosecurity, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, trade, farmers associations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in this initiative.

PNG	VANUATU	FIJI	SOLOMON IS
CEPA	DEPC	BAF	ECD/NDMO
NAQIA	BSV	SRIF	MAL
Fisheries	Fisheries	FSC	SIQS
Agriculture	Agriculture	MOA	MFR
Forestry	Forestry	Forestry	MCT
Customs	Customs	Tourism	MFMR
Commodity Board	Tourism	FRCA	Foreign Affairs
Health	Health	Health	Trade
Trade	Trade	Environment	Business Council
Foreign Affairs	Foreign Affairs	Trade	
National Planning	NAB	Foreign Affairs	
National Disaster Service	Business Council	DISMAC	
Business Council		Business Council	

MBISAC – Challenges

A number of challenges were identified that should be considered and addressed to ensure that the MBSIAC moves forward in a constructive and effective way. These challenges include funding constraints, sharing of information, the need to develop memorandum of agreement between and amongst countries especially with regards to strengthening border security, gender and political will. There was a concern of competitions from other interest groups that may undermine efforts to establish MBISAC. Some genuine concerns on duplication of programs and responsibilities amongst the regional advisory groups that will need to reassess to ensure a cost-effective and streamline functions of all working groups in alignment with the priorities of Melanesian countries. For this to be successful there needs to be a strong endorsement and engagement of national actors and governments to ensure that regional collaboration and coordination are a top priority.

MBISAC – Opportunities

Participants were particularly encouraged that existing under the MSG framework are various groups which address biosecurity and invasive species issues including the TEOM in relation to trade, SubCommittee on Security, Customs and Quarantine SubCommittee (CQSC), and the environment and climate change advisory group ECCTAC. Invasive species being both an environmental and a climate change issue fits nicely within the regional framework. One of

the challenges and an opportunity as seen by participants, was the fact that many invasive species are shared amongst the members, and that addressing them through a coordinated approach will make it cost effective, and will help reinforce the value of the group. There is a wealth of technical experts in the region together with the excellent in country knowledge would facilitate prompt response to dealing with incursions and ongoing invasive challenges. Funding opportunities through the GEF 6 cycle is currently open and countries are encouraged to take advantage of this and ensure that invasive species are included in their submissions. In addition to the ECCTAC MBISAC will be able to support the TEOM, SCS, by providing these subcommittees a greater focus on Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) matters that are identified in the revised MSG Trade Agreement but not well addressed in the existing MSG framework. This will have a wider impact from a trade perspective but also on climate change response in the region.

There is an opportunity that the MBISAC will also promote the modernization and standardization of electronic risk management systems for biosecurity management in the region to assist with facilitating trade within and outside the MSG region. Such a system if applied regionally, will save cost and the burden currently exerted on national efforts. There is an opportunity also to develop a standardize system for the region on policy matters including legislation. Overall it was agreed that with a united front that many of the problems will be much easier, faster and cost-effective to solve than going it alone.

MBISAC – steps towards formalising

Participants discussed how best to formalize MBISAC and the following suggestions were proposed:

- Developing a five-year regional strategic plan
- Preparing a submission to the MSG Senior Officials Meeting for the establishment of MBISAC as a priority.
- Developing a memorandum of agreement or a charter for the members.
- Seeking endorsement by the Leaders of MBISAC in 2017
- Memorandum of agreements amongst national agencies to form multi-agency and cross-sector teams
- Establishing a committee to oversee the progress of MBISAC
- Developing an information paper and submission paper for the Leaders
- Explore linkages and synergies with other advisory group under the MSG framework

Annex 1. Workshop Action plan

The participants agreed to develop some urgent actions to be pursued following the workshop. It was agreed that this action plan and roadmap towards establishing MBISAC will be overseen by the following representatives:

- Vanuatu – Donna Kafaltak and Sylverio Bule
- Fiji – Jainesh Ram
- Solomon Islands – Josef Hurutarau and Crispus Fanai
- Papua New Guinea – Warea Orapa and Maino Virobo
- MSG Secretariat – Stanley Wapot

Action	Lead	Due Date
VANUATU		
1. Work on the template for Biosecurity, Fisheries and MSG	Vanuatu DEPC (Donna Kafaltak)	
2. Brief Director General and Minister	Vanuatu DEPC (Jason Raubani)	
3. Present Brief to Foreign Affairs Minister	Vanuatu DEPC (Jason Raubani)	
4. Brief BV Director and DARD	Vanuatu Biosecurity (Sylverio Bule)	
5. Work on draft MBISAC submission	Vanuatu Biosecurity (Sylverio Bule)	
6. Inform Director	Vanuatu Forestry (Sam Channel & Philemon Ala)	
7. Brief staff	Vanuatu Forestry (Sam Channel & Philemon Ala)	26 Sept. 2016
8. Assist Environment and Biosecurity on MSG submission	Vanuatu Forestry (Sam Channel & Philemon Ala); Vanuatu Fisheries (Jeremie Kaltavara)	
9. Update Director	Vanuatu Fisheries Division (Jeremie Kaltavara)	
10. Assist Vanuatu Environment on the GEF-6 submission	Vanuatu Fisheries Division (Jeremie Kaltavara)	
SOLOMON ISLANDS		
11. Convene National Invasive Species Committee consultation	Environment & Biosecurity (Josef and Crispus Fanai)	

12. Inform superiors within MAL of update	Biosecurity (Crispus Fanai)	
13. Liaise with working group	Environment & Biosecurity (Josef and Crispus Fanai)	
14. Inform Permanent Secretary, Director and colleagues of the proposal and development	Environment & Biosecurity (Josef and Crispus Fanai)	30 September, 2016
15. Formalise the working committee	Environment & Biosecurity (Josef and Crispus Fanai)	7 October, 2016
16. Consult Permanent Secretary and Director on proposal	Environment & Biosecurity (Josef and Crispus Fanai)	21 October, 2016
17. Report back on submission	Environment & Biosecurity (Josef and Crispus)	28 October, 2016
PAPUA NEW GUINEA		
18. Update superiors on the workshop	Maino Virobo	30 September, 2016
19. Consult relevant stakeholders	Maino Virobo	28 October, 2016
20. Review proposal	Maino Virobo	28 October, 2016
21. Provide feedback to proposal	Maino Virobo	28 October, 2016
22. Initiate meeting to finalise proposal	Maino Virobo	
23. Prepare workshop report	Luania Bob	
24. Coordinate stakeholder meeting	Luania Bob	
25. Share proposal with stakeholders	Luania Bob	
26. Organise meeting between NAQIA and CEPA	Warea Orapa	7 October, 2016
27. Organise inter-agency to discuss formation of MBISAC	Warea Orapa	7 October, 2016
FIJI		
28. Consult with the Executive Chairman on workshop outcome	Jainesh Ram	
29. Make comments on submission	Jainesh Ram	
30. See Environment Department to reignite	Jainesh Ram	

the taskforce on IAS for Fiji		
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Annex 2: Workshop agreement

We, the participants from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu met from 21-22nd September, 2016 at the MSG Secretariat Headquarters in Port Vila, Vanuatu to form the inaugural technical advisory working group on biosecurity and invasive species management for Melanesia.

We acknowledge with gratitude the leadership by the Government of Vanuatu for convening this workshop at a critical period when biosecurity and invasive species are at the forefront of threats to national economies, communities, environment and associate biological diversity.

We further acknowledge the support of the MSG Secretariat for making available its facilities for the meeting, as well as providing an advisory role during our discussions.

We recognise invasive species as one of the top key threats to Melanesian economies, as well as the biodiversity of our islands, our natural heritage and cultures. This threat will continue and will become severe due to increased movement of people and goods across our borders and further exacerbated by the impact of climate change

For the protection of our countries and communities from the harmful impacts of invasive species, we make the following Agreement.

- To establish the Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MBISAC) inclusive of a Biosecurity and Invasive Species Technical Working Group to provide advice to our leaders and to foster collaboration amongst the MSG member countries for the purpose of safeguarding economies, communities and our environment from harmful impacts of invasive species.
- To promote and strengthen the establishment of national mechanisms to facilitate and support the functions of the MBISAC.
- To invite organisations and other interested partners to join us and support our commitment to biosecurity and invasive species management in Melanesia.

Annex 3: Workshop Agenda

Part 1: Defining the Invasive Challenge:

Objective: The first part of the workshop provides background information on the importance of the invasive species challenge from national and regional perspectives, and to raise awareness on some of the existing frameworks and initiatives that are currently use to address the invasive species challenge.

8.30am	Registration
9.00am	Welcome & Introduction – [All Participants] Short Recess for Group Photo
9:15am	Defining the Invasive Challenge: Workshop Purpose and Overview
9:30am	State of Invasive Species in the Pacific [SPREP] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This is a general discussion based on the State of Conservation in Oceania (SOCO) report prepared by ICUN for SPREP. The focus will be on Melanesia countries. - Countries to give a brief on invasive species impact and management in their country. - All participants are encouraged to participate as much as possible. <p>Learning Outcome: Aware of the state of invasive species in the region, which is reinforced with national input. Furthermore, the impacts of these invasive species to biodiversity, economy and people.</p>
10:00am	Responding to the Challenge [All] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants to hear updates on initiatives to assist countries with their invasive species issues. The response will include regional and sub-regional frameworks such as the Micronesia RISC, and other like-minded initiatives. All participants are requested to provide their input on how they are responding in addressing invasive species in their countries. <p>Learning Outcome: Aware of some of the regional frameworks to manage invasive species, as well as what countries are doing nationally to address their key invasive species.</p>
10.30am	COFFEE BREAK
11.00am	Introduction to Invasive Species Management Framework in the Pacific [P Skelton] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A summary of invasive species management frameworks in the Pacific region to help guide the discussion on the pros and cons of these frameworks from Melanesia’s perspective. This is an interactive session

	<p>and participants are encouraged to help frame the discussion towards a model that could be used by the region.</p> <p>Learning Outcome: Participants understand some of the framework being used and have a general agreement on what will be possible in Melanesia.</p>
11.30am	<p>Melanesia Spearhead Group [Stanley]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What is the MSG and how can we work together? - Ultimately, we would like recognition of the issue and the body promoting the issue at the highest level. The Melanesia Spearhead Group is considered the highest political level in the region that can provide the support for this body and for the issue to be addressed. For this session, the MSG representative is requested to introduce MSG to the participants. Participants are encouraged to discuss areas where they see will help in promoting IAS management and the Council to MSG. - References also to previous MSG forums where invasive species were discussed and outcomes <p>Learning Outcome: Participants identify how biosecurity & invasive species can be incorporated into the MSG vision and agenda.</p>
12.30pm	LUNCH
<p>Part 2: Putting it to Action!</p> <p>Objective: This is the critical part of the workshop for participants to help build and shape a shared vision for the future.</p>	
1.30pm	<p>Way Forward: Building a shared vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An open and frank discussion on a framework suitable for Melanesia and how it can be adapted. - Building a shared vision and steps towards the vision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o What should a Melanesia Invasive Species Council look like? o Who should be in it and at what level? o What should its core functions be? o What level of recognition should it strive for and who should give it the authority that's needed to legitimize it? <p>Learning Outcome: Participants to agree on the framework to be used for the Melanesia Invasive Species Council – and to agree on a vision.</p>
3:30	AFTERNOON RECESS

	Coffee/tea break
4:00 – 5:00	Way Forward: Building a shared vision (cont'd) Participants to continue to build on the vision – identifying key functions of MISC, including identifying a mission and some goals or objectives and activities.

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9.00am	Recap of Day 1 and Overview of Day 2 – Developing the roadmap to MISC. - A quick recap of what took place the day before and to discuss learning outcomes and also clarifying any issues.
9:20am	Developing the Roadmap for MISC - Building on the roadmap process from yesterday discuss the following issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who are the people in your country that should be involved/consulted or engaged to ensure a national support? ○ What are some of the issues that will challenge MISC? ○ What are some of the opportunities that will help MISC? ○ What are the steps towards formalising MISC? (both from a national and regional perspectives) Learning Outcome: Participants to help build the pathway for MISC
10.30am	MORNING RECESS Coffee/tea break
11.00am	Developing Key Next Steps - Developing our workshop action plan: Taking into account previous sessions on IAS frameworks and vision, participants to start the conversation on key next steps Learning Outcome: Participants identify what some of the key steps that they would like to see take place and who to lead. Actions and who is responsible
12.30pm	LUNCH
1.30pm	MISC and the Region - Exploring some of the current and future programs, plans and projects in the wider Pacific region including potential opportunities and how these could be utilised. Resource mobilisation and funding opportunities Learning Outcome: Participants to identify opportunities that could be useful in MISC's deliberations.
3.00pm	AFTERNOON RECESS Coffee/tea break

3.30pm	<p>Developing Key Next Steps (cont'd)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Incorporating new ideas with MISC's strategic planning. <p>Learning Outcome: Participants to take into account all that has been discussed and include them into a final document.</p>
4.30pm	<p>Workshop Wrap up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participants to discuss any outstanding issues - Participants to agree on the outcome of the workshop and how it will be disseminated/distributed. - Next steps post workshop <p>Learning Outcome: Conclusion of workshop with agreed outcomes and steps for the future.</p>

Annex 4: participants list

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ANNEX 5 MELANESIA BIOSECURITY & INVASIVE SPECIES ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHARTER

Proposed Charter for the Melanesia Biosecurity & Invasive Species Advisory Committee

1. Name:

The name of this organisation shall be the **MELANESIA BIOSECURITY & INVASIVE SPECIES COMMITTEE** or MBISC.

2. Definitions

The definitions herewith are particular for the purpose of this Charter.

Alien species: Species that are not native to a certain area, which have been introduced either deliberately or accidentally.

Biosecurity: are measures for the control of pests and diseases affecting animals and plants and other invasive species by technical, legal and administrative means, including pests and diseases of animals and plants that consequentially harm humans, agriculture, the environment and the economy and including animal and plant health and quarantine.

Committee: Refers to the Melanesia Biosecurity and Invasive Species Committee, comprising of nominated representatives from the MSG member countries. Specifically representatives from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

Invasive alien species: A species that has accidentally or deliberately introduced to a new area and is causing either an environmental, social or economic problem.

Member country: A member country includes countries that are part of the Melanesia Spearhead Group, whom are also members of the MBISC.

Regular meeting: meetings of the full Committee as called by the Chair.

Representative: an individual who is party to a member country and is officially nominated by a recognised national authority.

Sanitary and Phytosanitary measure refer to the international recognized biosecurity measures of the WTO Agreement.

3. Mission

To reduce the likelihood of introduction of invasive alien species to islands across the region and to control or, when feasible, rid our islands of existing invasions through coordination of efforts throughout Melanesia.

4. Purposes

- Inform the Authority of Member Countries about biosecurity and invasive species issues and activities in the region
- Cooperate with invasive species managers within Member Countries and abroad

- Coordinate efforts within and between Member Countries and others
- Share knowledge within and among Member Countries and others
- Prepare and disseminate informational materials relevant to biosecurity and invasive species issues in the Melanesian region
- Share specific expertise within Member Countries and elsewhere
- Pool resources among Member Countries for more effective invasive species prevention and management.

5. Membership

Membership shall be limited to countries identified in the Melanesian region, which shall include Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Membership shall be available either at the invitation of the Committee, or upon approval by the Committee of a solicitation for membership from a non-affiliated jurisdiction. New membership requires the unanimous approval of the full Committee. Two representatives will be allowed from each member country. Representatives will be identified, in writing, by a recognised authority of that member country.

6. Leadership and Governance

- Offices
 - Chair: The Chair's responsibilities include:
 - Call, host, develop an agenda, and execute meetings
 - Deliver progress reports to Representatives, affiliated organisations and government officials and agencies; and
 - Speak and act on behalf of the Committee to government officials, the press, other organisations and the public.

The Chair shall serve a term of one year, which will commence on the first day of August and end on the 31st day of July each year. The office of Chair will rotate among member countries following the MSG chairmanship.

- Vice-Chair: The Vice-Chair's responsibilities include:
 - Act on behalf of the Chair when s/he is not available
 - Assist the Chair in their role capacity as host of meetings
 - Arrange meeting facilities, boarding accommodations and travel arrangements (to the extent possible and permissible) for travelling representatives at meetings
 - Conduct elections

The Vice-Chair shall serve a term of one year, which term shall commence on the first day of August and end of the 31st day of July each year.

- Secretary: The Secretary shall be responsible for the following:
 - Take notes at all meetings

- Read and distribute notes
- Hold copies, both physical and electronic, of all correspondence to and from the Committee, and all materials produced by the Committee
- Provide public information and education materials for the press and the public at large
- Maintain the Community's social media and communication channels by posting notices, meeting notes, agendas for upcoming meetings and contact information for Representatives

The term of the office of the Secretary shall be one year, commencing on the first day of August ending on the 31st July each year? The Secretary shall be elected by a majority vote of the representatives to the Committee.

- Treasurer: The Treasurer shall be responsible for the following:
 - Maintain records of all funds received and disbursed by the Committee, including invoices, receipts, price quotations and any related material
 - Prepare and distribute reports of funds collected and used by the Committee at each meeting; and
 - Verify elections

7. Nominations to office

Any member of the Committee may be nominated to an elected office. Nominations to an office must be submitted to the Vice-Chair. Nominations may be submitted in any manner – in writing, verbally, electronically or by any means the nominating party wishes to use. Nominations must be received by the Vice-Chair no later than three weeks prior to the election. Upon nomination, the Vice-Chair will inform the nominee privately, before announcing candidates publicly. Nominations may be refused. Members may nominate themselves.

8. Elections

Elections shall be conducted by secret ballot. Ballots will be prepared by the Vice-Chair. Candidates will be offered an opportunity to speak on their own behalf before the election commences. Elections will be held at the last meeting prior to the beginning of the office's term.

The Vice-Chair will tally votes and announce the incumbent at the end of the meeting during which the election is held, and no announcement is to be made prior to that in the presence of all members. The Treasurer shall verify the result of each election. Where no candidate wins a majority votes, a second ballot will be held between the two candidates receiving the most votes. In the case of a tie, another ballot will be taken. When both ballots result in ties, the Chair will select between the two candidates. Where no nominations to an office are received or accepted, the Chair will delegate a representative to the vacant office. In the case

of a disputed result, a second ballot will be taken and counted immediately by the Vice-Chair, with all Committee members present. If a Representative is unable to attend a meeting at which an election is held, they may request a proxy to cast their vote. The absent Representative must provide to their proxy a signed and dated statement authorising them to vote on their behalf.

9. Removal from Office

If an officer is found to be negligent in their duties, they may be removed from office by a two-thirds majority vote of the full Committee. Any vote to remove an officer must take place at least two weeks after the motion is made.

10. Meetings

At least two regular meetings shall be held in each calendar year. Regular meetings may be held in the jurisdiction in which the Chair is located. No less than two days will be allowed for any regular meeting of the full Committee. The Representatives from each Member country will provide a report on invasive species projects, initiatives and progress in their country at each regular meeting. The Chair may convene the Committee, or parts thereof, at other times as necessary, and the locations and times of these meetings will be at the discretion of the Chair. Member countries may invite observers from their jurisdictions to meetings of the Committee as part of their delegation. The Committee may invited experts or guests to observe regular meetings, or to speak or provide training on a particular topic of interest to the Committee. Expert, guests, and observers will not be accorded voting rights. The Secretary will, at each meeting, read and distribute the notes from the previous meetings. The Treasurer will, at each meeting, provide a report on the financial status of the Committee, including all collections and expenditures.

11. Accountability and Reporting

Member countries and their Representatives will be accountable to the Committee. A report of the Committee's notes and activities to be prepared by the Secretary and presented by the Chair, will be delivered to the designated authority of each member country at the end of the Chair's term. A report on recent Committee activities will be prepared by the Chair and delivered to Senior Officials Meeting at each regular meeting. An annual report for posterity and public consumption will be prepared by the Secretary at the end of their term.

All disbursement of funds will be by authorised payment. All payments will require the signatures of both the Treasurer and the Chair. The Treasurer shall be accountable for the disbursement of all funds.

12. Amendments

Amendments to this Charter may be introduced by any Committee Representative. Amendments may be ratified by a two-third majority vote of the full Committee. Any vote to amend this Charter must be undertaken at least two and no more than four weeks after the motion is made.

13. Ratification

This Charter may be ratified by a unanimous vote of the Representatives of the Charter Member Countries. Those Representatives as appointed by the authority in their country.

14. Authority

We hereby create the Melanesia Biosecurity and Invasive Species Committee by the authority we possess as officially appointed Representatives of our member governments.

Signatures

Fiji

Papua New Guinea

Solomon Islands

Vanuatu

New Caledonia