

SOPAC

GOVERNING COUNCIL

28th ANNUAL SESSION
Hosted By
New Zealand
(Nadi, Fiji, 23rd – 29th October, 1999)

| | | | |
|-------------|------|---|---|
| Agenda Item | 11 | : | ESTABLISHMENT AND ADMINISTRATION |
| Title | 11.8 | : | The SPC-SOPAC Relationship: A Planning Sequence for Intergration |

Purpose of Paper

To present to Council a proposal prepared by the Director of SOPAC and Director General of SPC in regard to consideration of the merits of integrating the two regional organisations

Background

The Secretariat of the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) are regional service organisations providing technical assistance and training to their island members. Our shared corporate vision is about quality in technical, scientific and research capacity, about excellence of service and about partnership in programme delivery.

This congruence of regional roles is readily identified.

In SOPAC's Strategic Plan for the New Millennium 1999 - 2001, we read its Mission as being: "To improve the well-being of the peoples of Pacific Island Member Countries by promoting sustainable development through the optimum use of the region's natural resources while minimising environmental degradation, and by mitigating against the impacts of natural disasters."

SPC's Corporate Plan, 1999-2003 presents its Mission statement....."We strive to develop the technical, professional, scientific, research, planning and management capability of Pacific Island people to enable them to make informed decisions about their future development and well being."

SOPAC's Governing Council and SPC's Conference of the Pacific Community, share similar memberships, but with the latter being broader based reflecting the reality of history. Both organisations are advised by technical committees as to island needs and priorities.

Although there is little overlap in their technical focus, in recent years the two organisations have worked together more overtly in two particular areas - renewable energy sources for community development : and in the application of communication technology.

In a general way of course, SOPAC's special expertise in the application of geoscience to the management of mineral and water resources and the coastal environment interacts positively with (or complements) SPC's service areas relating to the region's living resources - land, marine and social. These relationships receive regular inputs, formally through the CROP mechanism, and informally through the technical networks maintained by the scientific staff of both organisations.

On the other hand there are some important differences between the two. SPC is able to reach out to the whole region through its capacity to operate in both English and French languages. The two organisations differ greatly in size, in the scope of their missions, and in the nature of their resource bases. Their headquarters are separated by 1500 km of ocean.

Why Integration?

Informal discussion at the Chief Executive level about bringing the two organisations together has been in progress for several years. This meeting of minds has been stimulated by a number of general and specific factors.

General Factors

- (i) A shared belief that the Pacific's fragmented regionalism, though addressing a continuing need, is an inefficient approach reflecting an evolutionary history devoid of overall planning. The call for a single organisation was silenced by the reality of proliferation.
- (ii) The rapidly increasing difficulty being experienced by member states in funding regional services. This has produced an atmosphere of critical debate relating to the future of the present array of regional organisations.
- (iii) An understanding that all technical service organisations, whatever their sectoral disciplines, must now share, rather than duplicate, their basic tools of trade - electronic/satellite communication, data management, geographic information systems.
- (iv) An appreciation that a real integration of technical services is the only effective way to achieve coordination given the difficulties that must be expected with consultative mechanisms like CROP.

Specific Factors

- (i) There is a belief that integration of administrations could reduce the overall financial burden on members - and as a result, improve the sustainability of technical services.
- (ii) The achievement of a coordinated operation would improve both the quality and the geographic coverage of services provided.
- (iii) The need for improved office and laboratory housing in Suva applies equally to SOPAC and to SPC's Suva Operations. Working together with the Fiji Government on a vision of physical co-location has created a corporate climate conducive to integration.
- (iv) The policy of CROP uniformity in terms and conditions of employment means that there would be few industrial issues to contend with in bringing staff together.

- (v) The Chief Executives involved have been able to talk objectively about the values of integration, without the onset of the emotional syndrome known colloquially as the "protection of turf".

Where Do We Go?

The integration of independent organisations inevitably involves people, organisations, governments and the politics of special interest, e.g. the impact of integration on accessibility to and control of technical services. Obviously such a move can't be achieved overnight. However, given the will and the plan, integration could be achieved over a two to three year period.

This paper has been prepared for consideration by both SPC's and SOPAC's governing bodies. The same question is being asked of all delegates. Are regional policy makers interested in exploring the concept further? If they are, a cost-effective consultancy could be arranged for the first half of the year 2000. The terms of reference would encompass analysis of the concept and, if considered worthwhile, the formulation of an implementation plan. The recommendations could be considered and modified out of session with the final documentation coming before both governing boards at their October, 2000 meetings.

There is no intent to prejudge the results of the consultancy in this paper. However it could be that integration is a concept in Pacific regionalism whose time has come.

Recommendation

That Council agree to examining the concept of integration of the two regional bodies, should the SPC CRGA agree also at its December meeting then the following course of action will be taken:

- (i) In the first quarter of 2000 the Secretariats of the Pacific Community and SOPAC jointly manage a consultancy (draft terms of reference for the consultancy are attached) to examine the rationale for SPC-SOPAC integration. Should the consultancy conclude in favour of integration, a plan for implementation over a two to three year period to be developed by the consultants.
- (ii) The consultants' report be considered and modified as necessary by members out of session, with consideration of final recommendations by both governing boards in October, year 2000.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION IN FINALISING THE CONSULTANCY TERMS OF REFERENCE

Objective Of The Consultancy

To examine and analyse the rationale for integration of the two regional organisations, SPC and SOPAC - and to propose plans and timing aimed at achieving that end.

Asumption

- There is acceptance that regionalism has a continuing place in the Pacific;
- It is accepted that the justification for or viability of the technical programs of the two organisations is not under review;
- There is no intention at this time to review the roles of other regional bodies.
- There is acceptance that the co-location of the Suva based activities of SPC and SOPAC will proceed irrespective of the outcome of this consultancy.

Key Areas Of Focus

- Examine the costs and benefits of such a merger as it affects the two administrations, the technical programs, the memberships, and the external supporting agencies.
- Address the key political issues that may support or be an impediment to such an integration process.
- Review the constitutional and/or legal instruments of the two organisations, advising on solutions to difficulties.
- Propose a possible organisational model for the new single body taking into account realities such as the wider range of technical programs, the possible rationalisation of certain common support services and the geographic location of the two organisations and the membership difference.
- Propose a realistic timing, schedule or phasing for integration that would take into account practical, legal, contractual obligations, and or any other problems that might require prior resolution.

Consultants

- Familiarity with two organisations, their donors and their clients.
- Familiarity with the region, its needs - and the place of regionalism.
- Knowledge of management, particularly as it relates to technical service organisations.
- A consultant team of two to be appointed, supported by an analyst writer from one of the organisations.
- The consultant team to report to the two chief executives by 31 March 2000.