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# PCCOS Formative Evaluation: Final Report

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Prepared for The Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science  
(PCCOS)



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## List of abbreviations

COP	Conference of the Parties
CREDICA	Consortium of Research and Education in New Caledonia
CROP	Council of regional Organisations in the Pacific
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
ECOP	Early Career Ocean Professional
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
Hi-FAD	Highly instrumented Fish Aggregating Devices
FAME	Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems
FFA	Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency
GEM	The Geoscience, Energy and Maritime Division
GoF	Government of Fiji
GoPNG	Government of PNG
IAS	The Institute of Applied Sciences of the University of the South Pacific
IFREMER	French Research Institute for Exploitation of the Sea
IKU	Initiative Climate and Environment
IOC	The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRD	French Institute of Research for Development
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KIOST	Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology
KRA	Key Result Area
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFAT	New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MPA	Marine Protected Area

MSP	Managed Service Provider
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NIWA	National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OPOC	Office of the Pacific Ocean Commissioner
PacIOOS	Pacific Islands Ocean Observing System
PCCOS	Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science
PDH	Pacific Data Hub
PIC	Pacific Island Countries
PICRC	Palau International Coral Reef Centre
PICT	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
PIOAC	Pacific Islands Ocean Acidification Centre
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPO	Pacific Program Office
PSIDS	Pacific Small Island Developing States
SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
ToC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNOC	United Nations Ocean Conference
USP	The University of the South Pacific

# Executive Summary

This report provides the findings of a formative evaluation of an initiative funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)—Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science (PCCOS). The long-term outcome of PCCOS is: More effective implementation of science-based ocean governance and management by SPC members. This evaluation was constrained by several factors, including the time available, the fact that interviews were scheduled across multiple time zones and were conducted virtually, and that the evaluation team was only able to meet with relatively small number of stakeholders. The terms of reference required the evaluation team to assess PCCOS against the DAC evaluation criteria.



## RELEVANCE

The evaluation found that the rationale for PCCOS is relevant, and the project is being implemented appropriately. There was evidence in reports and through stakeholder interviews of alignment with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. Key PCCOS stakeholders, including national government representatives (Vanuatu and PNG), affirmed that PCCOS was relevant, especially its role as a central coordination mechanism for ocean science data. The evaluation team noted that the PCCOS team has been responsive to SPC and PICT ocean science needs and priorities through the approach taken in developing the workplans.



## COHERENCE

In relation to external coherence, the evaluation team noted synergies between PCCOS and other regional ocean policies and programs (e.g. PIFS 2021; SPC 2005). The PCCOS team has worked to strengthen regional collaboration and coordination of events and initiatives with other CROP agencies and with research partners and universities.

In relation to internal coherence, the evaluation team noted alignment between PCCOS and the SPC Strategic Plan (SPC 2021). PCCOS was found to have strengthened internal coordination within SPC. There was also evidence of synergies between PCCOS and other ocean policies or programs within SPC; for example, PCCOS is working closely with teams from FAME and GEM. PCCOS has coordinated with internal SPC portals including the GEM Ocean Portal to strengthen tools and systems for data sharing and removing duplication.

Notwithstanding the above affirmations of internal coherence, interviewees also advised the evaluation team of opportunities to further strengthen PCCOS systems and processes. A key finding from this evaluation concerns PCCOS' poor visibility among key internal and external stakeholders, including need for a more clearly defined and articulated role. Interviewees and survey respondents expressed a diversity of views about PCCOS' role, including about

the boundary between SPC and PCCOS. There is an evident risk that broadening the role and mandate of PCCOS, including as centre for the Ocean Decade, may compromise achievement of the current scope of work, especially given the current resource envelope.



## EFFECTIVENESS

Fundamental to the notion of ‘effectiveness’ is the merit and plausibility of the ToC, since this sets out the pathway by which anticipated changes can be realised. As currently framed, the focus of PCCOS seems to be narrowly on building capacity for SPC members to report against SDG14 and to align with Blue Pacific vision. However, this narrow focus contrasts with the ambitious long-term outcome which anticipates member states managing/governing oceans more sustainably.

The PCCOS team has prepared progress updates for the steering committee, including self-assessments of progress against four key result areas (KRA). These reports illuminate a diversity of progress ranging from ‘No overall progress’ to ‘Significant progress’. The evaluation confirmed that the delayed project start-up—due mostly to recruitment not being finalised until January 2021—impeded progress against the four KRAs.

It was evident that the PCCOS team is highly regarded by stakeholders. There has been limited progress at a national level on strengthening SGD14 reporting and National Oceans Policy (NOP) with only one country, Vanuatu, reporting against SDG14 (Life Below Water) with the support of PCCOS. Both internal and external stakeholders reported that PCCOS had contributed to capacity building through Ocean Labs, the SPC Science Symposium and the ECOP program. A high percentage of both internal and external stakeholders reported that PCCOS had improved the regional coordination of ocean science, mostly through participation in regional events including playing a coordination role in Our Ocean Conference and the UN Ocean Conference. Stakeholder discussions during this evaluation highlighted debate about PCCOS’ role as Centre of Excellence in Ocean Science.



## EFFICIENCY

At the time of this evaluation PCCOS was under-spent and behind on some implementation targets as reported in the July 2022 progress report. The relatively high proportion of investment in human resources (58%) is consistent with a capacity building program with staff in Suva and Noumea. When considering ‘activity costs’ alone, over 58% was spent against KRA 4; which was reportedly a function of the PCCOS team needing to pivot to an internal focus due to the global pandemic with travel restrictions preventing in-country meetings with national counterparts.



## IMPACT

The PCCOS theory of change envisions a future in which SPC member states are more effectively governing and managing ocean resources, informed by science and knowledge brokered by PCCOS. In this evaluation it was simply too early to discern any impact of this nature. Notwithstanding the inception-phase delays, the evaluation team learned of multiple efforts by the PCCOS team to reach out to member country counterparts, including during COVID-19 lockdowns, with limited response. It is well recognised that in the Pacific the efficacy of electronic engagement methods is weak. New ambition to engage in face-to-face capacity building must be supported with adequate resources for travel; and there should be a clear and comprehensive strategy to ensure counterpart engagement is well-targeted to trigger demand for the functions and services offered by PCCOS. Such a strategy must go beyond just delivering training and knowledge products to also engineering an enabling environment for science-informed ocean governance and management.



## SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability is a perennially challenging criterion to evaluate in midterm evaluations—and in the case of PCCOS, even more so given the early stage of actual implementation that has been undertaken. It was not possible for the evaluation team to form a view about sustainability in relation to science-based governance and management of ocean resources by member countries. It is likely that such a change will require considerable time and resources beyond the life of this MFAT investment.

To maximise sustainability prospects during the remainder of the current project the PCCOS team should explore sophisticated ways to engender an enabling environment for science-based ocean management among counterparts. The capacity building interventions already undertaken go some way towards this, but beyond knowledge and skill transfer alone are shown to be insufficient to engender sustainable capacity changes. In addition, counterpart leaders with authority to champion desired changes must be mobilised. Counterparts staff must be supported with appropriate management and technical systems. Incentives for counterpart staff to take on new practices and utilise PCCOS resources must be apparent. Sufficient and reliable resources—including human resources—must be allocated. These capacity building initiatives must work in concert to achieve the sustainable institutional changes envisioned by PCCOS.

Notwithstanding the above challenges, there is some evidence that changes in relation to medium terms outcomes in the PCCOS ToC may endure—particularly in relation to internal coordination within SPC. There is some evidence to suggest that improved regional partnerships may be sustained and generate longer-term benefits. At the most fundamental level, sustainability is challenged by virtue of the fact that PCCOS is a donor-funded initiative.



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 DOCUMENT PURPOSE

This report provides the findings of a formative evaluation of an initiative funded by New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)—*Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science* (PCCOS). PCCOS is hosted within the Pacific Community (SPC), which is the Pacific regional hub for science, technology and innovation for sustainable development.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

In 2017, the 10<sup>th</sup> Pacific Community Conference agreed to establish PCCOS as a flagship for scientific excellence and as a dedicated regional science information and knowledge hub, hosted at SPC. In 2019, Pacific Leaders reaffirmed the PCCOS vision and encouraged an expanded scope as a convener of partnerships and knowledge exchange on ocean science in the Pacific. With core funding from MFAT, an extended inception phase for PCCOS was implemented between July 2019 and January 2021, with 2021 being the first year of actual implementation. The full staff complement was engaged by January 2022.

The long-term outcome of PCCOS is: More effective implementation of science-based ocean governance and management by SPC members.

The PCCOS theory of change (ToC) anticipates that the long-term outcome will be realised through achievement of four medium-term outcomes:

1. Science Products and Country Capacities: Countries have reported progress against SDG14 using SPC's ocean science and knowledge.
2. Partnerships and Regional Coordination: Ocean science in the Pacific islands' region is coordinated and aligned to the Blue Pacific vision.
3. Excellence in Ocean Science: PCCOS is a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific islands' region.
4. PCCOS Structuration and Ocean Science at SPC: Systems and processes are in place for PCCOS to deliver as an integrated ocean programme across SPC.

See **Figure 1** for the Theory of Change (TOC).

Internally within SPC, PCCOS is expected to facilitate and promote cross-sectoral engagement and cooperation for a better-integrated ocean science service to its members. Externally, PCCOS is expected to be a platform for coordination and integration of SPC-led ocean science with international and regional partners. A principle aim of PCCOS is to help Pacific Island governments and communities easily access ocean science and expertise to inform protection and management of ocean resources.

## PCCOS THEORY OF CHANGE

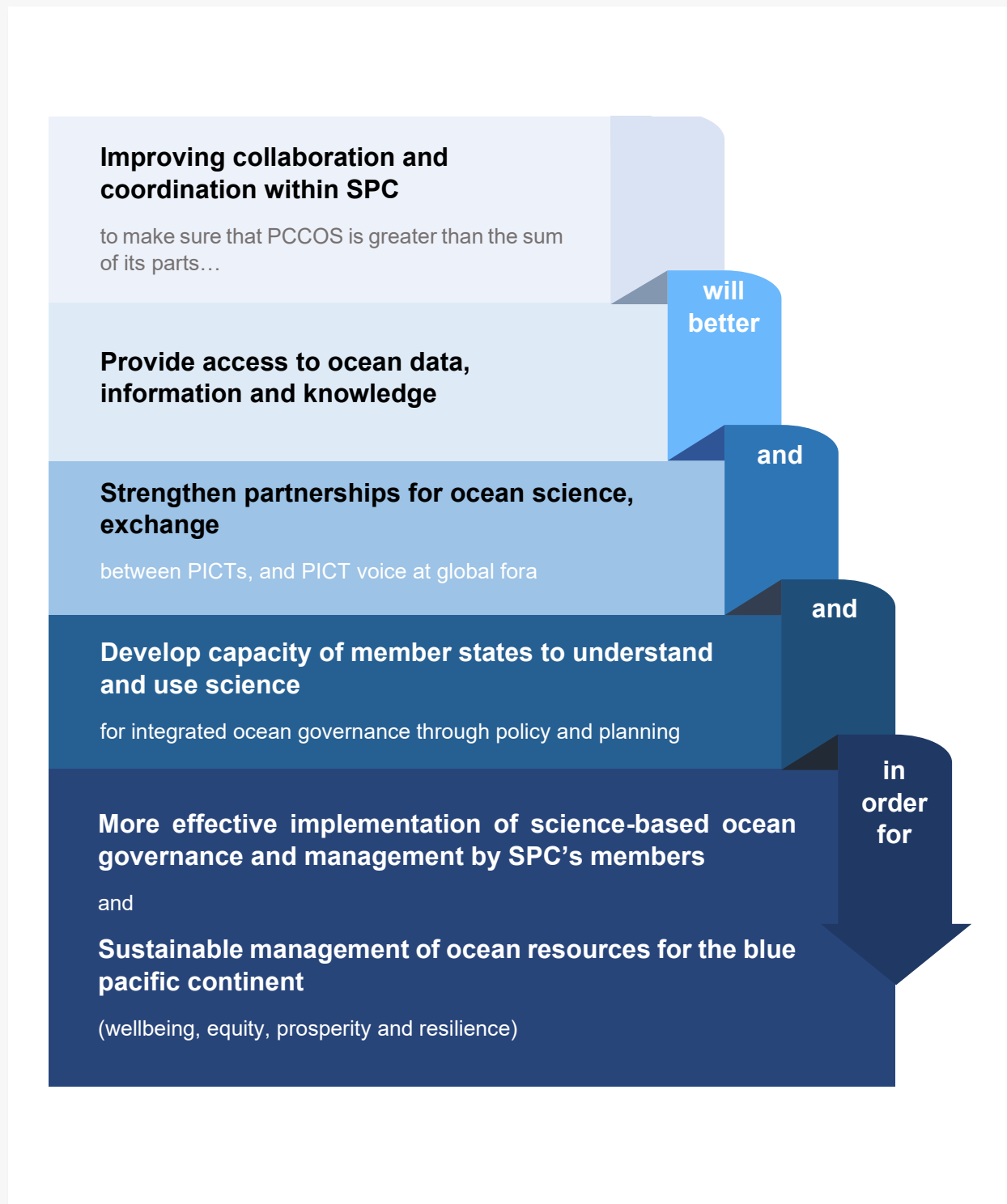


Figure 1: PCCOS Theory of Change

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

A midterm evaluation of PCCOS is a donor requirement. The terms of reference defined the purpose of the evaluation as being to:

- a. assess the effectiveness and achievements of the programme; and
- b. draw lessons and recommendations that will:
  - i. direct PCCOS' implementation for the remainder of its the current funding period;
  - ii. inform PCCOS' funding proposals for the next funding cycle, commencing with a new MFAT funding cycle from January 2024; and
  - iii. inform the development of the next PCCOS Business Plan from 1 January 2024.

The primary user of the evaluation is the PCCOS team along with selected divisional units within SPC involved in implementation. SPC's senior leadership and MFAT senior managers are a secondary audience. National stakeholders (mainly Ocean Offices) in the Pacific Island Countries (PIC) where PCCOS is implemented may also use the evaluation.

This evaluation will enhance accountability, credibility and transparency. Internally, the study will be used at PCCOS to identify good practices and lessons to potentially improve performance over the second half of the funding period. This evaluation will also inform the design of a further phase of MFAT funding and could contribute to PCCOS alignment considering the SPC 2022-2031 Strategic Plan, key regional needs and SPC's ambitions.

### 2.2 APPROACH

As a midterm evaluation with a focus on learning, the evaluation was formative rather than summative. The evaluation team adopted a 'utilisation focused' approach<sup>1</sup>—which is based on the belief that an evaluation should be judged by the extent to which it is useful for its intended users. The evaluation involved four broad phases which are described in detail in the Evaluation Plan. A brief summary is provided below:

#### **Phase 1: Document review and planning**

The evaluation team undertook a review of all relevant project documentation provided by the PCCOS team, as well as country-specific and sector literature.

A high-level evaluation framework structured against the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria was developed along with an Interview Guide.

#### **Phase 2: Data collection**

Data collection involved 'mixed methods' in line with SPC guidelines and international good practice. Both qualitative and quantitative data was gathered to triangulate findings and to inform responses to the DAC evaluation criteria. Specific methods included: key informant interviews, online survey, facilitated workshop discussion and case studies.

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<sup>1</sup> Patton, M.Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation*, 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

### Phase 3: Analysis and validation

At the completion of data collection, all quantitative data captured in surveys was analysed using descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, frequency etc.) in order to highlight interesting features in the data. Qualitative data was analysed by reviewing interviewee responses against the evaluation criteria and noting the predominant or common themes, and any particularly notable exceptions.

### Phase 4: Write-up and presentation

Preliminary findings were summarised and presented to the PCCOS team for validation. A full report presenting the findings, evidence and recommendations was prepared along with evaluative case studies.

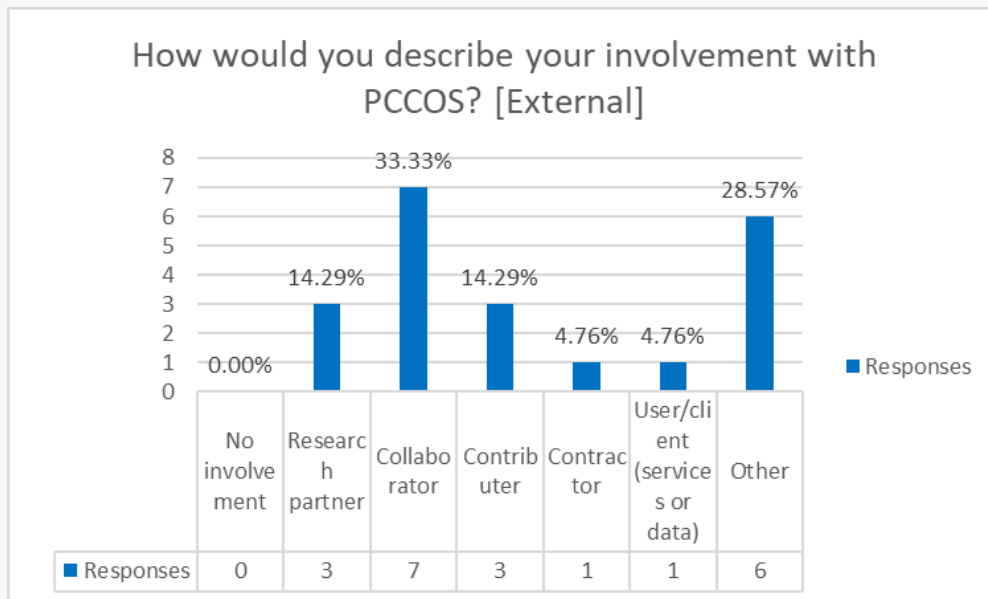
## 2.3 SAMPLE FRAME AND METHODS

The table below summarises the key informant interviews and surveys undertaken for this evaluation, and the sample frame and size. Each of the 'informant categories' had a different focus (and interview method). Overall, approximately 33 people were interviewed through online discussions and surveys.

**Table 1: PCCOS evaluation respondent summary**

Sample	Informant/respondent	Method
Implementers (11 interviewed, 2 survey responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SPC Steering Committee Members</li><li>• SPC Director General</li><li>• PCCOS staff</li><li>• SPC Team Leaders</li></ul>	Online interviews Survey instrument
Intermediaries / Change Agents (2 interviewed, 12 survey responses)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• SPC Staff</li><li>• USP Research contacts</li><li>• Key project contacts – NZ UNESCO; The Ocean Foundation; IOC-UNESCO; IRD</li></ul>	Online interviews Survey instrument
Target/End Users (5 interviewed, 1 survey response)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• ECOPs</li><li>• Country counterparts – Vanuatu Oceans Office; CSIRO; Solomon Islands Meteorological Service; NIWA New Zealand; Météo-France New Caledonia</li></ul>	Online interviews Survey instrument
Informed 3rd parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• UNESCO - Bruce Chapman Global conference bodies; Ocean science resources</li></ul>	Data sharing discussion Survey instrument

The majority (a third) of ‘external’ interviewees (15) identified as ‘collaborator’ (see **Figure 2**), followed by ‘other’<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 2:** Respondent association with PCCOS

## 2.4 CASE STUDIES

As part of the evaluation process, and to gain a better understanding of some of the key opportunities and challenges that were elicited during the interviews, the evaluation team selected ‘Capacity Building’ as a case study theme to explore further.

Two of the ‘capacity building’ mechanisms PCCOS have applied were investigated further including:

- Building capacity to use ocean science and data to support SDG14;
  - Support to the Vanuatu Oceans Office; and
- The Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs);

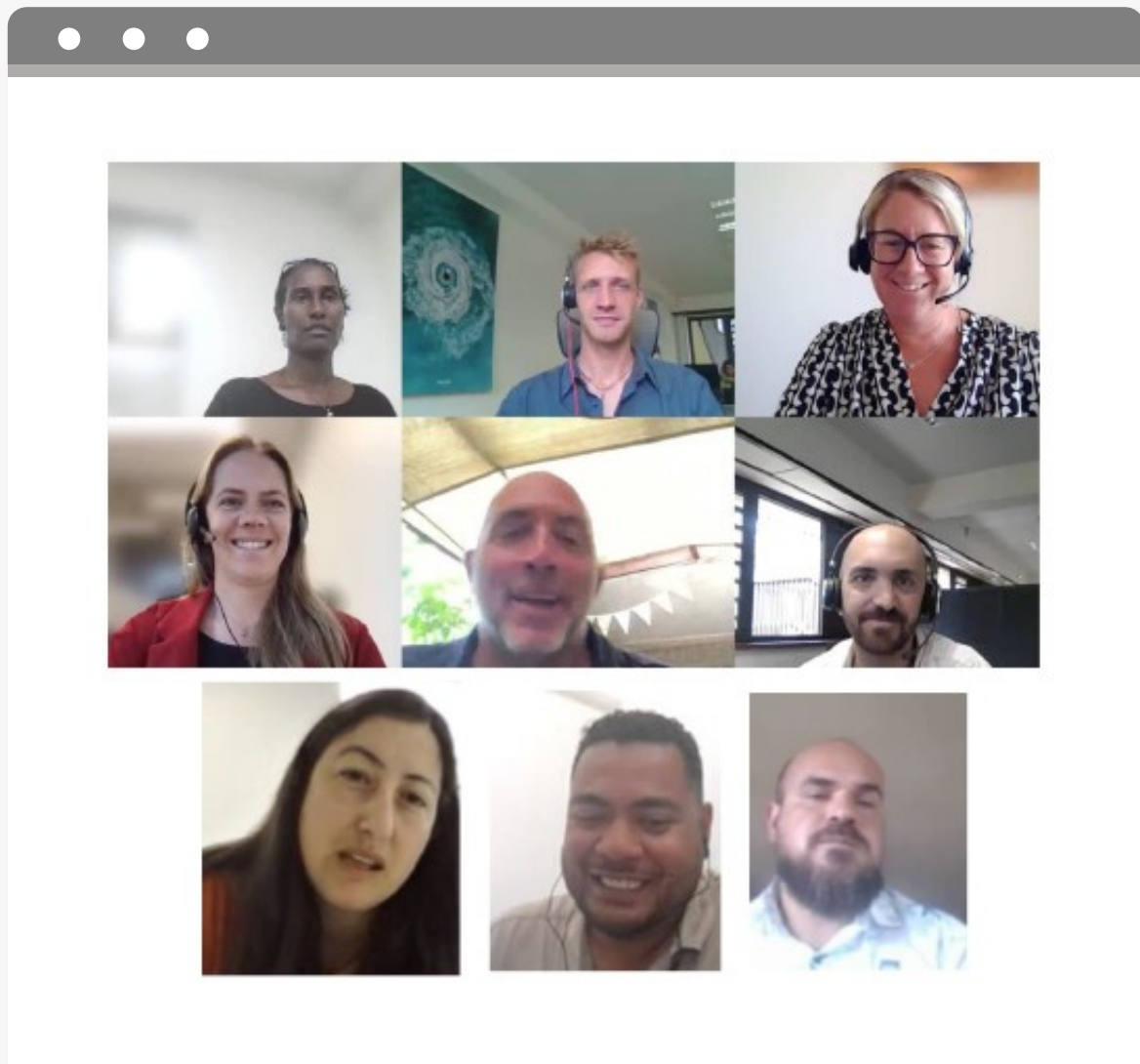
## 2.5 KEY LIMITATIONS

This evaluation was constrained by a number of factors, including the time available—only 15 working days were allocated for interviews with key stakeholders. This constraint was compounded by the scheduling of the evaluation close to the end-of-year holiday season, which also coincided with SPC and Pacific conferences. Further, interviews were scheduled across multiple time zones and were conducted virtually. The consequence of these factors was that the evaluation team was only able to meet with relatively small number of stakeholders, with especially limited access to member country counterparts. This situation

<sup>2</sup> Those who selected ‘other’ went on to specify the following in their selection: potential collaborator, academic researcher, concept developer, board member since inception, recipient of PCCOS travel funds, ECOP member country participant accessing technical and financial services.

was set against the backdrop of delayed implementation which was constrained by COVID-19 travel restrictions meaning that the progress and reach of the project was already less than planned by mid-term. As a consequence, this evaluation was able to only review activities implemented between January 2021 to August 2022. Hence, some caution should be used in drawing conclusions from the limited sample and from the early implementation performance.







**Figure 3:** PCCOS Team and select respondents from online interviews.



### 3. Evaluation Findings

The terms of reference required the evaluation team to assess PCCOS against the DAC evaluation criteria. Findings against these criteria are presented in the subsections below and summarised below in **Table 2**. Recommendations are highlighted in blue boxes at relevant points in the narrative and consolidated in **Section 5**.

**Table 2 Synopsis of Evaluation Findings**

DAC CRITERIA	FINDINGS	FUTURE FOCUS
 RELEVANCE	<p>PCCOS is responding to SPC and PICTs’ regional and national ocean science needs and priorities.</p> <p>Alignment with national priorities not evident.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Continue alignment with 2050 Blue Pacific Vision (Implementation Plan)</li> <li>· Stronger focus on national priorities (ocean science and governance).</li> <li>· More capacity building on SDG14 reporting and developing a NOP.</li> </ul>
 COHERENCE	<p>Synergy between PCCOS and other regional ocean policies &amp; programs</p> <p>There is improved coordination within SPC as a result of PCCOS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Review PCCOS ToC</li> <li>· Define PCCOs role</li> <li>· Strengthen PCCOS systems and process</li> </ul>
 EFFECTIVENESS	<p>PCCOS is progressing towards each of its key result areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Stronger focus on national priorities (ocean science and governance).</li> <li>· More capacity building</li> <li>· Increase visibility – Define PCCOS</li> <li>· Build on existing strengths (Capacity building, Regional coordination, MSP, Traditional Knowledge)</li> </ul>
 EFFICIENCY	<p>PCCOS is utilising its resources (small team) and delivery mechanism</p> <p>Under spent and behind on some targets</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Detailed implementation and expenditure plan for remainder of project Strengthen PCCOS systems and process</li> </ul>
 IMPACT	<p>It’s too early to say if PCCOS will have “significant and lasting change” but plausible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Stronger focus on national priorities (ocean science and governance).</li> <li>· Increased focus on capacity building.</li> <li>· Review and refine Theory or Change</li> <li>· More capacity building on SDG14 reporting and developing a NOP</li> </ul>
 SUSTAINABILITY	<p>It is possible there will be enduring changes as a result of the project (regional partnerships, ECOPs, reporting capacity)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Review PCCOS ToC</li> <li>· Develop a more strategic plan and investment in the ECOP program.</li> </ul>

### 3.1 RELEVANCE


In this evaluation, ‘relevance’ was explored through responses to two broad questions:

To what extent is the PCCOS theory of change is appropriate and realistic?  
Is it implemented in a relevant way to Pacific contexts and cultures?

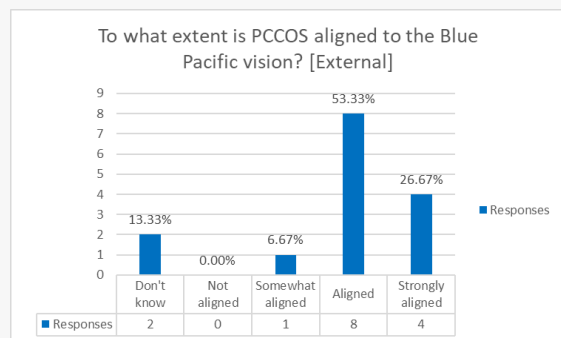
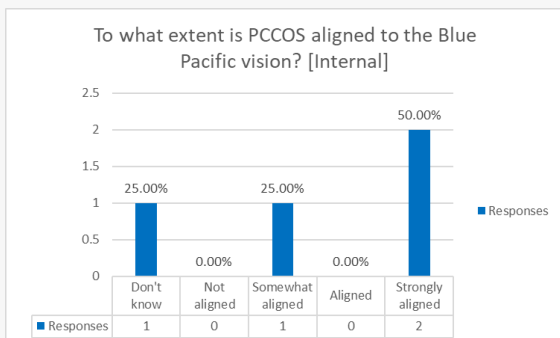
How is PCCOS responding to SPC and PICTs’ regional and national ocean science needs and priorities?

The evaluation found that the rationale for PCCOS is relevant, and the project is being implemented appropriately for Pacific contexts and cultures. There was evidence in reports and through stakeholder interviews of alignment with the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent—in particular **Thematic Area 4** (Oceans and Natural Environment), and the **Strategic Pathways** (Education, Research and Technology, Cultural Values).

In relation to PCCOS alignment with the Blue Pacific vision, survey responses from internal SPC stakeholders (4) found a majority rating the project as ‘strongly aligned’. This contrasted slightly with external stakeholders (15) who rated the project ‘aligned’ (see **Figure 4**).



*Vision: In 2050, the Blue Pacific Continent is a region of peace; harmony; security, social inclusion; and increased prosperity so that all Pacific people are leading free, healthy and productive lives. Our Blue Pacific identity reinforces the potential of our shared stewardship of the Pacific Ocean and reaffirms the connections of Pacific peoples with their natural resources, environment, cultures and livelihoods.1 We understand that this vision can only be achieved through regional collective action.*



**Figure 4:** PCCOS alignment with the Blue Pacific vision



Key PCCOS stakeholders, including national government representatives (Vanuatu and PNG) affirmed that PCCOS was relevant, especially its role as a central coordination mechanism for ocean science data:

“We need a one stop shop for data...the PCCOS team has the ability to link people to the right platform and provide opportunities for growth and development and capacity building”

— Vanuatu Oceans Office

“PCCOS is an excellent initiative given the similar ocean governance and management policy objectives and management tools being pursued and utilized. There are therefore common objectives and challenges that we work have worked together to address”

— GoPNG

The evaluation team noted that the PCCOS team has been responsive to SPC and PICT ocean science needs and priorities. Evidently the team completed a series of consultations to identify member country needs and priorities and then prioritised engagement with countries where there was evident political will, leadership and an enabling policy context such as the existence of a National Oceans Policy. By the time of this evaluation this included Vanuatu, PNG, Fiji, Solomons, Cook Islands and Samoa. The PCCOS team then scheduled activities based on internal capacity and in line with the Decade of Ocean Science themes: i) laws and regulations; ii) ocean science needs; iii) traditional knowledge.

PCCOS then took steps to address the identified needs<sup>3</sup> such as establishing The Pacific Ocean Acidification Centre and securing funding for a Marine Spatial Planning project in Palau and the Pacific region. PCCOS also elevated the importance of traditional knowledge in ocean management. The Vanuatu Oceans Office reflected:

*“What normally happens is donors come in and they go to the rural areas and they try to build governance on top of their ocean science. When the funding finishes, the science collapses and the traditional governance collapses. If you strengthen the traditional governance (place it at the bottom/foundation), when the funding goes, the governance and the people are still together.”*

## Recommendations

- 1 SPC should continue to work with PIFs in developing the 2050 Implementation Plan, ensuring that PCCOS workplans are clearly defined and aligned.
- 2 PCCOS should continue to liaise with national government counterparts to ensure workplans are aligned with national priorities.

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<sup>3</sup> Including: ocean acidification; marine spatial planning, integrated ocean management and national oceans policies.

### 3.2 COHERENCE

In this evaluation, ‘coherence’ was assessed in relation to the following question:

To what extent and how does PCCOS add value while avoiding duplication of efforts in making ocean science more accessible to inform decisions to protect and sustainably manage ocean resources in the Pacific?

The evaluation team understood coherence to apply to both the internal context within SPC, and externally across the region.

#### External coherence

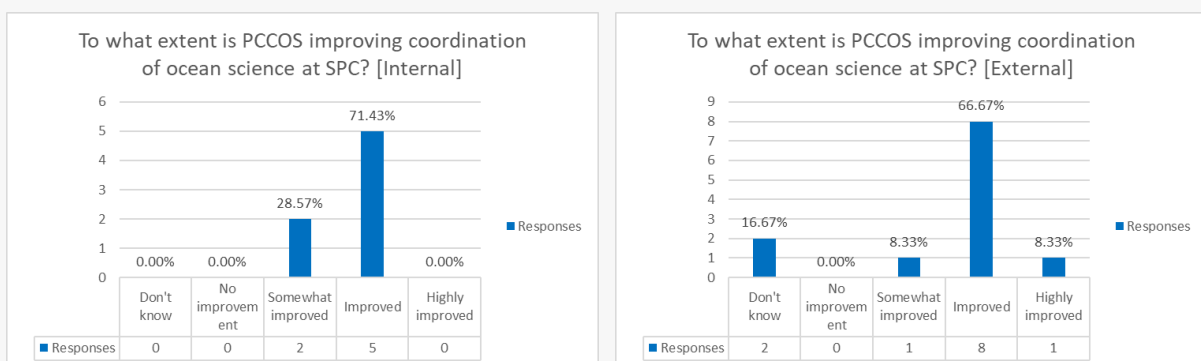
In relation to external coherence, the evaluation team noted synergies between PCCOS and other regional ocean policies and programs (e.g. PIFS 2021; SPC 2005). The PCCOS team has seemingly worked to strengthen regional collaboration and coordination of events and initiatives with other CROP agencies<sup>4</sup> and with research partners and universities<sup>5</sup> (see **Figure 9**). Some duplication or overlap was inevitable; however, this has largely been recognised and addressed by SPC/PCCOS. For example:

- An overlapping mandate between SPREP and SPC (PCCOS) in relation to climate change/oceans was discussed and addressed by SPC focusing on the ocean science as it relates to climate change, and SPREP taking the lead on policy support for member countries’ information dissemination.
- With respect to oceans and fisheries, FFA took the lead on policy while SPC focussed on fisheries science. PCCOS—as the coordinator of ocean science within SPC—directed questions or support requests from member countries about fisheries policy to FFA, while drawing on SPC expertise to respond to fisheries data requests.

#### Internal coherence

In relation to internal coherence, the evaluation team noted alignment between PCCOS and the SPC Strategic Plan (SPC 2021)—as expected, since PCCOS is a project within SPC. Nevertheless, PCCOS has seemingly strengthened internal coordination within SPC (see

**Figure 5**). Survey respondents (7) drawn from within SPC (including the PCCOS Steering Committee) reported improved coordination of ocean science. This view was corroborated by external stakeholders (12).



**Figure 5:** PCCOS’ value to improving coordination of ocean science at SPC

<sup>4</sup> E.g. SPREP, PIFS, FFA and OPOC.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. USP; IRD, IFREMER, NOAA, NIWA, and CSIRO.

There was also evidence of synergies between PCCOS and other ocean policies or programs within SPC; for example, PCCOS is working closely with teams from FAME and GEM on training initiatives such as a recent maritime boundaries workshop in Sydney.

PCCOS has also coordinated with internal SPC portals including the GEM Ocean Portal to strengthen tools and systems for data sharing and removing duplication. For example:

- An initial priority of PCCOS was to establish a Pacific data portal. However, the team recognised that the existing Pacific Data Hub (PDH) already plays this role and so worked with the PDH team to develop the technical requirements of a new PCCOS website and Ocean Catalogue to limit duplication, thereby ensuring the PCCOS portal is aligned with and supportive of PDH.

The new PCCOS Ocean Catalogue hosts ocean models, while the GEM Ocean Portal hosts decision- ready products.

Notwithstanding the above affirmations of internal coherence, interviewees also advised the evaluation team of opportunities to further strengthen PCCOS systems and processes, especially in relation to SPC infrastructure and a new program under development (see **Section 4.1**).

### PCCOS visibility

A key finding from this evaluation concerns PCCOS’ poor visibility among key internal and external stakeholders, including need for a more clearly defined and articulated role. Interviewees and survey respondents expressed a diversity of views about PCCOS’ role, including about the boundary between SPC and PCCOS.

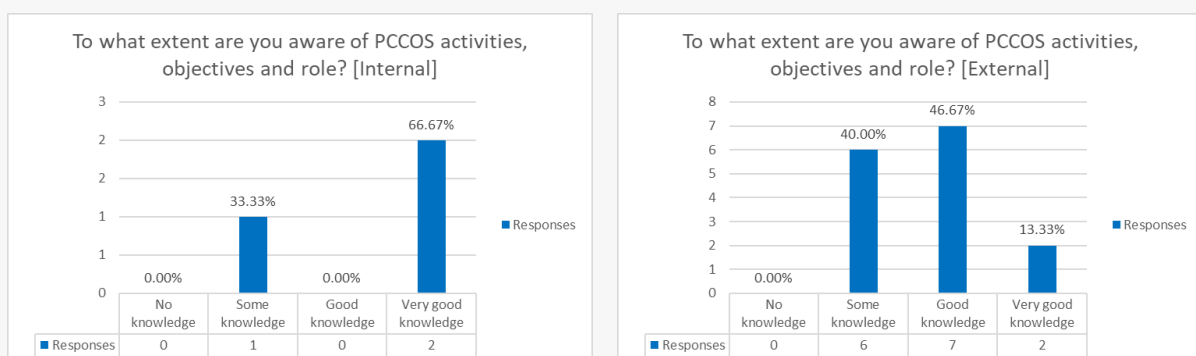
The evaluation data demonstrated that despite the majority of internal and external stakeholders reporting involvement with PCCOS (see **Section 2.3, Table 1**), still 33% of internal SPC respondents and 40% of external respondents reported having only ‘some knowledge’ of PCCOS activities, objectives and role (see **Figure 6**). A diversity of views about PCCOS was even reflected in comments by SPC executives:

*“PCCOS need to figure out what they want to be when they grow up.”*

*“I see PCCOS being the fundamental heart of the ocean flagship.”*

*“PCCOS needs to be the glue; the source of coordination and facilitation within SPC.”*

It seems likely the knowledge of PCCOS among broader regional stakeholders not directly involved with the project would be lower still.



**Figure 6:** The awareness of PCCOS activities, objective and role

The evaluation team were advised that a Communications Plan was developed at project start-up, and later updated to become a Communications Strategy (2021). The PCCOS team also reported that they are expanding use of social media and other communication tools to increase people’s awareness of PCCOS. However, there seems to be a more fundamental issue related to the delineation of what PCCOS’ role is in relation to SPC broadly and the ‘Ocean Flagship’<sup>6</sup> initiative specifically. Compound the matter of PCCOS current role definition, the evaluation team learned from SPC Executive of an intention to expand the scope of PCCOS beyond data and science to other areas of technical leadership such as maritime boundaries and human rights:

“PCCOS and the Ocean Flagship will focus not only on science but broader capabilities as they relate to ocean information more generally”.

There is an evident risk that broadening the role and mandate of PCCOS may compromise achievement of the current scope of work, especially given the current resource envelope and the fact that no additional resources/funds have been committed for the ‘regional centre’<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, there have evidently been discussions about the Decade for Ocean Science Centre—with ambiguity about PCCOS’ role in this centre.

It is clear that there should be focussed internal discussion about the scope and mandate of PCCOS *vis-à-vis* the resourcing of the initiative (see **Recommendation 1**).

### **Recommendation**

- 3 SPC should clarify PCCOS’ role and mandate and implement a communication campaign to unify stakeholder understanding about PCCOS *vis-à-vis* SPC, the Ocean Flagship Program, Decade for Ocean Science and Centre for Excellence for Ocean Science.

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<sup>6</sup> The ‘Ocean Flagship’ program is being designed within SPC to bring together all Ocean Initiatives.

<sup>7</sup> An independent feasibility assessment is being completed for UNESCO on this.

### 3.3 EFFECTIVENESS

In this evaluation, 'effectiveness' was assessed in relation to two broad questions with five sub-questions:

To what extent is PCCOS progressing towards each of its key result area?

- a. What positive or negative unintended outcomes have been achieved, including negative unintended outcomes?
- b. What are effective approaches implemented by PCCOS?
- c. To what extent PCCOS has implemented a people-centred approach and is effective with diverse groups?
- d. What program assumptions have been verified?
- e. How is PCCOS contributing to the SPC 2022-2031 Strategic Plan?

What steps can PCCOS take to make sure it moves toward achieving the right outcomes in the remainder of its current funding cycle? To what extent and how does PCCOS add value while avoiding duplication of efforts.

Fundamental to the notion of 'effectiveness' is the merit and plausibility of the ToC, since this sets out the pathway by which anticipated changes can be realised. A technical critique of the ToC is provided in Appendix A, however, relevant to this section is the fact that the current ToC diverges from program theory convention in several ways, and that there are long causal linkages<sup>8</sup>, which when set against the modest resourcing of PCCOS raise questions about the achievability of the design.

As currently framed, the focus of PCCOS seems to be narrowly on building capacity for SPC members to report against SDG14 and to align with Blue Pacific vision. However, this narrow focus contrasts with the ambitious long-term outcome which anticipates member states managing/governing oceans more sustainably<sup>9</sup>. A practical consequence for PCCOS performance evaluation is that that long-term outcome is unachievable, and the more immediate outcomes are pitched more narrowly than the articulated mandate for PCCOS and the views of many stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation.

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<sup>8</sup> For example, it is difficult to reconcile how 'developing the capacity of member states to understand and use science' will lead to the 'sustainable management of ocean resources for the blue pacific', noting there are many other influencing factors (like politics and economics), and enabling environmental pre-requisites (like leadership, policy frameworks, capacity, resources etc) that determine this end state.

<sup>9</sup> This is also the focus of the SPC Strategic Plan (2021) more broadly, hence raising conceptual questions about the alignment/nesting of PCCOS within the SPC strategy.

The broader focus and role of PCCOS is discussed below and explored further in Sections 4.1 and 5.2.

Notwithstanding the above design and M&E challenges, the PCCOS team has prepared progress updates for the steering committee. These have included an annual progress report with a self-assessment against key result area (KRA) indicators. These reports illuminate a diversity of progress ranging from ‘No overall progress’ to ‘Significant progress’<sup>10</sup>.

The evaluation confirmed that the delayed project start-up—due mostly to recruitment not being finalised until January 2021 (see **Section 2.1**)—impeded progress against four KRAs. It was evident that the PCCOS team is highly regarded by stakeholders and has worked constructively in the short period of implementation to mobilise PCCOS.

*“I respect the team who are professional and knowledgeable”*

*“I do compliment the team and trust the work they do”* (ECOP).

*“The passionate team of experts working hard to ensure that PCCOS achieves its vision and goals in the Pacific forum”* (GoPNG).

*“Engagements with member states and outreach has been limited due to COVID, however, the team is doing a great job catching up”* (SPC Executive).

The evaluation team mostly corroborated the results presented in the progress reports, but make the following observations against the four overarching KRA’s:

#### ***KRA 1: Countries have reported progress against SDG14 (Life Below Water) using SPC’s ocean science and knowledge.***

There has been limited progress at a national level on strengthening SDG14 reporting and National Oceans Policy (NOP) with only one country, Vanuatu, reporting progress against SDG14 (Life Below Water) with the support of PCCOS (see **Section 4.1**, case study). The PCCOS team reported that this was not through lack of trying—providing examples of outreach to PNG with little uptake. The limited progress against this KRA was also reflected in the relatively low expenditure against this budget item (see **Section 3.4**).

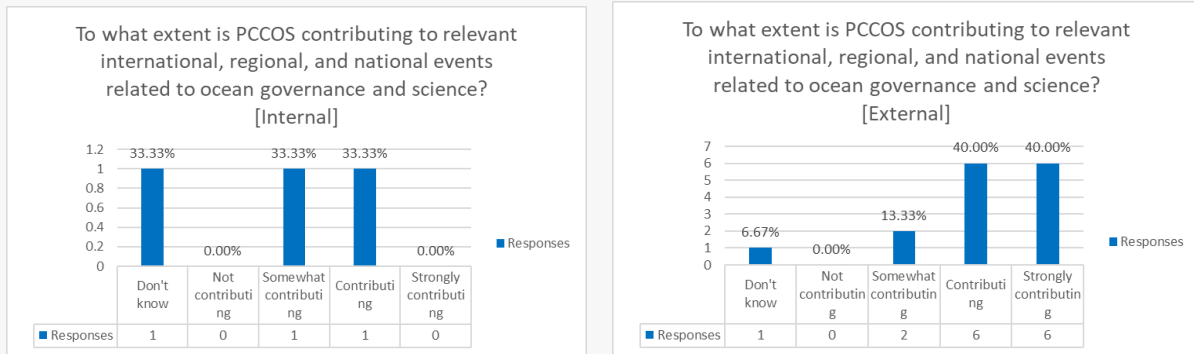
*“Members agreed to form PCCOS prior to COVID, however practical hands-on work was strained, not just due to lack of travel, but members were pre-concerned with public health issues. The same people wearing multiple hats in these countries...focus was on other things. Very comfortable that no effort to date has been wasted though”*

— SPC Executive

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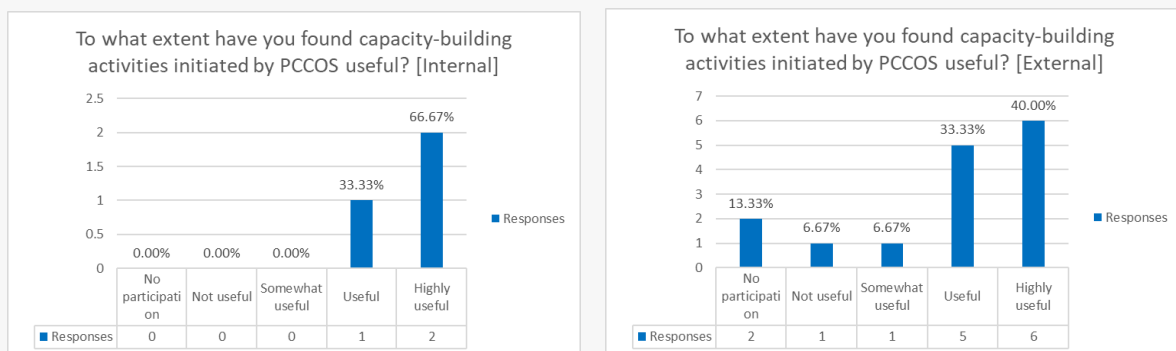
<sup>10</sup> July 2021 to June 2022 Progress Report, The Pacific Community Centre for Ocean Science, August 2022.

The evaluation team explored respondents' views about PCCOS's contribution to relevant international, regional and national events related to ocean governance and science, and found mixed responses from SPC respondents (3), while external stakeholders (15) 'believe' or 'strongly believe' that PCCOS contributed to relevant international, regional, and national events related to ocean governance and science<sup>11</sup> (see **Figure 7**).



**Figure 7: PCCOS' contribution to relevant international, regional and national events related to ocean governance and science**

Both internal and external stakeholders reported that PCCOS had contributed to capacity building through Ocean Labs, the SPC Science Symposium and the ECOP program (see **Section 4**, case study). Internal (SPC) survey respondents (3) considered PCCOS capacity-building to be 'highly useful'—a view shared by the majority of external stakeholders.

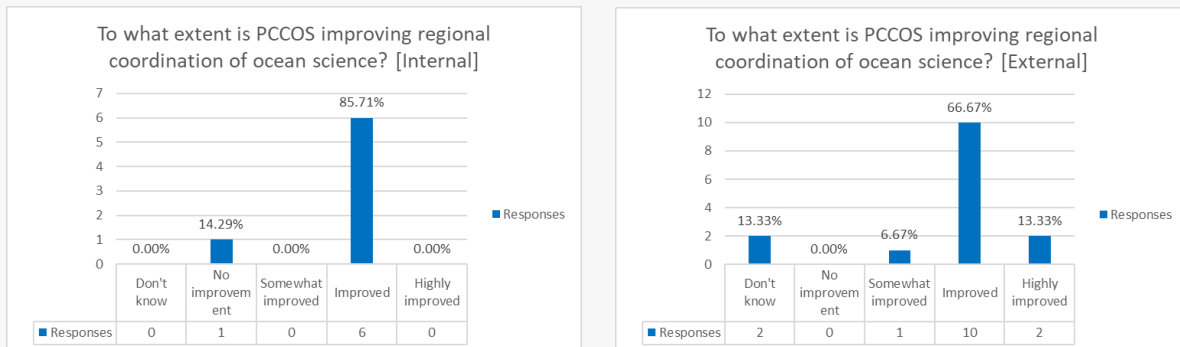


**Figure 8: The usefulness of capacity-building activities initiated by PCCOS**

<sup>11</sup> The evaluation team was unable to ascertain reasons for the difference, but is likely due to the small sample size being insufficient to capture the breadth of views.

**KRA 2: Ocean science in the Pacific Islands region is coordinated and aligned to the Blue Pacific vision (see Section 3.1)**

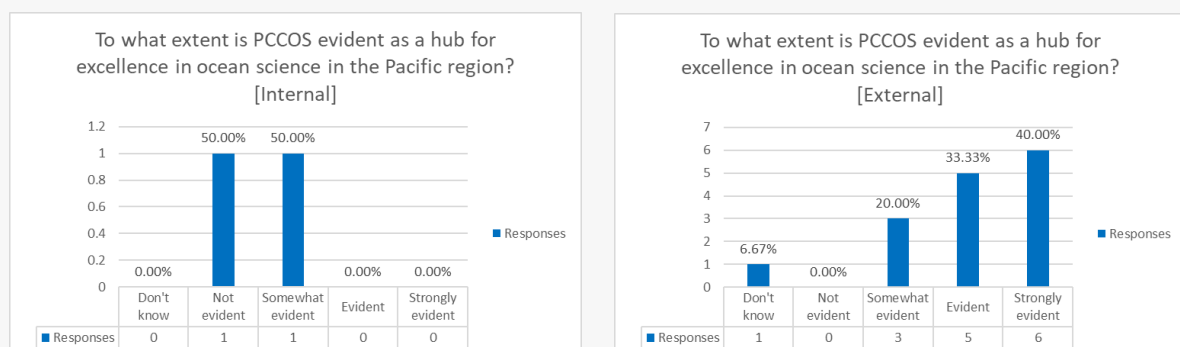
A high percentage of both internal and external stakeholders reported that PCCOS had improved the regional coordination of ocean science, mostly through participation in regional events including playing a coordination role in Our Ocean Conference and the UN Ocean Conference. Both internal (SPC staff, including PCCOS Steering Committee members) and external survey respondents noted that PCCOS was improving regional coordination of ocean science.



**Figure 9: PCCOS' value to regional coordination of ocean science**

**KRA 3: PCCOS is a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific Islands region:**

Stakeholder discussions during this evaluation highlighted debate about PCCOS' role as Centre of Excellence in Ocean Science. Within SPC there was a belief that PCCOS role was to *“contribute to SPC being a hub of ocean excellence”*, while the KRA for PCCOS reads *“PCCOS is a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific islands' region”*. Survey results highlight a diversity of views about the extent to which PCCOS is a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific region with a majority of the 15 external respondents (contributors and researchers) stating that there was ‘strong’ evidence that PCCOS is a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific region. This finding reinforces the finding above in relation to clarifying PCCOS' role within SPC (Section 3.2).



**Figure 10: PCCOS as a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific region**



#### ***KRA 4: Systems and processes are in place for PCCOS to deliver as an integrated ocean programme across***

PCCOS was found to have improved internal coordination within SPC (see **Section 3.2**). PCCOS was also credited with identifying and growing new SPC capabilities such as marine spatial planning, and traditional knowledge (see **Section 3.1**) for example.

#### **Recommendations**

- 4 PCCOS should commission a review of the ToC, with particular reference to the plausible influence that the project might have in member countries.
- 5 PCCOS should prioritise effort against KRAs 1, 2 and 3 during the remainder of the current funding, especially in relation to building capacity of member states.

### **3.4 EFFICIENCY**

In this evaluation, 'efficiency' was assessed in relation to two broad questions with three sub-questions:

To what extent is PCCOS maximising its use of resources and delivery mechanism (presence in Suva and Noumea campus, working across divisions and units with a network of contributors)?

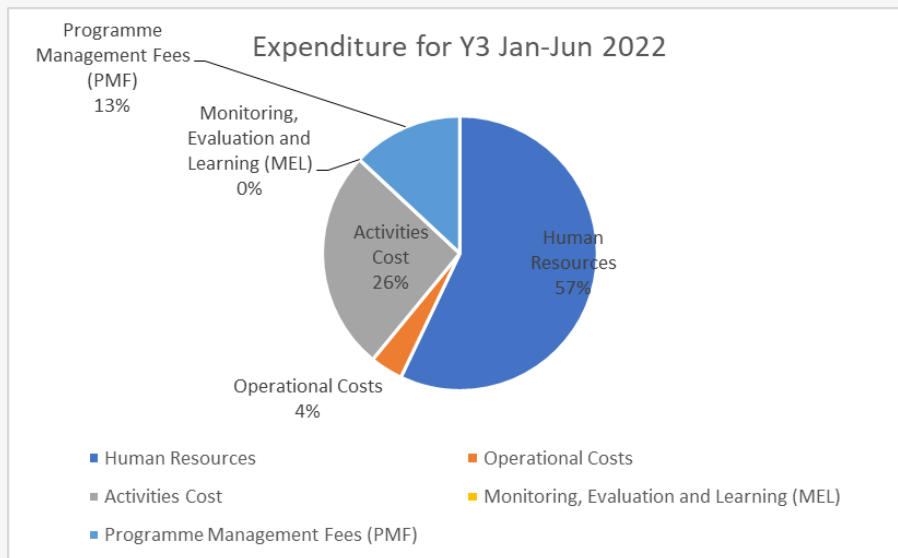
- a. Are PCCOS outputs/activities delivered on-time and on budget?
- b. Is the program well governed, well managed and accountable?
- c. Is PCCOS being implemented in an adaptative manner? How adaptative management practices can be strengthened?

To what extent are the current funding modalities for PCCOS suitable to the achievement of its medium- and long-term outcomes? How could this be improved?

At the time of this evaluation PCCOS was under spent and behind on some implementation targets as reported in the July 2022 progress report. Total project expenditure was at **NZD 1,381,680**<sup>12</sup>. An illustrative breakdown of expenditure in Year 3 (Jan-Jun 2022, NZD603,822) comprised (see **Figure 11**):

- Human resources (NZD**344,563**)
- Operational costs (NZD**23,386**)
- Activities costs (NZD**157,114**)
- Programme Management Fees (NZD**78,759**)
- Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) was Nil for Y3 (Jan-Jun 2022)

<sup>12</sup> This is the sum of Y0 (Jul-Dec 2019) NZD \$40,939, Y1 (Jan-Dec 2020) NZD \$106,475, Y2 (Jan-Dec 2021) NZD \$630,445 and Y3 (Jan-Jun 2022) NZD \$603,822.



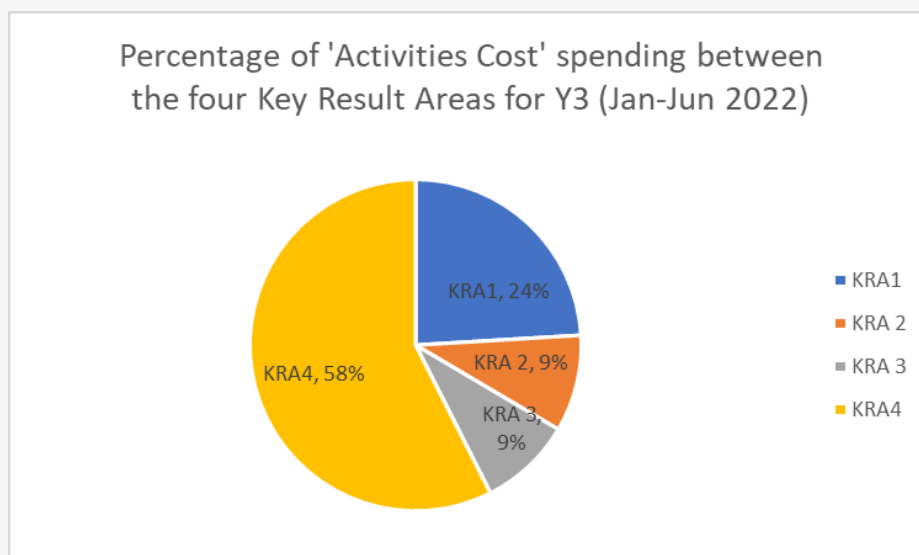
**Figure 11:** Expenditure for Year 3 January 2022 – June 2022

The relatively high proportion of investment in human resources (58%) is consistent with a capacity building program with staff in Suva and Noumea.

A breakdown of expenditure by KRA is indicative of the weight of emphasis in implementation to date (see **Figure 12**<sup>13</sup>):

- **KRA 1** (Countries have reported progress against SDG14 (Life Below Water) using SPC’s ocean science and knowledge): NZD37,776
- **KRA 2** (Ocean science in the Pacific Islands region is coordinated and aligned to the Blue Pacific vision): NZD14,831
- **KRA 3** (PCCOS is a hub for excellence in ocean science in the Pacific island’s region) NZD14,234
- **KRA 4** (Systems and processes are in place for PCCOS to deliver as an integrated ocean programme across SPC) NZD90,273.

<sup>13</sup> Figures are drawn from activity costs.



**Figure 12:** Percentage of 'Activities Cost' spending between the four Key Result Areas for Year 3 January 2022 – June 2022

When considering 'activity costs' alone, over 58% was spent against KRA 4 (see **Section 3.4 Figure 11**), which was reportedly a function of the PCCOS team needing to pivot to an internal focus due to the global pandemic with travel restrictions preventing in-country meetings with national counterparts. Notwithstanding the significant focus on KRA 4, the evaluation team was advised of several opportunities to further strengthen 'systems and processes' (within PCCOS and SPC more broadly) to improve efficiency. For example, some respondents indicated that while the Vanuatu internship program (see **Section 4.1**) usefully provided financial support for interns, they were not adequately trained on basic work processes and skills required to perform their roles, such as time management and sending emails. A second example cited involved the recruitment of a Fijian ECOP in New Caledonia who was unable to commence work due to no working visa being processed.

More broadly, the evaluation team were advised of a view that the broader divisional structure within SPC was at times problematic for a project such as PCCOS, though there was some optimism that the development of the Ocean Flagship initiative may improve this situation.

### Recommendations

- 6 PCCOS should develop a detailed implementation and expenditure plan for remainder of project to optimise achievement of outcomes and address findings of this evaluation.
- 7 PCCOS should develop/refine internal processes and systems in support of key activities such as an on-boarding plan for interns and ECOPs.

### 3.5 IMPACT

In this evaluation, the ‘impact’ criterion was explored through responses to one broad question and four sub-questions:

To what extent is PCCOS progressing towards its long-term outcome and contributing to SPC’s key focus area 2 (Natural resources and biodiversity)?

- a. What factors have contributed to this? What are obstacles? What further support is required?
- b. To what extent have PCCOS services been contributing to young people, and especially young women’s, empowerment?
- c. Have PCCOS activities the potential to contribute to significant positive higher-level effects beyond those identified as expected results?
- d. What opportunities exist to maximise the potential for impact?

As set out in **Section 1.2** (and **Figure 1**), the PCCOS theory of change envisions a future in which SPC member states are more effectively governing and managing ocean resources, informed by science and knowledge brokered by PCCOS. In this evaluation it was simply too early to discern any impact of this nature. To date, the predominant effort and resources have been invested at the foundational (i.e., ‘lower’) levels in the ToC—establishing PCCOS and emphasising coordination and systems within SPC. Further, as discussed in relation to ‘Efficiency’ (**Section 3.4**), implementation was affected by delayed recruitment and then by COVID-19 travel restrictions. A consequence is that Vanuatu is the only member country to substantively engage with PCCOS. Also, as discussed in relation to ‘Effectiveness’ (**Section 3.3**), while there have been some well-regarded capacity building interventions, these are not yet of a scope and scale to have had any significant and lasting effect as framed by the long-term outcome.

This situation is well understood by stakeholders. An SPC Steering Committee member stated:

“For more SPC member states to be effectively implementing science-based governance and management there needs to be a shift in the focus of activities around capacity building and demand driven requests from National counterparts”.

— SPC Steering Committee Member

Notwithstanding the inception-phase delays, the evaluation team learned of multiple efforts by the PCCOS team to reach out to member country counterparts, including during COVID-19 lockdowns, with limited response. It is well recognised that in the Pacific the efficacy of electronic engagement methods is weak. The PCCOS team noted that since the lifting of travel restrictions there has been an encouraging increase in counterpart engagement when face-to-face interactions have been possible. This suggests some basis for optimism about progress towards the medium-term and long-term outcomes during the second half of project funding. However, the evaluation team notes that this optimism must be supported with adequate resources for travel; and there should be a clear and comprehensive strategy to ensure counterpart engagement is well-targeted to trigger demand for the functions and services offered by PCCOS. Such a strategy must go beyond just delivering training and knowledge products (i.e., a so-called ‘supply-side’ approach) to engineering an enabling environment for science-informed ocean governance and management (i.e., a ‘demand-side’ approach). This is a complex undertaking, as discussed in **Section 3.6** and further emphasises the importance of Recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 5.

### 3.6 SUSTAINABILITY

In this evaluation, the ‘sustainability’ criterion was explored through responses to two questions.

To what extent is there an indication of ongoing benefits attributable to the program?

What mechanisms, practices, approaches, or initiatives to which PCCOS has contributed are most likely to be sustained over time and yield long-term benefits to PICTs stakeholders, regional partners, research institutions, and SPC?

Sustainability is a perennially challenging criterion to evaluate in midterm evaluations—and in the case of PCCOS, even more so given the early stage of actual implementation that has been undertaken.

As discussed in **Section 3.5**, the fact that there is limited accrued impact in relation to the long-term outcome means that it was not possible for the evaluation team to form a view about sustainability in relation to science-based governance and management of ocean resources by member countries. It is likely that such a change will require considerable time and resources beyond the life of this MFAT investment.

Nevertheless, the PCCOS team should explore sophisticated ways to engender an enabling environment for science-based ocean management among counterparts. The capacity building interventions already undertaken go some way towards this, but beyond knowledge and skill transfer, international experience indicates that fostering sustainable capacity requires the mobilisation of counterpart leadership figures to authorise and champion the envisaged changes in policy and practice. There may also need to be appropriate management and technical systems established within counterpart agencies to ensure optimal coordination and utilisation of PCCOS services. Further, incentives for counterparts to take on new practices and utilise PCCOS data and information must be apparent to counterparts. Finally, it is necessary for counterparts to allocate sufficient and reliable resources—including human resources—to ensure sustainable change. These factors working in concert are necessary to achieve sustainable institutional change of the nature set out in the PCCOS long-term outcome. Working in this more sophisticated way is challenging and may benefit from collaborating with aligned initiatives in the region.

Notwithstanding the above challenges, there is some evidence that changes in relation to medium terms outcomes in the PCCOS ToC may endure—particularly in relation to internal coordination within SPC such as the establishment of better communication processes, and an ‘entry point’ for external people to find and access SPC data and services. PCCOS is also now included in both the FAME and GEM Business Plans.

Although too early to argue definitively, there is some evidence to suggest that improved regional partnerships may be sustained and generate longer-term benefits. While the ECOPs program has good potential to build and sustain long term change, it would benefit from a clear plan and dedicated investment in order for results to be sustained (see **Section 5.1**).

“I now use PCCOS to access the right people or areas within SPC”.

— CSIRO

At the most fundamental level, sustainability is challenged by virtue of the fact that PCCOS is a donor-funded initiative. Steering Committee members reported to the evaluation team that in the future PCCOS may become funded under core institutional funding arrangements rather than as a donor project. Such a move would improve financial certainty but would likely be contingent on the project first achieving unambiguous results in counterpart agencies in line with the higher order outcomes in the ToC. This further reinforces the point above in relation to generating demand and creating an enabling environment for PCCOS among counterparts in the region.

### Recommendations

- 8 PCCOS should consider developing a more sophisticated approach to strengthening counterpart capacity for science-based ocean governance and management.
- 9 PCCOS should develop a coherent plan to guide ECOP, identifying synergies with similar initiatives such as the PCCC’s capacity building program and the Pacific Climate Alumni Network.

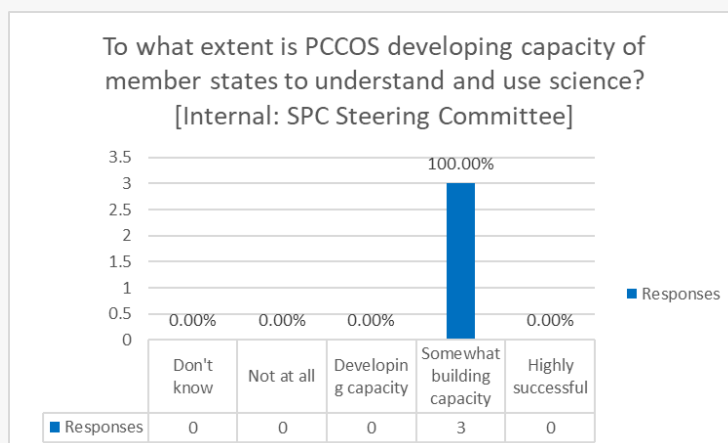
## 4. Case Study: Capacity Building

Support to the Vanuatu Oceans Office; and the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) were reported as relatively 'substantive' capacity building achievements by PCCOS and were explored further to gain a better understanding of some positive outcomes, and to understand the opportunity to apply to remaining countries.

### 4.1 BUILDING CAPACITY OF MEMBER STATES TO USE OCEAN SCIENCE AND DATA TO SUPPORT SDG14

One of the main outcomes for PCCOS is that; *Countries have reported progress against SDG14 using SPC's ocean science and knowledge (KRA 1)*. This is seen as an indicator of progress towards achieving the ultimate end goal in the ToC "More effective implementation of science-based ocean governance and management by SPC's members" and "Sustainable management of ocean resources for the blue pacific continent" (**Figure 1**)

General feedback on the value of capacity building by PCCOS was mostly positive across all internal and external respondents (**Figure 8**). In contrast, the extent that PCCOS is developing capacity of member states to understand and use science was only rated "somewhat building capacity" internally within SPC and not viewed as highly successful yet. This is most likely due to early stage of the program and limited member country participation. As well as there being an internal view that it is divisions within SPC's who's role it is to build capacity rather than PCCOS's.



**Figure 13:** PCCOS' capacity development for member states to understand and use science

The evaluation discussions highlighted some areas where PCCOS could also make changes to improve their general capacity building initiatives including;

- Engaging more frequently with country officers in person as evidenced by a comment from GoPNG "*PNG would like to see more interaction and involvement from PCCOS within PNG.*" Also providing clear annual country work plans
- Developing workplans in advance of consultations ... "*ensuring work programs for countries are planned together and circulated for any given year. This provides more certainty for work programs and deliverables reporting.*" – GoPNG



- The Executive within SPC felt that PCCOS was *“Making some progress [towards capacity building].”* They were in the view that it was *“about developing tools that are easy to use and understand. Not raw data, ... [member countries] need decision ready products. Data is often not delivered in easy policy ready form.”*

More specifically, and at a national level the PCCOS team has been working with to the Vanuatu Oceans Office to build capacity largely through support to the Vanuatu Internship Project. Vanuatu already had an established intern project with nine (9) interns under their guidance. However, there was a lack of ongoing funding to support them, and as such a direct request was made to PCCOS to provide financial support to continue to employ them.

Interns in the Vanuatu Oceans Office are seen to play an important role in data collection, to support SDG14 and National Ocean Policy implementation. Vanuatu acknowledges that without the financial assistance of PCCOS the intern program may not have continued, and as a result, no data would have been collected, and without that there would also be no SDG14 reporting. So, in this regard the support to Vanuatu has been somewhat effective. However, the degree to which implementation and progress against SDG14 targets and NOPs as a result of this support could not be attributed.

In evaluation discussions with various Vanuatu stakeholders, it was highlighted that although PCCOS provided financial support through direct funding of the intern’s wages, a large gap still remained with respect to capacity building and training of the interns.

The...“Main support from PCCOS was the provision of the interns themselves and they then became part of Vanuatu’s in country training program and field trips. PCCOS paid the wages. If PCCOS could fund some of the training field trips it would be better.”

— Vanuatu Oceans Office

“PCCOS has not been able to deliver that training, only funding”.

— SPC Regional Director

The Commissioner of Oceans highlighted the importance of learning through experience (providing training and 'field' work) for graduate interns to help increase their awareness, understanding and also appreciation and advocacy for the ocean.

“These graduates are sitting in the lecture theatre thinking they are swimming, then you give them the opportunity to swim and their appreciation and value of the ocean grows.”

— Commissioner, Vanuatu Oceans Office

It was clear through various discussions with relevant stakeholders, that the provision of training, and more programmatic structure would add significant value to the internship.

There is a similarity to the finding with PCCOS support to the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOPs) program (see **Section 4.2**), and opportunity to look for synergies between the two.

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### Key findings

- Support to member countries (through supporting interns) is somewhat effective in facilitating the collection of data for SDG14 reporting.
  - Training and capacity building should be part of the support provided to countries, and in particular interns.
  - There is opportunity for a stronger alignment with national interns and with ECOP program
-

## 4.2 BUILDING CAPACITY OF EARLY CAREER OCEAN PROFESSIONALS (ECOP)

The PCCOS team have a keen interest in highlighting the voices of the youth, and have shown this through the Intern support (above) as well as through contributions to the Early Career Ocean Professionals (ECOP) program. The vision of the EOCP program is to *elevate and strengthen the diverse perspectives of new generations of ocean professionals through a collective voice, ensuring that knowledge is transferred between experienced professionals and ECOPs.*

Support provided to ECOPs included online networking and linking various ECOPs from within SPC and other CROP agencies to a broader network, as well as organising travel to and attendance at a conference. The evaluation team also heard that PCCOS were instrumental in having the ECOP program endorsed by the UN Ocean Decade as a network program in 2021.

The other key role PCCOS has played in the ECOP program appeared to be their virtual presence and digital communication of relevant conferences, ECOP initiatives, job vacancies and other networking potentials. For a recent oceans conference held in New Zealand, integral support was provided from PCCOS in getting ECOPs to attend and providing funding for this travel.

“I have not had much involvement with PCCOS up until the conference in NZ – only passively followed email chains, I’m aware of some activities but not in detail”

— ECOP

“They do a really good job updating everyone via email. Apart from specifically ECOP initiatives, they [PCCOS] post vacancies for jobs in similar fields and I have a few colleagues who’ve actually got employment from that, so a testament to some of the good work they do in linking ECOP to some of the jobs that are available”

— ECOP

While discussions with ECOPs noted the support of PCCOS for travel and information, the evaluation team heard PCCOS could possibly be more effective supporting the ECOPS through increased visibility and a physical presence in various places through the Pacific.

“I think what they can do to improve is have bit more of a presence... not just to be there present via email and digitally, but every now and then have a symposium, convene a conference where you are creating spaces where we can actually network across the pacific. Bring people together a bit more face-to-face. This is a bit more in tune with the Pacific way”

— ECOP

“Identify what is not being taught in university, so potentially training around communications... policies... what challenges did some of these more established people in the Pacific face...”

[moving forward PCCOS should prioritise]... “Continuing to encourage, empower and build on the capacity of youths and ECOPs to promote their research and provide avenues for Pacific Island researchers to enter spaces they are kept out of / unaware of”

— ECOP

For PCCOS to strengthen its support to the ECOP, it was suggested they do more ‘hands-on’ planning and training. Increasing the presence of spaces where ECOPs can convene, attend conferences, lecture series or panel discussions would also be valuable. It is also acknowledged that the presence of COVID-19 restrictions have put a halt to more of this being possible but, as these restrictions ease, more focus on face-to-face contact and training should be a priority. PCCOS and ECOPs may also benefit from collaborating with aligned initiatives in the region, such as the PCCC and the Alumni Network supported by the Australia Pacific Climate Partnership.

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### Key findings

- Existing support from PCCOS to the ECOP ‘network’ is recognised.
  - PCCOS should continue to encourage, empower and build on the capacity of youths and ECOPs.
  - There is opportunity to strengthen PCCOS’s role supporting ECOPS through more strategic planning and collaborating with aligned initiatives in the region.
  - A greater focus on face-to-face contact, physical presence of PCCOS, training and networking opportunities should be a priority.
  - Opportunity for stronger alignment with national interns (e.g Vanuatu) and with ECOP program.
-

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The report provides the findings of a formative mid-term evaluation of PCCOS against the DAC evaluation criteria. The evaluation team found PCCOS to be a relevant initiative with clear alignment with regional policies and strategies, including internal priorities within SPC. The PCCOS implementing team was highly regarded and worked to strengthen coherence with relevant regional policies and programs, however, there was a diversity of understanding among internal and external stakeholders concerning the precise role and mandate of PCCOS. During the first term the project made some progress against the four KRAs, but implementation delays—contributed by delayed staff recruitment and COVID-19 travel restrictions—mean that considerable refocussing of resources and approaches will be required in order for PCCOS to achieve its outcomes during the remainder of this phase of funding. Greater efficiency of resource deployment and scheduling should improve implementation performance. Implementation emphasis should pivot towards KRAs 1, 2, and 3. Impact and sustainability among member state counterparts could be strengthened by adopting more sophisticated approaches to capacity building than just knowledge and skill transfer; including: mobilising counterpart leaders with authority to champion desired changes; ensuring counterparts can access appropriate management and technical systems to support utilisation of PCCOS initiatives; ensuring counterpart incentives to adopt new practices and knowledge are apparent; allocating sufficient and reliable resources—including human resources. This type of institutional change is significant and it raises the question of if this is within PCCOS's (SPC's) mandate?

Through discussion with SPC's Executive team it was apparent that the role of SPC, and PCCOS are a science agency, and staff are expected to remain neutral and not delve into politics.

"PCCOS role is not to drive particular policy outcomes, it is to make clear what the choices might be, what the implications are... all factual decisions not value choices. We can't get drawn into the politics"

— SPC Executive

## Future considerations

Through the evaluation process a number future considerations and priorities were identified. by respondents for consideration by PCCOS:

- Stay trusted, neutral and within an agreed mandate.
- Coordinate with other integrated programmes (outside SPC) to optimise and maximise the use of shared resources.
- Stronger engagement with policymakers.
- Resource mobilisation and accessing external funding to drive new products, assets and services.
- Deliver SPC members science in easy to access online dashboards, with on ground data use and implementation support.
- Developing easy to use and understand tools based on country needs and capacities. Tools should be decision ready products (not raw data).
- Continue to develop programmes that address the gaps of ocean science in the region; including connected fresh water systems and climate adaptation.
- More research infrastructure and resources to build the program.
- Continuing to encourage, empower and build on the capacity of youths and ECOPs.
- Involve more students and obtain opportunities for furthering research like scholarships, funding to attend conferences and more engagement activities
- In addition to the consortium of partners through SPC which is predominantly on maritime delimitation, PCCOS should also build on the existence of the POA network.

## Recommendations

The evaluation made nine recommendations for consideration by PCCOS/SPC:

1. SPC should continue to work with PIFs in developing the 2050 Implementation Plan, ensuring that PCCOS workplans are clearly defined and aligned.
2. PCCOS should continue to liaise with national government counterparts to ensure workplans are aligned with national priorities.
3. SPC should clarify PCCOS' role and mandate and implement a communication campaign to unify stakeholder understanding about PCCOS vis-à-vis SPC, the Ocean Flagship Program, Decade for Ocean Science and Centre for Excellence for Ocean Science.
4. PCCOS should commission a review of the ToC, with particular reference to the plausible influence that the project might have in member countries.
5. PCCOS should prioritise effort against KRAs 1, 2 and 3 during the remainder of the current funding, especially in relation to building capacity of member states.
6. PCCOS should develop a detailed implementation and expenditure plan for remainder of project to optimise achievement of outcomes and address findings of this evaluation.
7. PCCOS should develop/refine internal processes and systems in support of key activities such as an on-boarding plan for interns and ECOPs.
8. PCCOS should consider developing a more sophisticated approach to strengthening counterpart capacity for science-based ocean governance and management.
9. PCCOS should develop a coherent plan to guide ECOP, identifying synergies with similar initiatives such as the PCCC's capacity building program and the Pacific Climate Alumni Network.

# APPENDIX A:

## Critique of PCCOS Theory of Change

### OVERVIEW

- The PCCOS theory of change (ToC) sets out a long-term outcome underpinned by four medium-term outcomes.
- The four outcomes are to be achieved through delivery of four high-level outputs.

### GENERAL CRITIQUE

- The ToC provides a broad logic for the project, though some causal linkages are long and evaluability of some elements are challenging.
- The ToC diverges from program theory convention in several ways:
  - Outcomes are not phrased as ‘end states’ (*who* will be doing *what* differently in the future).
  - The human actor or ‘subject’ of outcomes is either absent or ambiguous/broad (e.g. “countries”) and hence challenging to evaluate.
  - There is circularity/redundancy in some aspects of the logic (i.e. ‘outputs’ lead to ‘outcomes’ which are substantively the same thing as the underlying outputs).
- As framed, the focus of PCCOS seems to be narrowly on building capacity for SPC members to report against SDG14 and to align with Blue Pacific vision.
- The long-term relevance of PCCOS is defined in terms of member states managing/governing oceans more effectively—rather than in terms of the benefits/value to Pacific communities who depend on healthy oceans for survival and livelihoods (i.e. the ultimate beneficiaries).

### CRITIQUE OF LONG-TERM OUTCOME

- The phrasing of the long-term outcome does not conform to program theory convention insofar as no human subject is defined for the purposes of the significant and lasting change in behaviour or performance anticipated by the project.
  - Phrasing more aligned with program theory convention could be: “*SPC member states are implementing science-based ocean governance and management*”<sup>14</sup>.

### CRITIQUE OF MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 1

- Outcome 1 conforms to program theory convention, but could be strengthened by more precisely defining the actor (i.e. which institutions within “*countries*”?) who will be undertaking the SDC14 reporting.
  - E.g.: “*Pacific maritime ministries are using science and knowledge generated by PCCOS in SDG14 progress reporting*”.

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<sup>14</sup> N.B. even this amended statement pre-supposes that there is clarity/agreement about what constitutes “*science-based*” and “*ocean governance and management*”

### CRITIQUE OF MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 2:

- Outcome 2 will be challenging to evaluate because it does not articulate the actor that will be responsible for the change, and the change itself is imprecisely defined.
- The outcome could be strengthened by stating who within the Pacific Islands region will be 'coordinating and aligning'.
- The current outcome presumes there is clarity/consensus about what alignment with Blue Pacific vision entails, and hence that it is possible to unambiguously determine if/when this has happened.
  - A stronger phrasing could be: "*Relevant Pacific Ocean science institutions are aligned with the Pacific Blue vision*".

### CRITIQUE OF MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 3:

- Outcome 3 restates Output 3. The practical effect of this to create circular logic (i.e A leads to B, but B = A). Regardless, from a technical standpoint, Outcome 3 is an 'output' since it concerns a deliverable of the project. It is not an 'outcome' because it does not describe a change in counterpart performance or behaviour as a result of the project deliverables.
- Outcome 3 should be removed.

### CRITIQUE OF MEDIUM-TERM OUTCOME 4:

- Outcome 4 restates Output 4 and should be removed for the same reasons as for outcome 3 above.

### CRITIQUE OF OUTPUTS:

- The outputs are broadly acceptable insofar as they set out what the program will deliver.
- Output 1 uses the word "*support*" which may require further definition.
  - An alternative or more precise phrasing could be: '*PCCOS is generating ocean science and knowledge to facilitate Pacific Island reporting against SDG14*'.
- Output 2 is not a grammatically correct sentence and is ambiguous in its meaning.
  - Suggestion: '*PCCOS is facilitating SPC member alignment with the Blue Pacific Vision*'.
- Output 3: the word 'establish' is likely meaningless for the purposes of output monitoring since it was delivered in 2017 when the Pacific Community Conference agreed to create PCCOS.
  - Suggestion: '*Promote [or extend] PCCOS services among relevant science and maritime organisations in the Pacific*'.
- Output 4 is acceptable provided that the 'systems and processes' that are the subject of the output are well understood/defined.
  - N.B. in program theory convention, the establishment of internal systems and processes is ordinarily framed as an 'activity' which in turn enables the program to produce deliverables/outputs.



## REFERENCES

- SPC (2021) The Pacific Community's Strategy 2022 – 2031 (SPC Strategic Plan)
- SPC (2005) Pacific Islands Regional Ocean Policy and Framework for Integrated Strategic Action. CROP Marine Sector Working Group
- Pacific Islands Forum 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent

### **MEL documents provided by PCCOS:**

- PCCOS Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Plan, Version 5.0, December 2021
- PCCOS Quarterly Review July-September 2021
- PCCOS Quarterly Review October-December 2021
- PCCOS Quarterly Review January-March 2022
- PCCOS 2022 Work Plan (excel workbook)
- PCCOS Business Plan 2020-2023
- PCCOS 2021 Results Reporting Template (excel workbook)
- Financial Report-J00200 PCCOS-as at Dec 2020 (excel workbook)
- Financial Report-J00200 PCCOS-as at June 2022 (excel workbook)
- PCCOS 2019 Workplan Report Annex1 - RF as of 31 Dec 2019 (excel workbook)
- PCCOS 2019 Workplan Report - Jul-Dec (WP version 3.1)
- PCCOS 2020 Workplan Report - 1 July 2019 - 30 June 2020 (WP version 4.0)
- PCCOS 2020-2021 Workplan Report submitted to MFAT July 2021
- PCCOS 2021-2022 Progress Report

### **Publications provided by PCCOS:**

- Pacific Solutions to Save Our Ocean Factsheet
- A pathway to effective regional ocean governance in the Pacific region
- Brochure PCCOS eVersion April2022
- Pacific Community Ocean Decade meeting, final report
- Pacific Islands Ocean Acidification Centre brochure June2022
- Pacific Solutions to Save Our Ocean IOM Programme Leaflet
- PIOAC poster for Peru Poster final web version

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