

**Review of Australia's Approach to the Pacific
Regional Organisations
(PROs)**

SPREP ELEMENT

November 2005

SPREP

Support for SPREP among members is mixed. SPREP enjoys strong support from Government and non-government organisations in Australia. Given the political sensitivity of Pacific environment issues, SPREP has provided a useful mechanism for disseminating information on issues such as Australia's position on Kyoto and a mechanism for implementing Australian funded initiatives. SPREP has provided well considered and often moderated regional positions in international forums, and has played a valuable facilitation role for Australia when consulting with the more vocal Pacific nations.

Some other SPREP members, including countries where projects are being implemented, are more critical citing lack of consultation and general understanding of the environmental needs and issues facing the region. The PIC representatives that attend the annual meetings are not always aware of the role SPREP plays in the international forums, or see the value in such a role. Rather they want to see what tangible impact they are achieving on the ground at the national level.

Some criticism in the region may be attributable to a lack of understanding by PICS of SPREP's role and consequently misinformed PIC expectations. SPREP's role of providing information primarily through workshops and fulfilling the role of coordination and support at international forums does not appear sufficient for Pacific partners to commit significant financial support. SPREP has responded by doing some practical projects, with mixed success.

Some activities undertaken by SPREP staff are in fact "badged" as separate projects, and may not be recognised as being SPREP activities.

The Review team believe the role of SPREP in the region requires clarification amongst its members. Following this, a communications strategy should be developed so that members and partners who engage with SPREP (including those who do not attend annual meetings) can develop a better understanding of SPREP and ideally encourage a more beneficial relationship.

Donors do not consider SPREP as an agency that should "implements projects" rather that is considered the role of national governments. However SOPAC and SPC do implement activities based on certain criteria. The Australian Government's position with respect to SPREP's role in implementation vs facilitating national capacity needs to be reviewed, be realistic and be communicated.

There is a need for clarification of the various Plans and processes within SPREP. SPREP is required to develop a 5 year Action Plan for endorsement by the region. The Action Plan was developed in consultation with the PICs in response to their identified needs and priorities. The process for development of the Strategic Plan did not allow a similar consultation process to be undertaken with PIC partners and there remains confusion in the region and within the organisation between the Action Plan and the Strategic Plan.

SPREP management did in fact seek additional resources to undertake a more extensive consultative process. However other organizations developed plans as part of the regular regional consultative processes without additional resources from Australia.

In their current format, the dates and sequencing of the Action Plan and Strategic Plan remain counter intuitive. This may partly be due to the language used, but the link between the Action Plan and the Strategic Plans is neither clear or logical.

The DG SPREP indicated some of this confusion may be clarified at the next Council meeting where they propose to “re badge” the Action Plans as “Priority Issues” with the Strategic Plans being derived from these issues.

The Review of SPREP in 2000 was critical that the organisation was Projects based and SPREP continues to have a high level of Project based funding. Australia provides approximately 20 per cent of SPREPs funding. Some staff consider they are accountable to the donor agency rather than to SPREP management, and work very much in isolation from the rest of the organisation. It appears there has been some progress since 2000 with some staff indicating the agency was working better across programs. The move to Strategic Planning and program based funding has encouraged staff to work together, however the silos still remain and there is still a way to go.

The process of developing the Strategic plans were seen to be, and were in fact, driven by Australia as a donor. The actual process by which AusAID moved to program funding in SPREP may also have contributed to some confusion within the organisation.

With hindsight the initial Adviser AusAID sent to SPREP to support the process did not have the appropriate skills in organisational change or strategic programmatic planning at the organizational level. Recognising this deficiency, AusAID and NZaid subsequently provided SPREP with support from organizational change advisers, and technical support from the AusAID environment adviser.

While NZ have indicated an intention to move to program funding with SPREP they have not done so to date. NZaid continue to provide project based funding as they consider the SPREP program strategies and the programmatic approach in the organisation still require development, particularly with respect to performance indicators. This message does not seem to have been understood at all levels with some staff being confused and receiving mixed messages concerning NZaid support.

AusAID staff concerned by what appeared to be a lack of progress in development of the Strategic Plans and sensing some resistance to the process reverted to close scrutiny of management and financial statements of the organization. This in turn was perceived as micromanagement rather than the principle of moving to more “strategic engagement”. Hence the relationship has at times been strained and not always constructive.

AusAID has therefore sent mixed messages to SPREP. This was also the case initially with the process in FFA where the same Adviser was provided and FFA were cautious regarding AusAID’s motives and intent.

There is a need to ensure awareness and understanding within the GOA of what the program approach is and the rationale behind it, and lift the level of engagement to more strategic dialogue.

There is a need to **clarify the roles of the various Australian counterpart agencies**. Currently SPREP has links into a range of Government and non government organisations, academics and individuals across Australia, with little or no coordination. Australian representatives contact SPREP in regard to issues as diverse as whaling, climate change, hazardous waste, bio diversity and coral reef conservation.

There is a need for a clear focal point for SPREP within the Australian Government. SPREP staff remain unclear of the relative roles and responsibilities in Australian bureaucracy. While the discussion of donor versus member is often discounted as irrelevant, in some agencies it may be useful to differentiate between the arms of government, while of course encouraging a whole of government approach to policy.

The Review team recommend that the relevant Australian government agencies formulate a whole of government position on agencies' respective roles on how to better manage and coordinate their interactions with SPREP. .

Environment is a difficult issue for development practitioners and a difficult area to demonstrate outcomes. Pacific Island communities and countries often provide lip service to the importance of the environment. The policy and rhetoric are usually in evidence, but the political will and resources to back the statements are often lacking. Similarly it is a difficult cross cutting issue that some consider needs to be mainstreamed rather than addressed in isolation.

A Learning Organisation

SPREP currently does not have a program for capacity building, development or training for its professional staff. As a result, after 6 years in the organization, staff are often out of date. It is important that all regional staff are given appropriate training to maintain professional skills. Professional staff development is of benefit to both the agency and the region.

For example the move to program approaches requires a high level of strategic reporting against identified "performance indicators". While professional staff can grasp and accept the concepts and needs, they may not be experienced in developing performance indicators, or clear outcome focused reporting styles. As one staff member acknowledged, "we know we need to improve quality of reports, we are just not sure how to do it."

Consideration could be given as to how SPREP could benefit from coordination / collaboration with the significant Institutional Strengthening Projects underway in Samoa through the AusAID and NZaid bilateral programs.

All Learning organisations require a system of self assessment. Through regular monitoring and evaluation, providing feedback on performance, an organisation

continuously improves. The evaluation and assessment processes in SPREP for individual programs and for the organisation also need to be revised.

Management Structure and Staffing.

The departure of several senior staff and the time required to recruit 3 new program managers has meant the organisation has suffered from a lack of middle level management for a considerable period of time while the process of change in relation to the move to Strategic Programming has been underway.

The new Corporate Manager commenced in June and the two other program managers are due to commence work in July and August respectively.

It would seem appropriate to allow the new management team time to come together and address the issues confronting SPREP without placing additional burden on management at this time. The current Director is acutely aware of the organisation's perceived shortcomings and with the new management team in place, has indicated a strong commitment to organisational reform.

With the arrival of the 3 new program managers, the Director foresaw that they would operate as team managers for their own programs, allowing the Director and Deputy to manage the bigger picture issues and donor consultations. The requirement for SPREP teams to get out into the region and develop a better appreciation of needs and issues, and develop a stronger profile was also recognized and would be a priority over the next 12 months.

Funding

It is recommended that a three year MOU be negotiated with SPREP acknowledging and encouraging further positive reform. However the MOU will not specify funding levels beyond the first 12 months and will be subject to a rigorous annual performance assessment. Specific actions required under the MOU would include an internal systems review within 12 months. This review should consider how the organisation needs to modify structures and processes to ensure it is performing effectively against agreed program strategies, and can report clearly against progress. The review would consider issues such as delegations and HR development for staff and evaluation and assessment systems.

The MOU will also specify an independent corporate review within 2 years involving an independent team approach similar to the SPC corporate review currently underway. ie a significant review which would include PIC, private sector and donor representatives.

Recommendations

Enter into a 3 yr MOU:

a) within the first 12 months SPREP should undertake an internal Review of systems, structures, processes.

b) in late 2006 / early 2007, SPREP should undertake a major Corporate Review.

- AusAID Canberra and Post continue close liaison with SPREP with respect to progress in moving to program approaches. Continue Annual Donor meetings with AusAID that may include NZ.
- Given the importance and diverse nature of the SPREP / Australian relationship, Australian agencies should formulate a whole of government position on agencies' interactions with SPREP.
- The MOU should acknowledge that the development of strategic program plans is still work in progress, and include a commitment from SPREP to further develop the programmatic approach across the organisation, including performance indicators.
- The MOU with all PROs will acknowledge the intention of the Pacific Plan to recommend the "development of an appropriate regional institutional framework or architecture that is appropriate for the new forms of regionalism in the Pacific".