



## Spawning aggregation closures for the live reef fish fishery in Solomon Islands

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A landmark agreement was reached last November in Honiara by the management workshop for the live reef food fish trade (LRFFT) in Solomon Islands. The LRFFT targets three groupers in Solomon Islands: *Plectropomus areolatus*, *Epinephelus fuscoguttatus* and *E. polyphemadion*. The management workshop unanimously agreed that the spawning aggregations of these groupers would be totally protected. Considering the LRFFT fishery focuses heavily on targeting spawning aggregations, the decision was remarkable. Protection would be ensured through a total ban on all fishing at those sites identified by traditional resource owners as spawning aggregation sites for the three target species. It was agreed that the fishing ban would be for a 10 day period over the new moon, for three consecutive new moons each year, to coincide with the likely spawning aggregation times of the three species. Sites and spawning aggregation times would be determined by resource owners and fishers in conjunction with Fisheries Division officers.

The workshop was the culmination of a two year project 'Sustainable Management of the Live Reef Fish Trade-Based Fishery in Solomon Islands', a collaboration between Southern Cross University in Australia and Solomon Islands Fisheries Division, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR, Project No. ANRE1/1998/094). Over 30 representatives, ranging from traditional resource owners, LRFFT operators and government officials to international researchers, participated in the two day workshop, which was run by Ryan Donnelly (Southern Cross University) and Greg Bennett (S.I. Fisheries Division), and chaired by Melita Samoilys

(Project Seahorse, McGill University & Zoological Society of London).

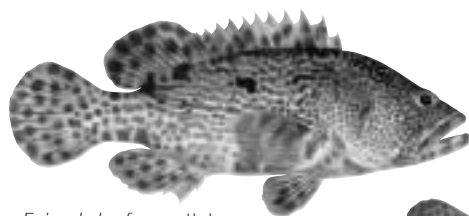
The workshop participants were responsible for devising a LRFFT management and monitoring plan that recognises customary ownership. The resulting draft plan adopted two main conservation strategies: license limitations (initially proposed at two for the country), and seasonal area closures to protect spawning aggregations.

Licenses will operate through Reef Owner Agreements, with technical advice provided by the Fisheries Division. This gives traditional resource owners considerable control over the operation of the fishery.

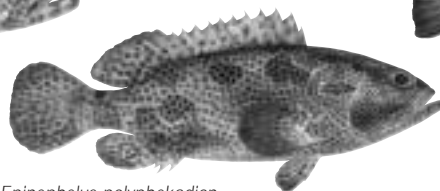
The questions now are how and when is the draft management plan likely to be implemented? The termination of the ACIAR project has meant that the researchers are no longer working on this project because they were all on contract, therefore continuity is an issue. The Solomon Islands Fisheries Division remains under-resourced, and therefore is unlikely to be able to pursue the plan to completion. If the workshop's hopeful outcomes are to have any real impact, further external funding and technical assistance is likely to be necessary.

For further information, please contact:

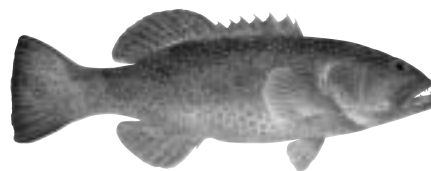
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*Epinephelus fuscoguttatus*



*Epinephelus polyphemadion*



*Plectropomus areolatus*