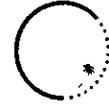


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South Pacific Bureau  
for Economic Co-operation



South Pacific Commission



Economic & Social  
Commission for Asia and the Pacific



United Nations  
Environment Programme

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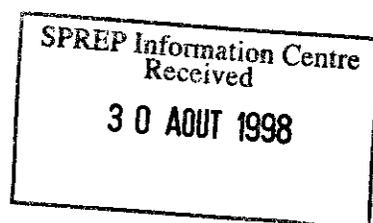
## South Pacific Regional Environment Programme

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SPREP/Country Report 5  
Original: French

COUNTRY REPORT No.5

FRENCH POLYNESIA



South Pacific Commission  
Noumea, New Caledonia  
November 1980

ORIGINAL : FRENCH

SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Noumea, New Caledonia.

FRENCH POLYNESIA

COUNTRY REPORT

SOUTH PACIFIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

FRENCH POLYNESIA

FRENCH POLYNESIA AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

French Polynesia comprises approximately 130 islands, including one hundred of which are atolls and thirty high islands somewhat larger.

In fact, all these islands are very small and many of the mountainous islands are so rugged that a large part of their surface area remains inaccessible.

Under such conditions, natural terrestrial resources are scarce, and require protection and appropriate environmental management.

Despite this need, no "overall environmental policy" exists in French Polynesia for the time being, which, strictly speaking, would imply the definition of priorities concerning the protection of natural resources and their distribution in space, the enactment of comprehensive legislation, and the application of enforcement procedures by a Territorial department especially empowered for this purpose.

However, protection does exist for a certain number of ad hoc problems and only with the passing of years and acquisition of more experience in this field can all actions be integrated to form the core of a general environmental protection policy in the Territory.

I. PRESENT STATE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN FRENCH POLYNESIA

A certain number of administrative regulations exist for the organisation of environmental protection.

1.1 Protection of flora

This concerns the forestry sector, straying animals and quarantine procedures for plant imports.

- Forestry regulations

Control of wood felling, clearing and bush fires combine nine legal instruments passed by the Territorial Assembly between the years 1942 and 1978.

- Straying animals

Controlled by virtue of a local decree passed in 1936.

- Plant quarantine regulations (imports)

Basically designed to prevent the introduction of plant pests, they also ensure overall protection for flora; combine several decrees, of which the three main ones date from 1924, 1968 and 1965.

1.2 Protection of fauna

This concerns hunting, fishing and the introduction of live animals.

- Hunting regulations

Originally, hunting was controlled by a decree of 1896 applicable to what were then the French Pacific settlements.

This legal instrument was supplemented by two local decrees in 1974 to prohibit wild boar hunting with dogs at certain times of the year, and in 1967 to prohibit the hunting and destruction of all species of birds in French Polynesia.

- Fishing regulations

A decree of 1933 controlling fresh water fishing in the French Pacific settlements was supplemented in 1950 by a local decree concerning the exploitation of certain freshwater fish and shellfish.

- Regulations on the importation of live animals

Two local texts in 1977 and 1978 laid down conditions for the import of live animals in order to prevent introduction of diseases and disturbance of existing ecosystems.

### 1.3 Protection of the sea against pollution

#### 1.3.1 Definition of risks

Geographically removed from major industrial and commercial zones, French Polynesia is thus in theory a low-risk area nevertheless subject to specific problems by reason of its particular geomorphology (atolls, lagoons) and tropical climate.

Territorial development, at present, places the coastal and lagoon marine environment at risk through

- the concentration of sea traffic and, more particularly, large ships using heavy hydrocarbons as fuel, at the harbour entrance of Papeete,
- jumping of hydrocarbons, and particularly heavy hydrocarbons, during shipping and unloading,
- discharge of urban sewage which can contain highly active products (pesticides, detergents, etc.)
- excess sedimentation in water caused by the acceleration of natural erosion (layout of roads, constructions, etc.) and dredging with excavation of coral marl.

#### 1.3.2 Side effects

Any coastal construction, filling, concrete reef works disturb the lagoon ecosystem and has an adverse effect on :

- normal renewal of water which prevents stratification and over-heating,
- growth of coral essential for reef survival,
- marine wildlife and annual recruitment of young individuals (fish, shellfish, etc.)

In addition, the occurrence of ciguatera (fish poisoning) is often related to foreshore "developments".

#### 1.3.3 Risk areas in the Territory

On the island of Tahiti, the area between FAAA airport and Pointe Venus which includes the harbour and its industrial zone, seems to be exposed to most risks.

The concrete covering of the reef between the passes of Papeete and Taaone will, once completed, increase the confinement of the lagoon waters whilst accelerating the various processes of environmental pollution and retention of toxic elements and pathogenic germs.

The other high islands in the Territory, due to their under-population, are at less risk, but the atolls, on the other hand, are extremely vulnerable since their existence depends solely on the coral metabolism.

1.3.4 Legislation in force

Non enactment of the decree of 12 April 1965 establishing the minimum size of ships other than tankers, which fall subject to the law of 26 December 1964 concerning dumping, limits the scope of the law in Polynesia.

Concerning accidental pollution, the law of 26 December 1964, modified on 16 May 1973 and 2 January 1979 concerning marine pollution by oil, is enforced in the Territory. Hence, since 8 September 1980, an order from the Prime Minister brought about the creation in the French Overseas Departments and Territories of the twofold POLMAR Plan : a POLMAR sea plan and POLMAR land plan, each accompanied by a project for assistance.

However, the International Convention of 12 May 1954 for the prevention of pollution of the sea by oil which is in force in France, has not yet been enforced in the Territory.

Territorial legislation exists for the protection of shorelines, extraction of aggregates and the dumping of chemical products.

1.4 Protection of the marine environment

Protective legislation concerning fishing and aquaculture includes :

- sanitary regulations for aquaculture stations,
- research in the marine environment,
- fisheries and aquaculture regulations for the protection of species,
- rational management of living open-sea and coastal resources.

1.5 Prevention of risks caused by establishments listed as dangerous, noxious and unhygienic

Environmental protection against industrial pollution comes under this provision which enables any activity involving hazards to nature or possible nuisance to the surrounding area to be inspected and investigated.

Legislation applicable in this field emanates from the Territorial Development Code established by a resolution passed by the Territorial Assembly on 8 April 1961.

## II. INSTITUTIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

The status of French Polynesia (Law No. 77-772 of 12 July 1977) gives full power to the Territory in environmental matters.

Several territorial administrative departments are presently responsible for enforcing directives and regulations in this field :

- the Department of Public Works,
- the Department of Territorial Development,
- the Department of Rural Economy,
- the Fisheries Department,
- the Department of Public Health.

Together with these territorial departments, some state departments (under direct control of France) are also concerned with environmental protection, namely :

- the Department of Maritime Affairs,
- the Public Security Office.

## III. EFFECTIVENESS OF PROTECTION

### 3.1 Environmental Policy

The preparation of the Eighth Economic and Social Development Plan and the implementation of a Territorial Plan demonstrated the need for a real environmental policy in French Polynesia, which has often been implicit but not clearly defined up till now.

In coming weeks, Territorial leaders will decide on the aims and objectives to pursue in this field which is included in the constituent chapters of the Territorial Plan.

### 3.2 Legislation in force

Legislation covers virtually every area where the quality of life is endangered.

However, two basic observations should be made :

- in certain well-defined fields, additional legislation would render official action more efficient;
- a merging revision or updating of all environmental texts should be undertaken.

### 3.3 Enforcement

Administrative arrangements for the implementation of environmental policy are of very variable effectiveness according to the area considered.

More generally speaking, a drastic shortage of monitoring and control staff is to blame for a certain lack of effectiveness. Furthermore, it would seem essential for regulations to be backed up by adequate financial support to ensure their effective and sustained application.

## IV. MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AFFECTING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

These problems can be classified according to the two principal types of environment :

- terrestrial environment,
- marine environment.

### 4.1 Problems related to the terrestrial environment

Most high islands are so rugged that human settlement has been restricted to the coastal fringe and, consequently, environmental problems related to development are confined to the coastal plain and the lagoon. The inland area is generally protected by its inaccessibility and suffers little degradation.

On the high islands, the main problem is caused by the high population density on the coastal belt which has resulted in the replacement of the valuable indigenous forest, firstly by coconut groves and agriculture, and secondly, in the most populated areas by villages and townships. The second problem is soil degradation, a particularly rapid process under tropical conditions which started in French Polynesia as a result of bush fires or overgrazing. On most of the high islands vegetation on the lower slopes has been completely destroyed by uncontrolled bush fires, usually deliberately started to clear land for agriculture or clean coconut groves. Over vast areas and on the whole surface of several small islands (Mangareva, Tubuai, Bora Bora), the forest has been replaced by bracken heaths and occasionally by denuded zones subjected to active erosion. This phenomenon entails extremely grave consequences, firstly, rapid degradation of soils, thus preventing the rehabilitation of the original forest.

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