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Traditional practices combined to science based management in the governance of marine areas in the Pacific ocean

Virginie Tilot de Grissac

Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France

Academie des Sciences d'Outre-Mer

Traditional knowledge (TK) and practices have been developed from experience gained over centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment in the Pacific. Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) consider themselves resource custodians, and principal rights holders rather than stakeholders, and may have their own customary decision-making processes leading at a regional level with the concept of oceanian sovereignty in the Pacific. TK has complemented science in the protection of biodiversity (development of the Nagoya Protocol, designation of EBSAs, ILBI/BBNJ instrument, IPBES assessments), as well as in climate action (Paris Agreement, New Zealand Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act 2019), fisheries management (NOAA <https://voices.nmfs.noaa.gov>), mineral resources management (Inuit Circumpolar Council), damage compensation (Local Communities in China) and recently the high seas treaty (the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) signed at the United Nations in June 2024. Also, the implementation plan for the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development defines “Ocean science” broadly to include “local and indigenous knowledge” alongside western science and “recognises, respects and embraces local and indigenous knowledge.” It is now commonplace that Island states of the Pacific have the obligation to incorporate TK into their national marine policies and the duty to consult and involve IPLCs in decision-making relating to offshore activities, as they would be directly affected by such activities or as an encroachment of their spiritual and cultural connection to the marine environment, including pertaining to the protection of culturally significant marine species that migrate through high seas water columns.