

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION**

**TWENTY-FOURTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES**  
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 3-7 August 1992)

**COUNTRY STATEMENT**

**FIJI**

Fiji's ninth national 5-year development plan finished in 1990 and the Fisheries Division, with other branches of Government, moved to an annual planning process in 1991, a process guided by regular national summits and consultation with industry. There has been no sharp change in direction from previous years. The aims of the Division are based firmly on objectives developed over the course of previous Development Plans, which have been in support of increasing employment, developing exports and adding value, whilst promoting conservation.

However, there have been developments in the fisheries sector which have necessitated a gradual change in the balance of emphasis put on these different objectives. For example, as the sector becomes increasingly developed and commercialised, fishermen will become increasingly able to support their own infrastructural and capital development, whilst certain natural resources will come under greater stress. The Fisheries Division is still very much a development branch of Government, but must also ensure that legislative and procedural mechanisms are in place to ensure that the maximum long-term economic benefit can be gained from these resources.

1991 was an interesting year for the commercial fishery. The beche-de-mer export industry continued its steady decline following the dramatic rise to a peak of over 1,000 tonnes of dried product exported in 1988. 1991 confirmed fears that the "boom" in longline and bottom-fishing enterprises in 1989 and 1990 was perhaps a little premature. However, the problems with this fishery, exporting chilled tuna and snapper, were commercial rather than resource-based.

Fiji's mainstay export fisheries, skipjack and albacore tuna for canning, are comparatively long-established and continued at much the same level in 1991. 1990/91 was a good season for skipjack catches by the pole and line boats, but the value of this important fishery is threatened by the increasing number of purse-seiners operating elsewhere in the Pacific, and worries about export market saturation. On the other hand, with the cessation in driftnetting, albacore prices show promise of holding or even increasing.

Fiji's other main fishery export commodity is trochus shell and trochus shell buttons, and this industry also had severe problems in 1991 following a huge drop in the world market price to around half of 1990 levels. More than one button factory closed its doors in 1991.

In the domestic fishery, 1991 was characterised by increasing worries about the status of inshore fishery resources. Whilst Fiji's reefs and lagoons are generally fished at levels which are overall much below the level of optimum sustainable yield for the whole ecosystem, concerns about localised overfishing prompted several customary fishing rights areas (qoliqoli) to restrict the use of gillnets or limit the number of commercial fishermen in those qoloqoli.

During 1991 small-scale commercial (artisanal) fisheries production decreased by 7% to 6009 tonnes, and the value increased by 1% to approximately F\$21.5 million. A comparatively large decrease in fin-fish production was partly offset by an increase in non-fish (shellfish and crustaceans) production. Domestic fin-fish production has declined in each of the last two years, but this is the first time that the decrease has been significant. The shortfall is made even more significant by the fact that domestic fin-fish production showed an increasing trend throughout the 1980's. The decrease in production has yet to be elucidated, but appears to be in large part due to decreased fishing effort following bans on gillnetting in some major traditional fishing grounds, and the escalating cost of "goodwill" payments to obtain consent to fish in traditional fishing grounds.

However, domestic fish prices have risen greatly over the last three years, and for individual fishermen the increase in value should offset the effects of increased costs and limitations on fishing.

In the industrial sector, the local tuna catch increased by 17% to 8,578 tonnes. Longline albacore tuna landings were up by 25% to 4,150 tonnes and the pole and line skipjack tuna landings were up by 10% to 4,428 tonnes. The PAFCO tuna cannery increased its tuna intake by 9% to 17,070 tonnes and sold a creditable F\$48.5 million worth of canned tuna, mainly to export markets (F\$47.55 million) in the United Kingdom and Canada. PAFCO throughput is expected to increase with the completion of major upgrading to Levuka coldstore facilities around May 1992.

1991 has been a difficult year for the Fisheries Division itself. Staffing levels were consistently 75% or less of establishment despite a steadily increasing workload arising from the commissioning of new iceplants and fisheries stations, the increased amount of law-enforcement work demanded, and rapid growth in aquaculture. Operating budget allocations declined in real terms over 1990 and the Division will have to think very hard about the type of service it provides to the public in 1992. Consolidation into the essential "governmental" functions of fisheries management, monitoring and law-enforcement would eventually be required in a fully commercially-developed fishery, but the Fiji fishery is not yet at that stage.

1992 will be a challenging year for the Fisheries Division.