

Burma and the Philippines. Personally, I'd have preferred a greater opportunity for informal networking—if refreshments were provided just outside the meeting rooms, instead of several minutes walk away, this might have been easier.

There was evidence of the dissociation of academic research from farm-based research, fuelled in part by the secrecy that many pearl companies see necessary for their eminence.

Notwithstanding the several collaborative projects described above, there is still information being tied up for years that would benefit the pearling industry as a whole and its competitive position with respect to other jewellery industries.

Some academic research could benefit immediately from knowledge common among pearl farmers, and producers are only now coming to realise the usefulness of studies begun decades ago on the structure of nacre and the pearl formation process.

Bio-coated nucleus is a current hot topic (following Japanese studies reported ten years ago in the open literature), of which there was no mention at the conference, although many farms are trying out this approach. These illustrate the need for better exchange of information; a need only partially satisfied by WAS '99.

(Abstracts from WAS '99 are presented on pages 24–36, in the Abstracts section, Ed.)



Employment levels in pearl culture in French Polynesia: a correction

Dear Sir,

I read your article 'Pearls vs. Tuna' in the SPC Pearl Oyster Bulletin no. 11 from July 1998 with great interest. While the pearl culture industry is developing rapidly in French Polynesia, I feel that your figures concerning employment in this sector are, to say the least, optimistic, i.e. you spoke of 23,000 to 34,000 jobs created 'on the outlying atoll islands'.

Almost all pearl farms are located in the Tuamotu and Gambier island groups that only had 15,370 inhabitants at the time of the 1996 census. The labour force represents about 42% of this population, i.e. 6427 people, from which must be deducted all those who do not making a living from pearl culture as not all of the islands in these groups are suitable for this industry.

It is generally estimated that the number of pearl culture-related jobs is between 3000 and 4000. Your estimate seems to have been extrapolated from a 1989 figure to which you applied the production growth rate, but it seems that increased production was the result of very large pearl farms using increasingly modern methods which make possible scale economies and significant

increases in productivity. Family production, which is more job-intensive, accounts for only 10 to 20% of total production.

It certainly is true that pearl culture has led to spectacular repopulating of these island groups. Between 1988 and 1996, the population increased 106% on Apataki, 80% on Arutua, 30% on Kaukura, 88% on Fakarava, 191% on Kauhei, 75% in the Gambier Islands, 57% on Makemo, 132% on Ahe, 79% on Manihi, 44% on Makatea, and 46% on Rangiroa. These figures, which are themselves remarkable, demonstrate the benefits of pearl culture for the islands concerned. But they only involve a small part of French Polynesia and I do not believe that indirect jobs are on the scale you suggest as storage and marketing of this light-weight product require a much less elaborate infrastructure and less manpower than is needed for the tuna industry.

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