

One of these agreements is for research on pearl oyster mortality, which is regarded as high priority, since pearl farming is French Polynesia's top-ranking export activity. In 1985, massive mortality occurred in pearl farms on several atolls, and studies undertaken to date have failed to establish the causes of this mortality and find appropriate remedies.

Although the phenomenon has not recurred since, there is still enough concern about it for a comprehensive research programme, following on from the limited investigations carried out so far, to be included in the State-Territory development plan.

The programme's three main aims will be:

- to determine the direct causes of pearl oyster mortality by studying the functioning of the atoll/lagoon ecosystem;
- to learn more about pearl oysters in their natural environment and under farm conditions;
- to investigate the effects of pollution.

The programme will be conducted by EVAAM (Etablissement de valorisation des activités aquacoles et maritimes) and other local and metropolitan research institutions (ORSTOM, EPHE, VFP...). The management committee appointed by France and French Polynesia met for the first time last January, when it decided that Stage 1 of the research would be largely completed in 1992 (even before the relevant Agreement was formally signed, field work had begun at Takapoto and Rangiroa).

Stage 2 will commence around 15 February 1993 and be based on the 1992 findings.

The 'Comprehensive pearl oyster research programme', as it is called, will have no less than 18 different field components involving the co-operation of a large number of laboratories, many of them located in French Polynesia.

It will cost 210 million CFP francs for stage 1 and 135.5 million CFP francs for stage 2, most of the funding being provided by MEDETOM and FIDES, as well as by the French Ministry for Research and Technology.

French Polynesian cultured pearl export statistics

Source: 'Te Avei'a'
Institut Territorial Statistique
Tahiti, French Polynesia

Cultured pearls exported from French Polynesia

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Volume (kg)													
1986	2.5	50.1	0.7	0.9	0.0	9.2	0.0	0.6	3.4	21.7	9.0	5.7	103.8
1987	99.6	1.3	19.0	4.2	0.2	0.1	12.9	83.4	24.8	32.5	68.4	61.7	408.1
1988	35.3	1.0	23.1	1.5	7.4	8.0	5.4	69.2	116.0	93.4	5.7	80.7	446.7
1989	28.8	4.8	2.8	0.8	10.8	11.9	15.9	242.8	56.2	118.1	16.5	113.0	622.4
1990	13.8	8.1	5.7	5.5	13.2	13.1	196.1	95.9	11.0	158.0	56.0	23.3	599.7
1991	134.0	0.7	6.4	21.9	14.0	22.9	32.9	51.9	92.0	366.1			742.8
Value (million CFP)													
1986	16.9	477.6	5.1	1.7	0.0	130.9	0.4	14.3	8.6	205.4	78.9	104.3	1044.1
1987	593.7	17.2	96.6	13.3	1.4	1.6	78.7	425.7	140.1	221.2	411.0	251.0	2251.5
1988	119.3	4.3	139.4	7.0	94.9	29.5	29.6	406.9	646.7	560.7	47.1	427.7	2513.1
1989	165.4	32.8	24.6	0.8	35.2	95.9	273.5	1196.4	468.3	767.5	92.1	638.2	3790.7
1990	82.8	60.6	37.4	61.7	83.5	94.1	1321.3	413.7	79.2	1092.5	278.5	153.1	3758.4
1991	849.9	12.5	43.5	67.4	70.1	54.3	109.7	252.0	499.6	2049.0			4008.0

These figures were extracted from 'Te Avei'a', Bulletin d'Information Statistique, Institut Territorial de la Statistique, Tahiti, Jan–Feb 1990, p. 10, and Nov–Dec 1991, p. 32.

Value	1988	23.3
(million US\$)	1989	32.1
	1990	36.8
	1991	37.5