

behind the ones sealed. The Fisheries Department yesterday opened the containers and separated the under-sized shells from the acceptable shells. Most of the shells were under-sized. According to Mr Kunatuba the shells sell for US\$10 a kilogram. The containers contained nine tonnes of trochus shells.

Mr Kunatuba said the confiscation showed that other exporters might be getting away with the same offence because of flaws in the Fisheries Department's checking system. 'From now we will be present when the containers are sealed and taken to the wharf. We will target the exporters with strict export regulations to deter them from

buying under-sized shells from villagers', Mr Kunatuba said. He said since the fisheries department was under-staffed, it would be easier to place control on exporters than people who fetch the shells from the sea.

Mr Kunatuba said many villagers did not know the laws governing the collection and selling of shells and it was the duty of exporters to inform them about acceptable sizes.

He said that if he was convicted, the exporter could lose his licence, pay a fine of F\$ 1,000 or go to prison for one year, or face all penalties.

### Government imposes ban on trochus shell export

The Ministry of Primary Industries has slapped a ban on the export of trochus shell for one year. This follows the confiscation of nine tonnes of under-sized trochus shells by the Customs Department in Suva in November 1992.

Fisheries Director Peniasi Kunatuba said investigations by his department revealed that under-sized trochus shells had been exported to Japan for the past five years. 'Without harsh action, exporters would have made the shells extinct', Mr Kunatuba said.

He also added that fisheries officers would continue their crackdown on exporters and those found contravening the Fisheries Act will have their licence revoked permanently. Mr Kunatuba said one

exporter had already lost his licence for trying to export almost nine tonnes of trochus shells to Japan. Mr Kunatuba said the ban would help prevent the extinction of the trochus shell.

Two ailing local button factories have been running at half capacity because exporters were concentrating on sending shells to Japan rather than supply to the local factories.

'The two local factories have had to lay off workers because they could not get enough shells to process. This will hopefully change with the ban in place', Mr Kunatuba said.

Mr Kunatuba said shells which are confiscated will be dumped at sea.

### Info on recent trochus harvest/export figures

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☞ Last Pohnpei (+ the three closest islands) harvest in 1992 was 36 tons (short tons) and was taken in 8 hours. Buying price: US\$ 1.50–1.85 per lb. Stock assessment for next harvest has already been completed and, if there is to be a trochus season declared in 1993, it will probably be 8 hours or less (Source: Tashiro Ludwig).

☞ Fiji 1992 trochus raw shell exports were 71 tonnes for F\$705,000 (previous exports: 1991: 103.38 t, F\$901,010; 1990: 225.77 t, F\$3,266,760; 1989: 235.55 t, F\$1,928,670; 1988: 398.47 t, F\$2,010,420). Fiji also exports shell buttons and blanks (1992: no quantities, but value F\$335,138; 1991: F\$639,246; 1990: F\$1,008,837). Ban on exports in 1993, but presumably buttons still allowed.

☞ Palau 1992 harvest was worth US\$ 1,100,000 at export and 229 tonnes harvested (one of the highest catches since trochus fishing started in the 1920s) following a moratorium of 2 years. The Palau trochus open season has been one month in duration since Japanese mandate times.

☞ Aitutaki (Cook Islands) harvest in 1992 was 28 tonnes.

