

The main export markets are:

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Japan: | 67.7% |
| USA: | 17.0% |
| Switzerland: | 9.6% |
| Hong Kong: | 3.2% |

The Japanese market

French Polynesia ranks second, behind Australia, among pearl exporters to Japan. In 1988 Japan imported 596.7 kg of raw cultured pearls from Australia compared with 182.9 kg from French Polynesia, for 3 billion CFP francs (US\$ 27.2 million) and 1.5 billion CFP francs (US\$ 13.6 million) respectively. The average price works out at 6,933 CFP francs/g (US\$ 63.0) of South Sea pearls (Australia) and 8,676 CFP/g (US\$ 78.8) of Tahiti pearls (French Polynesia).

Development prospects

Since 1984 French Polynesia has been implementing a vigorous pearl farming development programme in which only a dozen atolls are involved at present but which will be shortly be extended to 30 more atolls and about 10 high islands. Increased production will go hand in hand with improved pearl quality. Better spat collection and rearing techniques will be supplemented by hatchery spat production.

Already 1,000 pearl oysters produced in the hatchery in 1987 were grafted in 1990 and 300,000 spat will henceforth routinely be produced each year at the EVAAM laboratory in Rangiroa. The pearl grafts carried out in 1990 allow us to anticipate a doubling of production by 1992, which means that over one tonne of pearls will be put on the market.

Advertising

Advertising campaigns carried out by EVAAM in several countries since 1987 have led to the present boom in the black pearl market.

Sustained efforts have resulted in approval by international jewellery trade bodies of the trade name 'Tahiti cultured pearl' for every black pearl cultured from *Pinctada margaritifera*. This trade name will be guaranteed by a certifying laboratory set up in Papeete (Tahiti).

Conclusion

The marketing strategy adopted by French Polynesia for this product is to increase production while keeping the value high. This rules out mass production, even though potential pearl farming sites in French Polynesia would enable production to be raised to over 7 tonnes.

First pearl auction in Rarotonga

Source: Islands Magazine: "Inaugural black pearl sale nets 803,567 for islanders", by Tap Pryor

The first auction of cultured black pearls in Rarotonga last October fetched a total of US\$803,567 for 24 pearl farmers from Manihiki. Two Asian companies, No-Ah and M.S. Orient Ltd, bought the entire offering of 6,302 pearls at an average of \$128 each, with the largest single pearl going for \$9,000.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Marine Resources has completed a national pearl industry plan, making the Cook Islands eligible for US\$2.4 million over five years to establish a pearl research and train-

ing facility on government-owned Suwarrow atoll, south-west of Manihiki. The results are intended to be fully transferrable to the other lagoons of the Northern Group, with the caveat that each Island Council agree to the national plan. So far, the Penrhyn islanders, with a lagoon five times the size of Manihiki's, have been reluctant participants, preferring to wait and observe the pioneering efforts of their neighbours. Perhaps the success of the first sale will accelerate the Penrhyn Island Council's decision to proceed.

Pearl oysters in Abaiang and Butaritari atolls, Republic of Kiribati

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Introduction

A questionnaire survey was conducted at Abaiang and Butaritari atolls of the Republic of Kiribati in May 1991, mainly to confirm rumours of the presence of the black-lipped pearl oysters (*Pinctada margaritifera*) in the lagoons of these two atolls, and

try and gather baseline information that would indicate the present status of the stocks. An attempt was also made to map the location of the stocks on each island. This should be very useful in the planning of future field surveys.

Abaiang Atoll

On Abaiang Atoll, 16 local residents from 4 villages were interviewed. All reported the presence of pearl oysters. Half of the responses indicated current exploitation while half denied any exploitation. It is suspected that this reflects feelings of reservations to tell the truth in relation to the recent Island Council regulation which prohibits any exploitation of the resource.

The results of the survey however showed that on average for a 3-4 hour trip, 14 pearl oysters are usually collected. These are all obtained from the western reef passages. Most are sold at a price ranging from AUD\$10.00 to UAD\$20.00 per half shell. Also quite a large number are given away to friends and only some are being used for fish lures.

It is suspected that although there is a current regulation prohibiting the collection of the resource, there is very little enforcement. A meeting with the Island Council would be appropriate to encourage enforcement and discuss the potential for pearl oyster farming and pearl culture.

Butaritari Atoll

On Butaritari Atoll, a total of 14 local residents from 5 villages was interviewed and all reported the presence of pearl oysters on the island.

Results seemed to indicate a more limited pearl oyster stock for Butaritari than for Abaiang. An average catch of only 4 pearl oysters per 2-3 hour trip was reported. These are all obtained from the western reef passages. Most of the pearl oysters are given away as gifts with some being sold. Those sold are priced from AUD\$10.00 to AUD\$50.00 per half shell and therefore are more expensive than the Abaiang oysters.

There is no current existing Island Council regulation and therefore the stocks are likely to be totally depleted if exploitation is continued. Butaritari Atoll would also be considered for future pearl oyster research work and therefore an immediate moratorium on further harvesting is to be recommended by the Fisheries Division to the Island Council.

Shell prices (black-lip, trochus and green snail)

*Source: FFA Export Market Report,
Third Quarter 1990*

| A. April 1990 | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| | Solomon Islands (FOB prices) | Solomon Islands (Prices to producers) | Vanuatu to producers | Fiji producers | Australia (FOB prices) |
| Trochus | 8.60 | 4.00 | 3.00 | 4.67 - 5.67 | 4.00 |
| Black-lip | 8.00 | 4.00 | 5.00 - 6.00 | 5.00 - 5.67 | 4.00 |
| Green snail | 15.00 - 32.00 | 3.20 - 7.20 | 4.00 | | |
| B. August 1990 | | | | | |
| | Papua New Guinea (Export) | Solomon Islands (Export) | Vanuatu (Export) | Vanuatu (Producer) | |
| Trochus | 6.40 - 7.00 | 8.60 | * | 1.77 | |
| Black lip | 5.00 - 6.00 | 8.00 | 13.25 | 3.35 | |
| Green snail | 15.00 - 20.00 | 15.00 - 32.00 | 55.00** | 7.07 | |
| C. December 1990 — January 1991 | | | | | |
| | Papua New Guinea (FOB prices) | Solomon Islands (Prices to producers) | Vanuatu to producers | Fiji producers | Australia (FOB prices) |
| Trochus | 6.00 - 8.00 | 4.80 | 2.00 | 4.70 - 5.30 | 4.70 |
| Black-lip | 7.00 - 9.00 | 4.40 | 5.00 - 6.00 | | 4.70 |
| Green snail | 25.00 - 30.00 | 3.50 - 8.00 | 4.00 | | |

* Trochus button blanks sell for US\$ 26.50 per thousand

** Price for processed (i.e. cut) green snail shell in Korea