Capacity development in the Pacific tuna processing sector

In order to develop capacity in the Pacific tuna processing sector, two training sessions were held in late 2015 in both Fiji and Papua New Guinea (PNG). The trainings were facilitated by the European Union (EU)-supported Development of Tuna Fisheries in the Pacific (DevFish2) project, which is implemented by the Pacific Community (SPC). The first training, which took place in Levuka, Fiji, involved 18 cannery and national fish inspectors from Fiji, PNG and the Solomon Islands. The second training took place in Lae, PNG, and involved nine students from the Department of Applied Sciences – Food Technology Section at PNG's University of Technology.

Image: Malo Hosken

Thermal processing and regulatory audit training

This training was aimed at ensuring that the production of canned tuna in the region meets the required standard for safe human consumption. In welcoming training participants, Lomaiviti Provincial Administrator, Ekimi Rokoduru, stressed the importance of the training for Fiji's tuna processing plant and the local economy.

"Such SPC regional training adds value to the Pacific Fishing Company Limited's operation in Levuka, in terms of supporting the skills of locals who are employed by the factory," said Rokoduru. "After initial plans to move sites, we're pleased that the tuna factory will remain in Levuka because it is the mainstay of the local economy and the largest employer on the island," he added.

The two-week intensive training involved the increasing the skills of participants to ensure that the process of canning fish under high temperatures is observed and maintained so that the end product meets prescribed quality standards.

SPC's DevFish Officer, Jonathan Manieva, said the training was both timely and critical because the tuna processing industry in the Pacific Islands region is experiencing growth.

"As the industry grows, the need for human resources in key specialised areas of the production line also grows. The EU-funded DevFish2 project contributes its support for such technical and specialised training to enable and enhance the skill sets of our nationals so that they can fill these roles that would otherwise would be occupied by specialists from overseas," Manieva said.

"The safe production of canned tuna fish is a critical component of the nutritional contribution of fish to food security for our people. And, enhancing employment opportunities of our nationals in the sector contributes to individual and household incomes."

In collaboration with the Pacific Fishing Company Limited, the 18 workshop participants also had the opportunity to undertake practical training sessions at the tuna processing plant's factory floor.

"The need for such technical training is critical because the canned products are exported to overseas markets

such as the EU and USA, which requires the technical thermal processing of cans to meet required standards," said the Pacific Fishing Company Limited's General Manager, Brett Carter.

"Thermal processing in canned fish is classified as a high risk operation, and personnel must be technically qualified and aware to engage in the canning process to meet standards that ensure canned fish is safe for public consumption," he added.

PNG students benefit from a training attachment with local tuna processing companies

In November 2015, nine students from the Department of Applied Sciences – Food Technology Section at PNG's University of Technology started a 10-week industrial training attachment with four tuna processing and canning companies based in Lae and Madang in PNG.

As with the Levuka training, this training attachment was facilitated by the DevFish2 project.

"The project's assistance to the department in supporting the industrial attachment programme over the last few years has been very helpful. The project support enabled our students to gain exposure to the real work environment in the factories and also mentorship in other industrial specific areas," the Department of Applied Sciences – Food Technology Training Coordinator, Ms Sogoing Denano remarked.

Third-year students have undertaken prerequisite courses in food technology in the areas of seafood safety, regulatory requirements, sanitation, sensory analysis, and other areas of food processing.

The industrial training placements enable students to gain hands-on experience on a factory floor and in laboratories to increase their professional skills in seafood quality assurance and control.

PNG is experiencing a growth in investments within the domestic tuna industry, particularly in onshore factories. Because processed tuna products from nearly all of PNG's factories are destined for the European market, they are subject to tough requirements and high standards in fish processing and packaging.

"A training needs analysis undertaken for the fisheries sector revealed that there is a gap in capacity in both technical and specialised areas of food processing," SPC's DevFish Officer, Jonathan Manieva said.

Hands-on training for students from the Department of Applied Sciences – Food Technology Section at Papua New Guinea's University of Technology (image: J. Manieva).

"Based on this finding, the project has been lending its support to this area of the growing industry. PNG is witnessing the continuing growth in the tuna processing industry, and the demand for technical and specialised skills from within PNG will also continue to rise."

The nine students were placed with Frabelle, International Food Corporation, Majestic Seafoods and RD Tuna Canners in Lae and Madang.

"Most of these students who undertook the internship will eventually be the local human resource capacity in the specialised area of food processing, and will ultimately support the domestic processing sector growth," Ms Denano added.

For more information:

Jonathan Manieva,
Fisheries Development Officer (DevFish2), SPC
jonathanm@spc.int