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**DISCUSSION ON THE FUTURE PATH
OF THE SPC/NELSON
FISHERIES OFFICERS TRAINING COURSE**

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Discussion on the future path of the SPC/Nelson Fisheries Officers Training course

Background

At the time of running the first SPC/Nelson Polytechnic Pacific Island Fisheries Officers course in 1979, no one thought it would still be operating twenty years later. All donors were adamant that their funding was only for one or two years, however, after twenty years of operation, almost all of the original donors are still financing this important training programme.

The reasons why the course has lasted so long are varied but can be summarised as follows:

1. The course has, at all times, met the needs of Pacific Island fisheries administrations. This has been achieved through constant consultation with the countries and territories of the region. This consultation has been in the form of discussions during the RTMF, informal discussions between SPC staff and Pacific Island fisheries personnel and through questionnaire surveys, the latest of which was conducted in 1996. As a result of these discussions and evaluations, the course content has been constantly adjusted to reflect the prevailing work and the practical training needs of the average Pacific Island fisheries extension officer.
2. The financial as well as logistical difficulties small Pacific island countries would have to develop a course of this magnitude, for their own needs. Only in Papua New Guinea, a similar course, the Certificate in Tropical Fisheries, was run from the early 80's to 1996, however, that course was not as "hands-on" and broad ranging as the SPC/Nelson course.
3. The rapid growth and staff turn-over within national fisheries administrations resulting in high and steady numbers of nominations for the course.
4. The willingness of the NZ School of Fisheries staff to change the course as required, their sympathetic approach to the social needs of the students and their excellence in teaching the course subjects. The Fisheries Training Section of the SPC and the staff of the NZ School of Fisheries have ongoing communication on the course administration and organisation and also on how the course content should be altered to reflect the directions coming from the region.
5. The support given to the course from the region itself has always been positive and contributory. Many countries have hosted the five-week practical fishing module of the course, and all countries freely contribute with advice on what they see as "their course".
6. The on-going support of donors. Apart from the FAO, the original donors (the New Zealand Government, the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation and the SPC), continue to fund the course after 20 years of existence. Every chance is taken to keep these donors abreast with progress and results. Unfortunately, as the overall level of funding had decreased, in 1997, some parts of the course were curtailed, the course duration was decreased by one week. In addition, a course fee of \$2,380 for each participant, was introduced to offset falls in funding.

While substantial changes have been made to the content of the course over the years, its purpose has remained the same since 1979. This can be summarised as: *"to give the participants those practical, hand-on skills, which are useful to a fisheries extension officer working in a remote station"*. The emphasis has always been placed on hands-on and practical subjects such as welding, outboard maintenance and repair, woodwork, fibre-glassing skills, chart work, fish handling and processing etc... In addition, some more academic subjects have been gradually introduced (extension and communication skills, computer studies, business management, marine electronics, and report writing).

On completion of the 18-week block at the NZ School of Fisheries in Nelson, the course has always finished with a five-week practical fishing module being conducted at a Pacific island venue. The purpose of this practical fishing module is to put into practise the skills learnt at Nelson and to gain additional experience and skills on the catching and processing of fish from small fishing boats. Until now, the practical fishing module has been operated in a fashion as close to a commercial operation as conditions have allowed. The emphasis being on gaining fishing skills and understanding the commercial aspects of a fishing operation.

A summary of the 1998 course contents is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Discussion

It has been suggested that the work now being done by fisheries officers in the region has become more orientated towards clerical, environmental and resource management aspects rather than towards hands-on field duties. If this is so (and we are by no means totally convinced this premise is correct), it would be desirable that a somewhat major change in the content, delivery and general emphasis of the course is effected.

This meeting is requested to give the Fisheries Training Section assistance and feed back on the direction which should be given to the course and whether its content should be modified to continue meeting the needs of today's fisheries officers. The meeting participants are also asked to define the major areas in which their present fisheries staff require additional training. In formulating ideas, it is understood that the SPC/Nelson course will remain directed towards new staff or middle-level staff needing additional training.

Solely as a means of generating discussion, the Fisheries Training Section proposes to run, on a trial basis in 1999, a modified course that would include a mandatory core block and two optional streams, the first one for "traditional" field extension officer, and the second one for "office-orientated" officers. Based on a total class time in Nelson, of 630 hours (18 weeks of 35 hours a week), the following subjects and the approximate class contact times for each subject are suggested. These can be compared with the 1998 course outline in Appendix 1.

Mandatory block:

Extension and Communication skills	2 weeks
Introduction to Computers	1 week
Introduction to Fisheries Biology/Resource Management	1 week
Introduction to Aquaculture	1 week
Introduction to Electronic Aids	0.5 week
Small Fishing Business Management	1 week
Seafood Handling and Quality Control	1 week
Survival/Safety at Sea	1.5 week
General Fishing Subjects/Fishing Technology	1 week
Project and Report Writing	1 week
Introduction/Orientation/Learning Reviews	<u>1 week</u>
TOTAL	12 weeks

Stream A (hands-on skills)

OBM Repair and Maintenance	1.5 week
Net-loft and Seamanship	1.5 week
Welding	1 week
Engineering Workshop Practice	1 week
Fibre-glassing and Boat Maintenance	<u>1 week</u>
TOTAL	6 weeks

Stream B (academic skills)

Resource Management	1 week
Ecology	1 week
Research Strategies and Survey Techniques	1 week
In-depth Computers	1 week
Office Management	1 week
In-depth Aquaculture (training attachment)	<u>1 week</u>
TOTAL	6 weeks

It is further suggested that the practical fishing course remains at five weeks but the emphasis be changed to a more structured approach. Three of the five weeks would be spent on fishing operations on-board small vessels, learning fishing skills under a less commercial regime but with more class and directed learning sessions. The other two weeks would be spent on the practical aspects of ecology, resource management, aquaculture, aquarium fish fishing, using different ventures available at the course venue.

Conclusion

We hope this document and the associated session at the RTMF will provide sufficient impetus to generate discussion which will direct the future of this long-standing and important training course.

Appendix 1

Programme outline for the 1998 SPC/Nelson Fisheries Officers course

Extension and Communication Skills	2 weeks
Computer Studies	1.3 week
Fisheries Biology	1 week
Introduction to Electronic Aids	0.4 week
Small Fishing Business Management	0.8 week
Seafood Handling and Quality Control	1 week
Survival/Safety at Sea	0.8 week
General Fishing Subjects/Fishing Technology	1 week
Project and Report Writing	1.1 week
Introduction/Orientation/Learning Reviews	1 week
OBM Repair and Maintenance	1.4 week
Net-loft and Seamanship	1.3 week
Welding	0.8 week
Engineering Workshop Practice	0.9 week
Fibre-glassing and Boat Maintenance	1.2 week
Navigation and Chartwork	<u>1 week</u>
TOTAL	18 weeks