

SPCSOUTH PACIFIC
COMMISSION**Press Statement**
NOUMEA, NEW CALEDONIASOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION URGES ALL-OUTCAMPAIGN AGAINST COCONUT PEST

1420

More Training Courses For Pacific Islanders

014
Noumea, October 13 - The South Pacific Commission has stressed the imperative need for an all-out campaign by governments, territories, and scientific bodies against the rhinoceros beetle, the slowly-spreading coconut pest which has become a major threat to the economy of the South Pacific. Each year it causes serious losses in copra output from the islands it now infests, which include Western Samoa, Tonga, Wallis Islands, New Guinea, Palau Islands and Viti Levu in the Fiji Group.

The Commission has just finalized plans for intensifying its own campaign against the pest. A meeting of its rhinoceros beetle advisory committee of leading Pacific entomologists will be held in Suva from February 16-20 to review results of present campaigns against the beetle, and to plan further action. The Commission's insect pathologist, Dr. Paul Surany, will attend. Aided by a Rockefeller Foundation grant, he is at present studying diseases of the rhinoceros beetle at his research headquarters in Kenya.

Arrangements will be made immediately for two entomologists to undertake a further search in West Africa and South America for predators and parasites likely to attack the beetle in the Pacific.

The Commission has also made a further grant of £5,000 for 1959 to assist the investigation now being carried out on its behalf by the Institute of Scientific Research in Madagascar. Its purpose is to discover the natural enemies of the rhinoceros beetle that apparently are keeping the pest in check there, to collect the most promising, and to introduce them to beetle-infested islands in the Pacific.

Commission Reviews Past Year's Work

These decisions were among many taken at the Commission's annual meeting, which opened on September 26 and closed here yesterday. It was attended by representatives from the six member nations, Australia, France, the Netherlands,

New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, the chairman being Sir John Gutch, K.C.M.G., O.B.E., senior commissioner for the United Kingdom.

The meeting studied progress made by the Commission in all its fields of work during the past year, and approved plans for its 1959 programme.

Practical Training Courses For Islanders

The Commission will play an increasingly active part in promoting and conducting practical training courses for Pacific islanders. Following two such courses already held in fisheries and health education there will be others in literature production and in boat-building, repair and maintenance. It is planned to hold both in the Solomon Islands in 1960.

The Commission has also directed that its experts in co-operatives, health education, and public health should assist territories in training local personnel in these fields, both by planning and by taking part in suitable courses.

Two Top-Level Meetings Approved

The Commission also approved the holding of two meetings of top-level experts towards the end of next year. A seminar to study problems of Pacific education will be held in Brisbane, while a study group meeting in Numea of specialists in filariasis and elephantiasis will examine the Commission's ten years of work in the field of mosquito-borne diseases, and make recommendations for future action.

Plant Collection And Introduction

The Commission's plant introduction officer, Dr. Jacques Barrau, supervises the collecting and testing of selected economic plants in the Pacific for distribution and exchange among the territories, as well as distribution of plants outside the region. His recent work has been concentrated on coffee, cocoa, root and green vegetables, breadfruit, pepper, bamboo, other possible cash crops, and forage and pasture plants.

During the past year the Commission's new plant introduction service has, in response to requests from territories, distributed among them planting material of 112 species and varieties of economic plants.

The Commission approved a further grant for next year of £Stg.1,000 to the plant introduction station at Naduruloulou in Fiji, which collaborates closely in this work. Additional crops to which special attention will be given are legumes suitable as cover crops, and the cereals, maize, rice and sorghum.

Further Work In Fisheries

The development and better use of the fish resources of marine and inland waters in the Pacific are main targets of the Commission's fisheries programme, which is being carried out by the fisheries officer, Mr. H. van Pel.

The Commission noted with pleasure the fact that the large majority of the twenty-five Pacific islands trainees who attended its fisheries course in 1956/1957 are now employed in useful fisheries work in their own territories. A further training course in practical fisheries planned for 1960 will be designed to encourage far greater use of small motor fishing boats in the Pacific, and of fish traps and weirs. As before, the assistance of the Food and Agriculture Organization will be sought for this project.

A marine biologist will be engaged next year to conduct preliminary research in the Cook Islands on the commercially-valuable blacklip oyster.

The possibilities will be explored of providing training for islands people in simple methods of fish preservation.

Coconut Industry

The economic development members of the Commission's expert advisory body, the Research Council, will meet next year. Among other priority subjects they will study problems of the coconut industry and indicate possible Commission action to assist in solving them.

The Commission approved a grant of £Stg.1,500 towards the 1959 programme of the new French coconut research station shortly to be set up in Rangiroa Atoll in the Tuamotus. Short-term research on trace element deficiencies in atoll soils already begun there offers promising possibilities for stepping up coconut production.

Agricultural Technical Meeting

The possibilities will be explored of holding a meeting of territorial officers engaged in agricultural extension work. If possible it will be planned

around demonstrations in the field. The Commission received with appreciation an invitation from the Government of Western Samoa to hold a demonstration tour in cocoa growing in that territory.

Production Of Islands Literature

A literature production training centre to be opened in 1960 at Honiara, in the British Solomon Islands, will assist territories planning to set up their own printing and publishing facilities by providing them with trained staff.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization is actively collaborating in the scheme, for which financial assistance will be sought by the Commission from the United Nations Technical Assistance Board.

New Womens Interests Project

Final details were approved for a new project in which an officer specially appointed for the task, Miss Marjorie Stewart, will actively promote the interests of Pacific islands women. Miss Stewart is at present director of the Y.W.C.A. tropical community centre in London.

In her new post she will collaborate with village and community authorities in establishing a programme for women's activities that will take account of their home and community needs and opportunities. She will develop women's groups as one way of furthering their progress towards family and community betterment.

A leading women's organization in the United States, United Church Women, has made a grant of \$30,000 to assist the Commission in this new field of activity.

SPC Meeting On Co-operatives

Last July, a technical meeting on co-operatives was held under Commission auspices in Port Moresby. It was attended by co-operative officers and administration officials from Pacific territories, and by observers from the Governments of Australia and the United States, and from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

After studying the report of the meeting and its recommendations for organizing co-operatives and of training staff to run them, and on ways the

Commission could help territories with their co-operative programmes, the Commission authorized important expansion of its work in this field. Its co-operatives officer will plan and take part in local training courses, the exchange and study travel of territorial co-operatives officers will be facilitated, and simple practical training and instruction manuals will be prepared. Training courses for experienced co-operatives officers will also be organized.

Tuberculosis Conference

Nineteen tuberculosis and public health officers from thirteen territories will attend a conference organized by the Commission to take place next month in Pago Pago, American Samoa. The conference will study tuberculosis as a community disease in the Pacific.

Nutrition And Diet

In this field the Commission is concentrating on practical applications of the results of its past research on the nutrition problems of Pacific islanders, carried out in co-operation with the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The latter body will be invited to provide a specialist to advise on the economics of food production and distribution in the Pacific.

Fourth South Pacific Conference

The Commission reviewed final arrangements for the holding next April of the fourth South Pacific Conference at Malaguna, near Rabaul in New Britain. It is expected that over seventy delegates from nineteen Pacific territories will attend. (The Conference is a regional meeting of island peoples convened by the Commission every three years).

END