

New regional research projects

ACIAR PARDI Pearl Project

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Pacific Agribusiness Research for Development Initiative (PARDI) began in 2010, in support of projects across a number of components, including fisheries. One of the fisheries projects focuses on “Supporting development of the cultured pearl industries in Fiji and Tonga”, and involves collaboration between James Cook University, the University of Adelaide, SPC, University of the South Pacific, pearl farmers, and fisheries departments in Fiji and Tonga.

The project builds on the activities and outcomes of prior ACIAR projects in both countries and has the following major research objectives:

- formulate pearl industry development plans for Fiji and Tonga;
- develop production and business capacity within Fijian and Tongan pearl industries;
- improve product quality, product diversity and value-adding; and
- develop a market structure and conduct an economic baseline review.



The principle behind the PARDI initiative is assessment of the value-chains for major commodities, with a view to identifying researchable issues. The major aim of the ACIAR PARDI Pearl Project is to facilitate pearl industry development in Fiji and Tonga at all levels. This includes increased supply of pearl oysters to pearl farmers, assistance in developing business capacity and business skills, product development (i.e. different types of pearls and pearl shell products for the jewellery and handicraft industries) and market and quality control issues. The project will also address capacity for potential import replacement and for the development of new products with potential for export.

Jamie Whitford of James Cook University was recruited as Senior Project Scientist for the ACIAR PARDI Pearl Project and is based at SPC's Nabua campus in Suva within the SPC Aquaculture Office. He will be responsible for implementing project research initiatives in Fiji and Tonga. Jamie took up his position in May 2011, and a large part of his project activities have included discussions with pearl farmers, industry associations and fisheries personnel in Fiji and Tonga. Stakeholder meetings later in 2011 in Fiji and Tonga will scope out specific research strategies for the project.

Research activities within the ACIAR PARDI Pearl Project will be assisted by the involvement of an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development position in Tonga, and a PhD student, Pranesh Kishore, from Fiji who began his PhD study at James Cook University in 2011 to address factors affecting pearl quality with a view to improving the yield of high quality pearls.

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Fiji pearl farmers
 Justin Hunter and Ratu Jone inspect
 spat collectors in Savusavu Bay