

Fish inspector training course for Competent Authorities

Protection of public health through food safety is a major concern that has been part of trade negotiations globally. Food safety is seen as one of the technical barriers to trade that needs to be addressed by exporting countries. Failure in food safety can have legal implications and lead to subsequent economic losses. Therefore, food exporters must comply with strict requirements to trade globally.

Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) have no exemption should they wish to trade seafood resources globally. The European Union (EU) is a very lucrative market but it has very stringent rules. The only countries currently exporting to EU are Papua New Guinea (PNG), Fiji and Solomon Islands. Each of these countries has an established and functioning Competent Authority that provides official guarantees for export to the EU market. Other PICTs have expressed interest in having access to the EU market, but have yet to establish a Competent Authority.¹ As part of the assistance provided to member countries and territories, the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) and SPC have developed a training curriculum, which was delivered for the first time from 7 May to 1 June 2012 in Auckland, New Zealand. The reference materials used were “Strengthening fish and fishery products health conditions in ACP/OCT² countries”, and “EU market access & eco-labelling for fishery and aquaculture products”, both developed by SIPPO³. The curriculum was tailored to suit the training needs of PICTs and it was delivered by two FFA Consultants, Francisco Blaha and Cushla Hogarth, and SPC’s Fisheries Development Officer (Post-Harvest and Exports), Timothy Numilengi. FFA and SPC acknowledge the excellent integrated facilities provided by Auckland Seafood School.

The FFA Devfish2 (Development of Sustainable Tuna Fisheries in Pacific ACP Countries – Phase II) project and the AusAID-funded Food Security Programme of SPC jointly funded the delivery of the training. A total of 17 participants attended, hailing from Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. The training targeted staff of Competent Authorities, fisheries ministries and other government agencies involved in inspections and certification of fish and fishery products for export purposes. The course was designed to meet the growing demand for compliance with technical market access requirements and trade facilitation. The training was quite intensive, with group exercises, presentations, and practical and open book exams. Areas of capacity building included the role of inspectors, establishing an organisation and its operational functions, managing food safety risk, developing and implementing inspection systems, establishing inspection methodologies, reporting, EU



*Explaining fish quality inspections at the Auckland Fish Market.
L to R: Alibate Momoka (Fiji), Christina Mamupio (Solomon Islands), Francisco Blaha (trainer) and Ethel Mapolu (Solomon Islands).*

regulations and other legislative requirements relating to market access, various fishing techniques and processing, laboratory testing, product traceability, rapid alert and crisis management. These are fundamentals required by the inspectors to effectively plan, manage and implement the systems in compliance with the market access requirements. The course participants appreciated the new skills and knowledge they gained, which will benefit their respective countries in meeting certain market access conditions.

All participating countries were given the opportunity to review their own systems, which allowed them to identify certain gaps that need to be filled. Some of these gaps will be filled internally, while others require further assistance from SPC and FFA, such as training in the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) food safety system, thermal process canning operations, Good Laboratory Practises, organoleptic (sensory) assessment, in-depth HACCP auditing skills, technical assistance on-site for private enterprises, arrangements for laboratory testing and establishment of Competent Authorities.

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¹ The Competent Authority is the competent official organisation, recognised by the European Commission, which is responsible for the management of official systems of inspections or certification of fish and fishery products to the EU market.

² ACP/OCT: African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States/Overseas Countries and Territories

³ SIPPO : Swiss Import Promotion Programme