*A member of the Limanak community holding hatchery-raised juvenile sandfish (image: Cathy Hair)*

# The Nago Island Marine Research Facility in Papua New Guinea is up and running!

***The Nago Island Mariculture Research Facility (NIMRF) began operating as a fully functioning marine hatchery and research facility several months ago. NIMRF is located on Nago Island, just off of Kavieng, the capital of New Ireland Province. The facility is being managed by Papua New Guinea's National Fisheries Authority.***

Thanks to the outstanding effort and time spent by the manager, technicians and employees of the facility, and through technical and financial support provided by James Cook University (Townsville, Australia) through a project funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) (project: FIS/2010/054), the NIMRF is fully operational. SPC has been part of the technical committee, providing technical and financial support for certain activities.

The ACIAR project's main objective is to promote the production of marine species that are technically feasible and socially acceptable to local communities within the region. The species that the project will focus on include sea cucumbers (sandfish), edible oysters and marine ornamentals, including hard and soft corals.

There have been substantial improvements to the facility, including a microalgae laboratory, wet laboratory, and increased optimisation of water distribution and filtration systems. Also, tanks and raceways have been distributed inside the facility in separate sections, in order to make NIMRF more efficient and easily manageable.

As initial activities, a number of sandfish spawning trials have been carried out with encouraging results: more than 500 juveniles have been produced and are currently being reared in sea pens. Some local communities in the vicinity of the facility have been involved in the project from the beginning. For example, the community at Limanak has provided the sandfish broodstock for the initial spawning trials. This same community has been selected to carry out initial grow-out trials by using different farming strategies, such as floating *hapas*[1], submerged cages and sea pens.

The fact that the moratorium on sandfish harvesting will remain in effect, most likely, for another three years, makes the development and optimisation of sandfish production techniques extremely relevant for the future of many local communities within the area.

*Sea pen for sandfish grow-out, Limanak village (image: Cathy Hair).*

To conclude, the facility will continue improving its operating systems over 2013, with a view to initiating certain activities on a larger scale in 2014.

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[1] The *hapa* is made by placing two open cloth sacks, one inside the other. The dimensions are usually 2 × 1 × 1 m and the interior sack is half that size. The outside *hapa* is of smaller mesh. As the eggs hatch, the larvae swim through the mesh in the first sack, but are retained in the second. [source: http://www.fao.org/docrep/field/003/ac182e/AC182E01.htm]