

A successful first harvest from milkfish aquaculture project in Fiji

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Following up on an earlier report in Fisheries Newsletter #132 about a new community-level milkfish aquaculture project for food security in Fiji, we now report on the successful harvest of milkfish from the project's first pond cycle on 23 December 2010, just in time for Christmas.

The Vitawa Aquaculture Development Project at Vitawa Village in Ra Province was launched in March 2010 as a collaboration among the Japan International Cooperation Agency, Fiji's Department of Fisheries, and the Vitawa Village community. The project is a capture-based culture trial using milkfish caught as small fingerlings on intertidal mudflats in the surrounding area. Technical advice was provided by Hideyuki Tanaka of the South Pacific Liaison Office for Fisheries and Aquaculture International. The project aims to be as low-tech as possible, as a low-cost way to increase the amount of fresh fish available to villagers.

In the first partial-harvest on 23 December, over 1,000 fish (approximately 300 g each) were netted from the main pond drainage channel by village youth under the supervision of the Minister of Fisheries, Joketani Cokanasiga, other visiting dignitaries, and the entire village. Some of the fish were immediately prepared for a *magiti* (feast) for visitors, while the remainder were distributed among village households. There were many requests to buy fish from the harvest; however, the priority at this time was for villagers to enjoy the fruits of their labour in the project.

The first pond cycle encountered some initial problems, including low water pH due to an acid-sulphate soil, which repeated pond use over time will correct. Another issue was high water salinity (more than 50 ppt) due to considerable sunlight and low water exchange, which pond managers can, in the future, take steps to ameliorate as they gain experience in pond water management. Unstable plankton blooms resulted in the need to purchase some supplementary feed in the form of commercial pellets, a situation that the project hopes to avoid in the longer term through careful pond management and low stocking density, which will allow fish to grow entirely on natural feed in the pond.

SPC's fish-pond economic decision-making tool software is being used by the project's managers in order to assess the economics of this type of milkfish farming.

For those interested:

SPC's fish-pond economic decision-making tool software is available as a free download from the Aquaculture Portal website at:

www.spc.int/aquaculture.



Fiji's Department of Fisheries officer Mr Senikau holds up two of the milkfish harvested, to show that they have reached a good eating size.



Vitawa Village youth netting the first partial-harvest of milkfish from the drainage channel of the culture pond system.