NORTHERN PROVINCE OF NEW CALEDONIA HOSTS PRACTICAL MODULE OF SPC/NELSON POLYTECHNIC FISHING COURSE

For the first time since the inception of the SPC/Nelson Polytechnic course for Pacific Islands fisheries officers in 1979, the concluding practical fishing module took place in New Caledonia, from 25 June to 28 July 1994.

In August 1993, in response to an offer from the Northern Province Fisheries Service, Hugh Walton and Michel Blanc, respectively Fisheries Training Adviser and Fisheries Training Officer at the SPC, paid a short visit to the Province. The facilities at Touho (a village on the east coast approximately five hours' drive from Noumea) were perfectly suited to the course requirements and, in June 1994, the SPC officially accepted the Northern Province's offer to host the practical fishing module.

The course participants arrived on New Caledonian soil on Sunday, 25 June in the company of Alastair Robertson, an instructor at Nelson Polytechnic, who supervises the New Zealand course module.

Before travelling north to Touho, the students spent three days in Noumea with the SPC. Their brief stay familiarised them with the SPC's fisheries programmes and gave them time for a few hours of tuition on the management of deep-swimming fish stocks and tunas.

On Tuesday 28 June, after visiting the Noumea fish market, the participants watched the unloading of longliners belonging to the Navimon company and the packaging of tuna for Japan (a foretaste of what they could expect in Touho).

Then, on 29 July, the 13 participants, accompanied by Alastair Robertson, the SPC Fisheries Training Officer and Bernard Lepron, an instructor at the New Caledonia Marine Trades Training School, set out for Touho in two vehicles which had been rented for the duration of the course. The participants were accommodated at the Touho Curriculum Development Centre, located in a former hotel built around a beautiful little bay 2 km north of Touho.

The next two days were set aside for the preparation of the fishing boats and gear and also used for teaching on the theory of fishing methods and small fishing venture management.

The venue for the theory classes and the preparation of the fishing gear was ideal: the marine annexe of the Touho Vocational Training School situated near Touho fishing port.

In addition to classrooms equipped with a television and video cassette recorder, an overhead projector and white boards, we also had the use of welding sets for making deep-sea fishing moorings and of a

The training vessel Tradiva of the Northern Province was launched a couple of weeks before the start of the practical module.
workshop big enough to store the fishing gear.

The Touho cold store, kindly lent to us free of charge for the duration of the course, consists of a 250 m² building housing 2 operational cold rooms (1 above zero and 1 below). This building is situated near the port, 200 m from the marine school annexe. Three fishing boats were used by the students: the Dar Mad, an 11 m aluminium catamaran belonging to the Territorial Merchant Marine and Fisheries Department; the Tradwa, a 7 m wooden catamaran operated by the Northern Province Fisheries Service; and the Pop, a 5.5 m single-hulled fibreglass boat from the Marine Trades Training School. Each was equipped with the following essential electronic equipment: VHF radio, echosounder and GPS (plus radar on the Dar Mad).

Fishing proper began on Saturday 2 July and went on continuously until Monday 25 July. Because of the toss of the FADs, specially moored off Touho by the Dar Mad last June, the emphasis was put on fishing for deep-swimming species using the handreel and bottom longlining methods.

Each course participant took part in two pelagic longline sets (200 hooks each) aboard the Dar Mad, one in the daytime for tuna fishing and the other at night for swordfish. During the last week, some trolling was done on the Tradwa and the Pop.

Although the practical part of the course primarily involved training in fishing techniques and boat handling, a lot of attention was paid to rational vessel management and data collection; as during the two previous practical modules, the course participants prepared daily catch records and general reports.

After analysis in group sessions, this work yielded profit-and-loss statements for each boat. The report format prepared by the SPC Training Section in 1992 was used as a reference document for these exercises.

This is already in use in fishery extension divisions in a number of regional countries; copies are available on request from the SPC.

Fish marketing was a new component introduced into the practical module this year. The fish landed during previous courses had been handed over to the host organisation and, in most cases, simply sold locally. In New Caledonia, the regulations governing the sale of seafood make it illegal for fisheries department boats to sell their catch.

Since the fish could not therefore be sold on the local market, it was decided to export all landings to the Sydney fish
markets. Four shipments of fresh fish, amounting to 1,800 kg in all, were freighted on Air France's Tuesday afternoon Noumea–Sydney flight.

The fish caught during the days prior to the shipment date were stored whole on ice in an above-zero cold room.

Every Monday evening, the participants weighed and packaged the fish after sorting them by species and weight. Carefully numbered and labelled, the boxes were loaded onto a refrigerated lorry and driven to Tontouta airport on Tuesday morning for the Noumea–Sydney flight. Similarly, 470 kg of tuna caught by the horizontal longlining method on the Dar Mad (mainly bigeye tuna) were exported to Japan through the Navimon longlining company.

From a strictly economic point of view, these trial exports yielded a profit of approximately 6,000 US dollars. This sum almost exactly covers the costs incurred by the Training Section to moor the Touho FAD, which unfortunately disappeared just a few days after being set.

From the skills point of view, this new component was a great success. The students left New Caledonia with full knowledge of the difficulties and the amount of work associated with a commercial fresh fish exporting venture.

The 1994 SPC/Nelson Polytechnic practical fishing module was concluded in fine style on Thursday 28 July with a barbecue laid on by the Training Section.

This 1994 practical module was one of the most successful in the history of the SPC/Nelson Polytechnic course. The ingredients for success were favourable weather (with enough bad weather to teach the trainees the hard realities of the fisherman's life), good fishing grounds, a motivated and hard-working group of participants and, of course, fruitful co-operation between the SPC Training Section and the various fisheries organisations in New Caledonia.

The officers of the Fisheries Training Section wish to thank the government of New Zealand, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation for the financial support they provided, which secured the success of the annual course organised by the Nelson Polytechnic Fishing School and of the practical module included in it.

The 1994 course is over, so it's already time to think about the 1995 course! The fisheries departments of Pacific Island countries and territories were requested to send in their nominations for the SPC/Nelson Polytechnic course next year by 15 November 1994 at the latest.
Fish marketing trials in Australia

In 1994, the SPC/Nelson practical fishing module included a new component on fish marketing. Four shipments of chilled deep-sea fish, amounting 1,800 kg in all, were freighted out to the Sydney Fish Market. The technical and administrative procedures followed by the trainees as well as the economical analysis of these marketing trials were covered in a specific report (Report on marketing trials in Australia for fish harvested during the 1994 SPC/Nelson Polytechnic practical fishing module). The French version has already been distributed to the various New Caledonia fisheries administrations and the English version is now available. People interested in this report should contact the Commission’s Fisheries Training Section.