

Rakahanga fishery officer shares skills with students

Students in Rakahanga, Cook Islands, are taking part in fishery training as part of their Life Skills programme, with assistance from the Ministry of Marine Resources (MMR).

Rakahanga fishery officer Tuteru Taripo is running weekly trainings that cover a range of fisheries skills for a dozen senior students from Rakahanga School aged 11–18.

In February of this year, students gained skills in tuna filleting, net mending and knot tying as part of their classes with Taripo.

Safety at sea and how to use a VHS radio are included in the skills that Taripo teaches students. “It’s the first time I’ve done this kind of training with the students and I want to extend this to the wider community in future,” he says.

Rakahanga School Principal, Bazza Ross, says that he has been impressed by the outcome of the training so far — with students now receiving requests from the community and from fishermen in Manihiki to help with net mending.

“Most of the families here rely quite heavily on nets for fishing in the lagoon. Some skills appear to have been lost over time, and the students are now being asked to help mend nets.”

Ross says the Life Skills programme includes learning using traditional and local techniques and resources. “We’ve focused our attention around marine resources because of our aquatic environment. Not all students have access to fishing skills like those that live with grandparents that don’t fish anymore. This is giving them skills they can use now and in the future,” says Ross.

He says Taripo has been a great tutor and very patient with the students.



Rakahanga students have been learning a range of skills, including tuna filleting.



MMR fishery officer Tuteru Taripo teaching a senior student the art of net mending.

The classes are benefiting the students in other ways too — some are already taking the net mending and knot tying skills and using them in craft making. Ross says they are planning to take up macramé — a form of textile art that involves knotting — to add to their craftwork.

Dried fish production is also something the students want to learn more about to contribute to this practice on the island, says Ross.

Taripo says the Rakahanga Island administration is working to raise funds through the export of fish, and many youth help with fishing on the island.

Last year, Taripo and Aitutaki fishery officer Alice Mitchell completed a five-month fishery officer course at Nelson Maritime School in New Zealand. They passed a wide range of certificates, including seamanship, marine electronics, safety and survival, outboard motor repair, surveillance, business management and fisheries science. Taripo says the course gave him the confidence and knowledge to do the training and is grateful to the New Zealand High Commission office for funding support.

A fishery officer on Rakahanga since 2002, Taripo’s role includes pearl farm support, working with the fishing community, and collecting data on fish catches.

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