IT can almost be said that before the South Pacific Commission really existed it was interested in the development of fisheries. One of the projects which the Canberra South Seas Conference of 1947 (at which the Commission was established), recommended for early consideration as being of great importance to the economic and social welfare of the local inhabitants of the non-self-governing territories in the South Pacific was:

"... fisheries research, including surveys and the testing of methods of catching and of processing fish and other marine products with the special aim of improving the nutrition of the local inhabitants."

"Fisheries Methods" was one subject discussed at the First South Pacific Conference at Suva in 1950. The assembled delegates of the people of the island territories recognised the importance of fisheries in the South Pacific area, both as a source of economic wealth and a means towards improved food supply of the inhabitants, and listed a number of associated aspects for the special attention of the Commission.

These and other proposals for Commission activity in this field led to the holding of a conference of fisheries experts at Nouméa in May, 1952, to define more precisely the work which should be undertaken by the Commission. The objectives of the Conference were described as:

(a) To work out a practicable method of bringing together all the relevant information available on fisheries in the region;

(b) to suggest the best way of investigating quickly the problems of catching, processing, transporting and marketing, and of inducing people to increase the use of local fisheries products;

(c) to make constructive suggestions concerning a statement of the prerequisites for fisheries development in the region;

(d) to consider and advise what role the South Pacific Commission could play in the development of the fisheries in the region.

The Report of the Fisheries Conference (S.P.C. Technical Paper No. 25) was accepted as the basis of the Commission's fisheries programme.

Expert Engaged

In the light of that report and of further recommendations from the Research Council and Second South Pacific Conference, Mr. H. van Pel was engaged by the Commission as Fisheries Officer to carry out investigations and other activities in accordance with the Commission fisheries project. In particular, he is required, as a Commission specialist and in consultation with territorial administrations, to assist and stimulate fisheries investigation and development in the Commission area, including inland fisheries and pond culture.

Mr. van Pel's early experience in the fishing industry included six years as skipper of a steam trawler operating in the Atlantic and North Sea. In 1932, he joined the Netherlands East Indies Government as a fisheries officer, finally being appointed Director of the Bureau of Fisheries, East Indonesia. In 1951, he joined the Food and Agriculture Organization, and was sent to Pakistan to design a fishing harbour at Karachi. He later went to Liberia to train fishermen there in modern fishing methods.

Since assuming duty with the Commission in July, 1954, Mr. van Pel has visited Netherlands New Guinea (twice), Fiji, Western Samoa, American Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands. In August, Guam and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands will have the benefit of his services. His reports on fisheries developments and prospects in each territory are being made available, with the concurrence of the authorities concerned, for the information of other governments, territorial administrations and institutions to whom they are likely to be of interest.

Fisheries Training Course

A Fisheries Training Course will be held in 1956 by the South Pacific Commission with the generous assistance of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

The site of the training course will be Nouméa at Commission headquarters, where the course will have the benefit of the collaboration of the Institut Français d'Océanie.

The aim of the instruction will be to train personnel from Pacific territories so that they will be capable of working on fisheries development, either as junior fisheries assistants in local fisheries services or as active participants in other local activities, as, for instance, fisheries co-operatives.