

## Update on beche-de-mer market prices in China

*Unlike fish, beche-de-mer (dried sea cucumber) is a luxury seafood that is eaten at banquets and often for its medicinal properties. Five years ago, a project by the Pacific Agribusiness Research for Development Initiative (PARDI) of the Australian Centre for Agricultural Research (ACIAR) revealed the prices of exported sea cucumbers from Pacific Islands and the attributes of beche-de-mer that affect sale prices (Purcell 2014). Prices commonly ranged from USD 15–400 depending on the species and product size. Since then the Chinese government has discouraged ‘conspicuous consumption’ of luxury food items, including beche-de-mer, thereby affecting demand (Eriksson and Clarke 2015). On the other hand, some fisheries (e.g. Kiribati and Tonga) have closed recently, thereby affecting supply.*

Most of the beche-de-mer that is harvested and processed in the Pacific Islands is exported to Hong Kong, and then much of it is redistributed to mainland China, via Guangzhou (Canton city). In most cases, market prices in China reflect export prices from the Pacific Islands. Knowledge on beche-de-mer prices can help to substantiate the value reported by exporters from the Pacific Islands and inform economic valuations of fisheries and aquaculture.

A recent study commissioned by the Pacific Community (SPC) believed that ‘prices are rising’ for Pacific Island beche-de-mer (Carleton et al. 2013), but the extent of such rises in recent years is uncertain. A regional workshop in Nadi in 2012 listed ‘better information on markets and prices’ as one of the five key needs for sea cucumber fisheries in the Pacific Islands (Anon. 2012). Likewise, delegates, on several occasions at a 2015 regional technical meeting on beche-de-mer in Tonga, raised the need for ‘market information’ in order to improve sea cucumber fisheries in the region (Shelley 2015).

In order to address the regional priority for updated information on market prices of beche-de-mer, an ACIAR-funded project will again collect and analyse data on market prices in November 2016. The study will collect data from Hong Kong and Guangzhou. The trip will allow for reporting on the changes in the market over the five-year period since the last study, and the publication of an up-to-date list of prices of beche-de-mer for various species of sea cucumbers that are harvested in Pacific Islands.



Tropical sea cucumbers in jars in Hong Kong (image: Steve Purcell).

It is hoped that the upcoming study will enable improved decision-making by Pacific Island fishery managers on certain regulatory measures and validation of the reported export value of beche-de-mer. The study could also underpin cost-benefit analyses and production strategies for sea cucumber aquaculture.

### References

- Anon. 2012. A proposed regional approach to improved management of sea cucumber fisheries: working Paper 2. Noumea, New Caledonia: Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Informal Consultation with Heads of Fisheries, Noumea, New Caledonia, 4 June 2012. 3 p. [[www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Meetings/HOF/Informal\\_HOF\\_Consultations/Inf\\_HOF\\_2012\\_WP2.pdf](http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/Meetings/HOF/Informal_HOF_Consultations/Inf_HOF_2012_WP2.pdf)]
- Carleton C., Hambrey J., Govan H., Medley P. and Kinch J. 2013. Effective management of sea cucumber fisheries and the beche-de-mer trade in Melanesia. SPC Fisheries Newsletter 140:24–42. [[www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/FishNews/140/FishNews140\\_24\\_Carleton.pdf](http://www.spc.int/DigitalLibrary/Doc/FAME/InfoBull/FishNews/140/FishNews140_24_Carleton.pdf)]
- Eriksson H. and Clarke S. 2015. Chinese market responses to overexploitation of sharks and sea cucumbers. *Biological Conservation* 184:163–173.
- Purcell S.W. 2014. Value, market preferences and trade of beche-de-mer from Pacific Island sea cucumbers. *PLoS One* 9: e95075 [<http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0095075>]
- Shelley C. 2015. Outcomes of a Regional Technical Bêche-de-mer (BdM) Meeting Nuku'alofa, Tonga 29 September – 1 October 2015. IUCN, Suva. 29 p. [[www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/bdm\\_tech\\_meeting\\_tonga\\_oct15\\_report\\_1dec.pdf](http://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/bdm_tech_meeting_tonga_oct15_report_1dec.pdf)]

---

#### For more information:

Steven W. Purcell  
National Marine Science Centre,  
Southern Cross University, Australia  
[steven.purcell@scu.edu.au](mailto:steven.purcell@scu.edu.au)