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Press Release

FNU plans state-of-the-art regional meteorology training centre

FIJI National University has unveiled plans for a state-of-the-art Department of Meteorology, which, when operational, will make FNU the only university in the region to offer a comprehensive training programme in all aspects of tropical meteorology.

FNU has appointed a former senior member of the Fiji Meteorological Service, Doctor Sushil Sharma, as Associate Professor and head of Met Programmes to assist with setting up the department at the College of Engineering, Science and Technology (CEST) on FNU's Nadi Campus in Legalega.

Dr Sharma has spent over 35 years of his life in the area of meteorology and is one of only four people selected initially with former Director of Meteorology, Rajendra Prasad to form the new Fiji Meteorological Service.

Dr Sharma acted briefly as Director of Meteorology in 2010 and was chief advisor to the Fiji government and other agencies on the 22-month, 3 seasons of back-to-back drought that impacted Fiji in 2009-2010. He also issues Tropical Cyclone Guidance summaries for the Pacific region as to the frequency, number and areas of formation of tropical cyclones that could affect the region.

He also submitted major proposals for the establishment of the National Samoa Meteorological Service in 2008-2009 when he was requested to become the private adviser of the Prime Minister of Samoa for tropical cyclone and tsunami warning for that country.

Dr Sharma said the FNU Department of Meteorology will offer academic degrees up to PhD level and also provide for all aspects of professional training up to WMO Class 1 certification, enabling students to enter any National Meteorological Service as certified staff in all aspects of marine, aviation and public weather forecasting and climate work. CEST has until now offered a Certificate IV in *Meteorology*.

Graduates would be able to work in any professional capacity at any National Meteorological Service (NMS), government departments such as the Ministry of Environment, or as independent Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) consultants, educators, planners, teachers and research scientists in all aspects of weather and climate, warning systems, disaster preparedness and mitigation studies, tropical cyclone and tsunami forecasting and warning systems.

"A comprehensive undergraduate programme of this nature is not offered by any university in Australia or New Zealand or the South Pacific region; neither does anyone in the region run a Tropical Pacific Regional School for Professional Meteorology Training," Dr Sharma said.

"A number of Australian universities such as the Melbourne University run general circulation models and do extensive advanced work, but they chiefly cater for postgraduate students. No structured programme as anticipated to be provided soon by FNU exists in the region to date."

Dr Sharma said traditionally all national meteorological service meteorologists from the region including Fiji have had to do a basic degree in science with no other prior exposure to the atmospheric sciences or aspects of dynamic meteorology. He said these professionals would have been sent to the Weather Service in New Zealand and now the Bureau of Meteorology in Melbourne for a 1-year intensive

professional training programme, after which they return to their regional NMC and work as meteorologists.

“Qualified professional staff in the region including Fiji entered their profession via this route.

“However in Pacific island countries there is a lack of qualified and trained staff and this programme can help the region. In total there are only about 6-8 qualified professional meteorologists in the entire Pacific region excluding Australia and New Zealand.”

“Regional governments could send their students here to FNU for their meteorology degree and for a one stop professional training school exposure. FNU will be able to provide full academic and professional qualifications to students who would easily be able to work as climatologists, weather forecasters, research scientists, and deal with all aspects of weather and climate variability issues in an honest and impartial manner without undue alarm, hype and speculation.”

Dr Sharma said FNU graduates would experience an emphasis on the hard core fundamentals of meteorology and allied subjects, placing them miles ahead of even those graduates doing the 1-year intensive Australian courses.

“Furthermore a specialized aviation meteorology course dealing with all aspects of aviation meteorology theory, flight planning, terminal and aerodrome forecasts, area forecasts, upper air gridded wind and temperature forecasts, including significant weather forecasts viz., all International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) mandated product knowledge, coding and decoding and familiarity of students to flight plans will be offered. This course is compulsory for all pilots who need to pass aviation meteorology courses before getting a flying licence.”

Dr Sharma worked for British Aerospace at the Royal Saudi Air Force at the King Faisal Air Academy for more than 8 years as a specialized aviation meteorology instructor and expert and has written a number of text books for pilots.

He said a number of professional courses for technical assistants in weather and climate observer certification at the introductory, intermediate and senior observer level would provide training and qualification for direct entry to the weather service.

“The economic benefits for FNU are great as there is a vacuum in these areas and there are lots of opportunities for great collaboration with regional and global scientists, students and governments at all levels,” he said.

“Many millions of dollars of funding can be accessed directly by FNU from many donors like GEF, UNDP, United Nations UNFCC and it is expected that regional governments would be able to send students to FNU on scholarships. This programme will directly benefit PNG, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Fiji, Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Tokelau and the French Polynesia from providing a one-stop academic and professional training facility.”