

EMPOWERING WOMEN – ENSURING BALANCE



Female enrolment at FMA increased from three in 2014 to 44 this year.

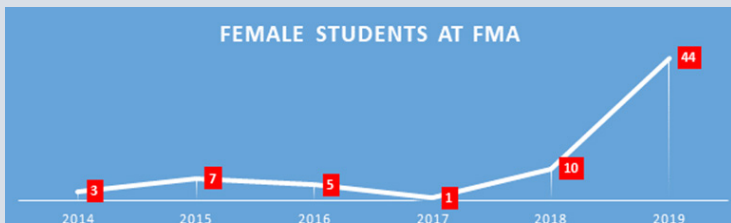
Traditionally, working at sea was seen as a male-dominated field. With exceptions of military navy and wives of senior officers, females were part of a merchant navy ship's crew.

Although the importance of gender balance at sea has been on the agenda of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) since 1998, only two per cent of 12 million seafarers are female.

While majority of women work cruise ships in catering and housekeeping divisions there is a new push towards having more women rise up the ranks to officer and captain levels.

Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA), together with the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), will aim to enhance this year's World Maritime Day theme of "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community" even further on Thursday, 26 September.

FMA, since its inception, has strongly encouraged the enrollment of females to study and pursue career pathways in the ever-growing shipping industry. Since 2014, female student numbers at the Academy have grown exponentially.



SOURCE: FMA

In recent times there have been a few exceptional achievements by FMA alumni. A former FMA cadet was the first Fijian female to receive a Bachelor's Degree from Australian Maritime College.

She is also a current staff member. Last year, a female cadet was recruited to Swire Shipping/China navigation to the cadet training. She is the first Fijian female to join this career-defining program on an overseas vessel.

Other than the evidence that empowered women are doing well in the workforce, the presence of the other gender at sea can change a typical day at sea.

Nothing but the horizon to ponder at, boring boy's conversations daily and the monotony of the work accepted as part of life can change as female perspective looms.

A female on board also adds a little compassion for being away from family and children, a gentle reminder of life over the horizon.

Life, however, is not all rosy for a female at sea. Having to prove that they are equal to the task, battling the bias of feminine



FMA students and staff will also be part of the World Maritime Day celebrations this year.

gender, and, fending off advances and harassment are some of the challenges for a girl at sea.

However, they have overcome these to be successful seafarers and we will all lend a hand to ensuring this for all female seafarers.

Exceptional women become exceptional seafarers.

Mahesa Abeynayake
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