

FMA graduates 'saviors' of Fiji fishing industry

Graduating students from the Fiji National University's (FNU), Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) Deckhand Fishing programme are seen as 'saviors' of the Fiji fishing industry due to the limited availability of locally trained deckhands.

This was the comment made by Fiji Fishing Industry Association (FFIA) President and Solander (Pacific) Limited General Manager, Radhika Kumar, who was Chief Guest at the FMA mini graduation ceremony organized for 18 students who completed Stage 1 of the Deckhand Fishing course.

"Even though the number that graduated two months ago and the number graduating today this afternoon is not enough to fill the huge existing crewing vacuum in the Fiji fleet, it is indeed the answer to our long standing yearning to have our fleet be fully manned by young enthusiastic Fijian crew, both young men and women, which is currently occupied by foreigners," Kumar said.

"Your successful performances will surely open up doors for other donors and even Government to step in and provide funding for future trainings in order to have a fully locally manned fishing fleet."

"The course you have just taken will be internationally accredited when Fiji adopts what is known as the International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Fishing Vessel Personnel (STCW-F)."

"What is new and unique to Fiji is the addition of a module in the curriculum devoted to sustainability and environment, emphasizing Fiji's total commitment to a sustainable fishing industry which acknowledges environmental concerns."

FMA Chief Executive Officer Mahesa Abeynayake congratulated the 12 male and six female graduates and challenged them to pursue their career goals in the maritime industry with diligence and consistency.

Graduate Kasanita Vakairai, 19, from Monasavu Village in Naitasiri said she felt a sense of accomplishment after completing Stage 1 of the programme and was determined to find attachment on a fishing vessel, which is the next component of the course.

"Due to financial hardships I was unable to begin my tertiary education in nursing, which was my initial plan after completing high school at Nasinu Muslim College," Vakairai said.

"But I feel like I have another chance at life after my friends told me about this course which I enrolled in through a tuition scholarship from World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) – Pacific."

"I did not know that females could also learn and work in the maritime sector but now I am glad that I took a chance and ventured into this industry because

I have decided that I want to become a skipper on a fishing vessel after achieving all the required qualifications from FMA."

Fellow student Sitareki Sigarara Vusonilawedua said he was following in the footsteps of his seafarer family and was proud to be enrolled in the programme.

The former Ratu Kadalevu School student, 20, said he aims to one day achieve the highest Master Class certification and contribute to Fiji's fishing sector.

Vusonilawedua, from Banikea Village in Bua, Vanua Levu, also encouraged females to consider joining the traditionally male-dominated industry.

The Deckhand Fishing programme was coordinated by WWF-Pacific and the students studied through tuition-only scholarships funding from the New Zealand Aid programme.



Graduates from the Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) Deckhand Fishing programme along with FMA CEO Mahesa Abeynayake (front, second from left), Fiji Fishing Industry Association President and Solander (Pacific) Limited General Manager Radhika Kumar and WWF-Pacific Project Manager Seremaia Tuqiri (far right) during the mini graduation this afternoon.