

He’Ofa joins fishing vessel on attachment as lone female crew member

Being the first female crew member on board a fishing vessel is an experience Lupe Meitakui He’Ofa will cherish as she currently serves a 12-month practical onboard a Solander (Pacific) Limited fishing vessel.

He’Ofa, 19, recently graduated from the Fiji National University’s (FNU), Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) Stage 1 theoretical course of the Deck Hand Fishing Programme.

Students undertaking the programme are provided tuition-only scholarships coordinated by WWF-Pacific through funding from the New Zealand Aid programme.



Lupe Meitakui He’Ofa part of the off loading process at Muaivalu Wharf. Picture WWF-Pacific.

He’Ofa said the Basic Sea Safety, Basic Sea Survival Techniques, Firefighting and First Aid training she received during the theoretical course enabled her to be confident out at sea during her attachment.

“Definitely, the Deck Hand Fishing Programme prepared me for my practical,” she said.

“What I understand is that, current experienced seafarers all learned on the job. I was fortunate to get theory training in a classroom before joining the workforce.”

“So prior to joining Solander V, I had fair knowledge on what was expected of me as a deck hand apprentice.”

According to the Solander V skipper, Captain Sesoni Vinakailoma, this was the first time the vessel had a female crew member.

He’Ofa added that the bycatch module of the programme, which addresses the need for greater awareness and education on sustainable offshore fishing

practices, made her conscious of the need to protect endangered species out at sea.

“The bycatch training that was part of the Deck Hand Fishing Programme, also allowed me to build my capacity in terms of how to mitigate bycatch caught whilst we were out at sea,” He’Ofa said.

“We went through the module at FMA and then on my practical, I knew the processes of mitigating bycatch.”

He’Ofa and the crew of Solander V recently berthed after a 19-day fishing expedition.

She highlighted that despite being part of a male-dominated working environment, she was confident that females could succeed in any field through hard work and determination.

“Women can also do well in this industry that is dominated by men. Nothing is impossible and if one is willing they can,” He’Ofa said.

“I just started my sea time and it was a challenge at first and am slowly getting used to these challenges and I know, the more sea time I get, the better a seafarer I will become.”

He’Ofa is one of eight apprentices currently undergoing their practical with Solander (Pacific)



From left to right; Vilisoni Tarabe of WWF Pacific, Malakai Matanisiga of FMA, fellow seafarer Patrick and Lupe Meitakui He’Ofa. Picture WWF-Pacific.