

Minister Koroilavesau launches bycatch manual at FMA



FNU VC Prof Nigel Healey (second from left) with Fisheries Minister Semi Koroilavesau, WWF-Pacific Rep Kesaia Tabunakawai (6th from left) with FMA students and stakeholders at the launch.

In an effort to create greater awareness and education on sustainable offshore fishing practices, a training manual titled “Protected Species Bycatch Mitigation for the Fiji Offshore Fisheries” was launched at the Fiji National University’s (FNU), Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) by Minister for Fisheries Honourable Semi Koroilavesau today.

Bycatch is fish or other marine species that is caught unintentionally while catching certain target species and target sizes of fish.

While launch the training manual at FMA, Honourable Koroilavesau said issues of bycatch was important to safe guard our marine industry for future generations.

“It is inevitable that there will be interaction between fishers and protected species which include fish and non-fin fish like sharks, turtles and seabirds,” said Hon Koroilavesau.

“Therefore, it is pinnacle for fishers to act responsibly. Not only do they need to be aware that such interaction may occur, but they should, as far as they are able, mitigate or avoid such interaction while going about their fishing activities.”

The Minister said the success of the training manual required the continuous collaboration between all stakeholders, which included processors, fishers, trainers, national fisheries agency and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

“With the use of the manual, trainees should be able to identify the animals which are of special interest or protected species, explain the current requirements when interaction with protected species occur, explain why protected species get caught during fishing activities, describe what best practice in avoiding interaction, use safe handling and release practices and be able to develop individual vessel management plans,” he said.

Hon Koroilavesau added that the training manual would not only build capacity for the fishing sector but also complement the collective approach Fiji is undertaking in the sustainable use and protection of our limited resources.

FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey said the training document addressed the need to sustainably harvest catch in ways that did not damage either the fish stocks or the marine environment.

“Today’s development means that, in collaboration with the World Wide Fund for Nature – Pacific (WWF Pacific), Fiji Maritime Academy will be able, for the first time, to train fisherman and support the professionalization of an occupation that is vital to the economic future of the nation,” Prof Healey said.

“Looking at the bigger picture, we need to rethink about how we will satisfy our future demand for protein and food.

“Wild fishing and, in time, ocean-based cage aquaculture offers an alternative solution that is healthier and more sustainable. But to benefit from these opportunities, we need our fishermen to be highly trained, and environmentally responsible, so that we can coexist with nature and our ocean’s resources.

“Today’s launch is an important step towards this future.”

According to WWF-Pacific Representative Kesaia Tabunakawai, the manual was made possible through WWF Pacific’s ‘Developing Sustainable and Responsible Tuna Longline Fisheries in Fiji’ project, which is funded by New Zealand Aid’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) and coordinated through WWF New Zealand.

“This project will ensure that Fiji’s tuna sector continues to enhance its reputation as a world leader in sustainable tuna fisheries by enhancing capacity and understanding for bycatch mitigation and contributing to the management of Fiji yellowfin and albacore tuna fisheries which in turn strengthens the contribution of sustainable Tuna fisheries to Fiji’s economy,” Tabunakawai said.

“Bycatch is an ongoing regional issue which poses a reputational risk to the local tuna fishery and it is our vision that through the provision of affordable and accessible training for fishing crews on bycatch, capacity building and development of professional fisher folks will go a long way to reducing impacts associated with bycatch not only nationally but across the Western and Central Pacific tuna fishery.”

The bycatch training manual will provide the fisheries bycatch component in the current Deck Hand Fishing and Offshore Skipper Fishing programmes being taught at FMA.

The 46 FMA students currently enrolled in the programmes were also present at today’s launch.



Fisheries Minister Semi Koroilavesau hands over the training manual to FNU Vice Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey.