

## Giant squid fishing in Okinawa... and soon in the Pacific

*As part of its fisheries diversification initiative, SPC's Nearshore Fisheries Development Section (NFDS) is constantly looking at introducing new fishing technologies in the region. Diversifying nearshore fishing operations provides alternative food security and livelihoods to coastal communities and reduces fishing effort on heavily exploited marine resources while also ensuring the sustainable harvesting of newly targeted species. After the successful introduction of new shallow-water FAD designs (2007–2008) and the setting-up and promotion of tourism-based sport fishing operations (2009–2010), NFDS, in collaboration with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) Fisheries Development Division, will soon undertake fishing trials for baitfish and other small pelagic species, using the Indonesian bagan method. In October, the Fisheries Development Advisers of both FFA and SPC met in Okinawa to develop ties with the local fishing industry. The objective of this trip was to make arrangements for an experimental fishing campaign in 2011 to target the diamond-back giant squid (Thysanoteuthis rhombus).*

The diamond-back giant squid is found worldwide in tropical and subtropical waters. The main fishing grounds are located in the Sea of Japan and around Okinawa Island where 90% of the Japanese total catch is made. In Okinawa, giant squid is fished primarily in the daytime with 500-meter-long free-floating droplines called hata-nagashi. Each dropline, made of 2 mm stainless steel multi-strand wire, is equipped with one flagpole and one pressure float at one end and three large squid jigs at the other end. Squid are attracted to the gear by a pressure-resistant light snapped onto the mainline, above the squid jigs. The Okinawan giant squid fishery runs mainly from November to April (northern hemisphere winter) and its catch has increased from 15 tonnes (t) in 1989 to 2,300 t in 2003. The yearly catch is currently averaging 2,000 t and all local production is exported to mainland Japan in frozen, vacuum-packed blocks. Giant squid is consumed as sashimi in Japan.

While in Okinawa, the FFA and SPC Fisheries Development Advisers met with representatives of the local fishing industry. They visited a tuna and squid processing plant and spoke with a local fisherman who agreed to come to the South Pacific to experiment with giant squid fishing in New Caledonian waters. The project is scheduled for June or July 2011 (southern hemisphere winter). While prices paid to Okinawan fishers (JPY 500–650 per kg) would not be high enough to sustain a new export fishery from the Pacific, this new commodity may be quite attractive to consumers, including tourists, on local markets. We know that giant squid are present in the tropical Pacific but the size of the resource and its accessibility remain to be assessed. It is hoped that this fisheries diversification project will provide the answers.

**For more information, please contact:**

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*Some of the gear used in giant squid fishing: electrical reel, squid jig, pressure light (yellow), which is attached on the line close to the lure, and strobe lights (orange) for the flag poles (Image: Michel Blanc).*



*Giant squid mantle ready to be processed (Image: Michel Blanc).*