

## MARINE RESOURCES DIVISION

### Tribute to Michael Manning

Michael John Manning, OFP Fisheries Scientist, passed away suddenly of natural causes at age 35, on Monday, 7 September 2009, while on duty travel in Tuvalu.

Michael was born on 17 September 1973 in Palmerston North, New Zealand, and grew up in Wellington. After studying for a BSc in Ecology and Zoology at Victoria University (Wellington), his first professional employment was at the New Zealand Seafood Industry Council (SeaFIC), starting in mid-1998. There, he organised biological sampling programmes that were conducted on commercial vessels. Michael excelled at training fishers to do this work. After two years at SeaFIC, he recognised that he needed more study to develop his talents, a decision supported by SeaFIC, who arranged financial support from the fishing industry. He obtained an MSc in Statistics from the University of Auckland, and graduated in 2006. His thesis was titled "On fitting and comparing selected statistical models of fish growth".

In 2001, he took a position with New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) in Wellington as a Fisheries Technician, and obtained a position as a scientist in 2003. He became involved in a wide range of projects, leading a number of them himself, and quickly developed skills across the spectrum of fisheries science (in ageing, tagging, statistics, sampling methodologies, stock assessment modelling, report writing and project management). He demonstrated great commitment and enthusiasm in every task he took on. He also discovered a love for sharks, and tagged rig, school, and great white sharks in the course of his time at NIWA. One white shark that he helped tag in New Zealand was tracked north to New Caledonia, and Michael was keen to follow this up after arriving in Noumea.

During this period, Mike's enthusiasm extended well beyond his working environment. He also developed a passion for running, including marathons, and was an extra in the second instalment of the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Michael started working for SPC's Oceanic Fisheries Programme in February of this year, in the Stock Assessment section, and his appointment was seen as a coup for the programme. With his expertise in all aspects of fisheries science, there was not a job within OFP that he could not have done. While he came from a New Zealand fisheries system with a few more creature comforts, it quickly dawned on him what Pacific tuna fisheries were all about. He could see past the technical aspects of the work, and became excited about the opportunity to make a real contribution to people and countries with little but the sea around them to support their nations' economies and food requirements.

In June and July of this year Michael worked as part of a team to prepare and deliver fish stock assessment training workshops to participants from all over the Pacific, to help these countries make decisions to ensure the sustainability of their only resource. Michael was a naturally gifted, engaging and enthu-



*Michael at sea while he was working for NIWA.*

siastic teacher and presenter. The mark he left on those he taught was highlighted in the many tributes that have flowed in from around the Pacific. Of these, the following perhaps best sum up his impact and the regard with which he was held.

*His passing away is a great loss not only to SPC, but also to the Pacific region. He was a great friend to us all, especially in promoting Pacific Island scientists whom he helped and assisted during the series of stock assessment workshops. We here in Samoa join with SPC and friends from the region in appreciating and thanking him for his tireless and tremendous efforts through SPC in helping the island states members to build our scientific capacity and knowledge and understanding of stock assessment issues.*

Atonio P. Mulipola, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Samoa

*We first met Michael Manning at the SPC Stock Assessment Workshop in Auckland this past June/July. As a relatively new addition to the SPC Oceanic Fisheries Division, we were eager to get to know, and learn from Michael. Many of us continued to develop a friendship with Michael at the WCPFC Science Committee meeting in Port Villa, Vanuatu.*

*During the course of the Stock Assessment Workshop in Auckland Michael proceeded to impress us with his ability to take complex statistical concepts and present them in an unpretentious, straightforward and easy to understand manner. Michael exuded patience and affability in listening to and responding to our questions, providing thorough answers. These attributes of Michaels continued to be very helpful to us at the Science Committee Meeting in Vanuatu.*

*Although we only knew Michael for a short period of time, we found him to be an amiable and genuine person, who was always willing to provide guidance and clarity to our understanding the essential tenets of stock assessment, so we could in turn better represent and serve our colleagues and countries.*

*It was an honor to get to know Michael and we will truly miss him.*

From: All participants at the 2009 Stock Assessment Workshops



**Michael Manning (fourth from left) at the SPC-GEF stock assessment training workshops in Auckland, New Zealand, June 2009.**

In August at the WCPFC Scientific Committee meeting in Port Vila, Michael presented the Western and Central Pacific's first ever Shark Stock Assessment Feasibility Plan (a paper on which he was the lead author), and potentially a significant step towards future shark conservation. While it was a task he took extremely seriously, it was also probably the first Pacific fisheries presentation to include a slide of Bob the Builder. His enthusiasm and passion for sharks were noted by many at the meeting.

But more important in his life were friendship and love. In coming to New Caledonia Michael brought with him his two great loves, his wife Juliette and daughter Caitlin, and together they continued old friendships and made many new ones. Michael became as well known for his ready and engaging smile, constant joking and laughter, and understanding and considerate nature, as he was for his professional skills.

Michael demonstrated the most important attributes for any scientist working at SPC, namely a very high level of technical skill, self-motivated dedication to his job, and enthusiasm for teamwork with his colleagues. We are fortunate to have known him. From the people of the Pacific, may he rest in peace.