

Sport fishing training in Niue



Young Teva Pasisi could well be part of the next generation of fishing guides in Niue.

The development of sport fishing tourism has great potential in the Pacific Islands region. On Niue, sport fishing is not in its infancy because fishing charters have been available to visitors for more than a decade. Strengthening this niche industry, and making sure that its economic benefits are spread across the entire community, is the objective of the Niue Tourism Office (NTO), which sought assistance from SPC to conduct a workshop for existing and prospective fishing guides.

The workshop took place from 13–27 April, following a smooth collaboration and some cost sharing between NTO, the South Pacific Tourism Organization (SPTO), the Niue Island Fishermen's Association (NIFA), SPC's Nearshore Fisheries Development Section, and the EU-DevFish2 project.

The workshop was conducted by SPC's Nearshore Fisheries Development Adviser Michel Blanc, and New Caledonia-based fishing guide Etienne Picquel, with strategic inputs from Graham Marsh (NIFA), Vanessa Marsh and Hayden Porter (NTO), Rusila Drekeni (SPTO), James Tafatu (Niue Fisheries Department) and staff of Niue Telecom. Topics covered in the classroom included SPC's perspective on sport fishing, safety at sea and legal requirements, customer service, VHF radio operations, data collection, modern sport fishing techniques, gear and knots... as well as some casting practice on Niue's golf course! During the following week, 6 fishing trips were organised for 15 people. Local skippers could practice their guiding and boat handling skills, while others (the "customers") fished Niue's fish aggregation devices (FADs) and reef drop offs, under the guidance of Etienne Picquel.

While new to most participants, the fishing techniques explained in the classroom the previous week (casting and jigging) proved successful, especially around two of the nearshore FADs that had aggregators on them.

NIFA's Graham Marsh stated: "This collaboration between local stakeholders and our development partners has made possible a very interesting sport fishing workshop on Niue." He further commented that, "Michel and Etienne were excellent with their assistance and presentations, with Michel's support being invaluable right from the start; participants cannot thank them and SPC enough for this support."

One major outcome of the workshop was the development of a draft accreditation framework for the charter operators who, once they become accredited, will be supported by NTO. To become accredited, prospective guides will need to attend a series of training modules (sea safety and legislation, VHF radio operations, first aid, customer service and safety, fishing techniques) and pass corresponding tests. This accreditation scheme is considered to be a very important step towards the development

of a professional fishing charter sector that NTO is supporting as part of its strategy to attract visitors to Niue.

The results of the sea fishing trials also showed the extreme importance of FADs, not only for sport fishing but also for food security and fuel savings. The casting and jigging techniques that were introduced through the workshop should benefit local charter operators by providing them with an effective and fuel saving alternative to trolling, especially during the wahoo off-season and during periods when fishing is difficult. Those techniques can be a lot of fun and enhance Niue's attractiveness as a sport fishing destination. At the end of the workshop, participants were encouraged to practice and enhance their skills in the key areas of customer service and safety, fishing gear maintenance and boat handling.

SPC's Nearshore Fisheries Development Section will continue to collaborate with NIFA and NTO in the near future: the next idea being the development of a comprehensive data collection system to analyse the socioeconomic impacts of Niue's fishing charter industry.

In its 27 April issue, SPTO's *Pacific Pulse* newsletter stated: "With ongoing support from the Niue Tourism Office and the commitment of local guides to further strengthen their operation, Niue has the potential to become a renowned blue water sport fishing destination."

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For more information:

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Top: Etienne Picquel demonstrates how to cast a big popper. This was immediately followed by practical exercises.

Middle: The fight. Teva Pasisi using medium tackle at the Aliutu offshore FAD to land a small mahi mahi.

Bottom: This fat wahoo crossed the path of Etienne's jig 70 meters below the surface.

All pictures in this article are by Michel Blanc.

