

Break the bias: First female crew set course for Pacific fishing industry¹

SUVA, Monday 13th June, 2022 – Opening career pathways and providing equal opportunities for women is the focus of a world-first initiative that sees an all-female deck crew set off on their first fishing trip on a tuna longline vessel, today. The collaboration between SeaQuest Fiji and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency seeks to begin addressing some of the issues creating the sizable gender imbalance in the Pacific tuna industry.

Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency Director General, Dr. Manumatavai Tupou-Roosen said the women on this crew were pioneers, charting a new direction for the Pacific and the world by challenging the status quo.

“The research tells us that most women’s jobs in Pacific fisheries are in processing (small scale and commercial) and marketing for the domestic market. Women working on fishing vessels are exceedingly rare. There are a multitude of reasons why we don’t see women on fishing vessels from socio-cultural beliefs, family obligations, lack of skills and experience to attitudes to what roles women can play. The uphill battle these women have faced to be on this vessel today is a testament to their strength, determination and commitment to their training. They are an inspiration for us and for generations to come.”

SeaQuest CEO, Brett Haywood said he was proud of his crew and how far they had come, especially as a 100% Fijian owned and staffed company.

“What started out as an ambitious hope to train and put forward an all-female deck crew for this very first voyage, has morphed into also having two senior officers, a first officer and an engineer onboard - which is an amazing achievement,” said Mr Haywood. We are at this point in our journey thanks to the collaboration with FFA and the Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA) who supported the women in completing the formal training to attain the skills and knowledge to become a competent longline vessel crew. This is the first crew we are putting out to fish for our company post-covid so it is particularly symbolic for us that it is also our very first all female deck crew. We know they will make us proud.”

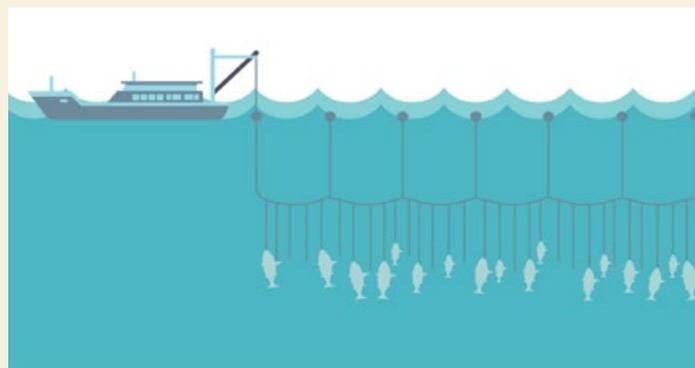
Seaka II Chief Officer Joana Kotoicikobia Vakaucautadra said she had dreamed of being the captain of a fishing boat since she was seven years old.

“This journey with this wonderful group of fellow women is a culmination of my efforts to achieve a position onboard a fishing vessel. I worked hard and never gave up. I hope that this success shines a light on a new pathway for younger women who may now see this career as an option.”

The fishing vessel will have two experienced, male, deck crew trainers present to provide direction on safe procedures and handling of fish, and help run safety drills. The women will be out to sea for a 2 week fishing trip. This female crewing initiative is the first phase of a project that is planned to be progressively rolled out in other Pacific countries by the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency with local partners.

What is longlining?

The two most important industrial fishing methods for tuna in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean are purse seine fishing and longline fishing. Longline fishing feeds out long lines with hooks into the open ocean. The crew of a longliner bait single hooks (manually or by machine) and feed out lines that maybe more than 60 km long. The hooks are on short lines (called branch lines) that hang off the main line. One longline may have 3,000 hooks. The depth at which the hooks hang in the water is crucial for attracting the desired tuna. This is regulated with a line thrower to produce a curved mainline between floats, and thus cover a range of depths. Longlines are not anchored: they drift near the surface, and are marked by radio beacons which the vessel uses to find them. It may take up to 11 hours to haul in a longline. There are different types of longline vessels. Most are large vessels of between 30 m and 70 m long. The length of time they spend away from port fishing determines the type of refrigeration they use to store the tuna catch. Vessels that are at sea for short periods usually have ice for cooling, whereas those that are at sea for many months at a time contain freezers capable of snap - freezing the tuna and keeping it at less than – 40°C. Longline fisheries target adult bigeye, albacore and yellowfin in tuna. This fishery accounts for 10 – 13% of the tuna caught in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean. However, the tuna caught this way is more valuable, as they are larger and can be landed in better condition. This is the main fishing method used for producing high quality sashimi.



¹ This article is extracted from a Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency press release available from: <https://www.ffa.int/node/2711#>

Profiles of the deck crew



Joana Kotoicikobia Vakaucataadra, Chief Officer

Joana Vakaucataadra is the Chief Officer on the Seaquest Fiji vessel Seaka II, holding a Master Class 5 certificate. As CO she supports the captain by overseeing the operation of the vessel. One of the barriers for women in commercial fisheries is that male crews often underestimate the skills of women, when they can be just as effective. Joana says women have a place in the industry and she is seeking higher qualifications. All-female crews will one day work their own vessels.



Linda Fong, Engineer Cadet

Linda Fong joined the fishing industry for the experience, travel and income. Her initial training is in engineering and as a watchkeeper. While there are few females on the commercial fishing vessels, Linda says she and her colleagues are showing they are just as good as anyone else at their jobs. More people are becoming aware of careers for females in the industry. She hopes to advance her own career and become a marine engineer.



Sereana Railala Cakacaka, Bosun

A love of travel and fishing led Sereana Cakacaka to start as a deckhand for a tuna longliner operating out of Fiji. Her work covers fishing operations, basic maintenance and general duties. While females make up only a small number on commercial fishing boats, this is changing as the industry becomes more inclusive. Sereana's advice is to listen and learn. Apart from her own job satisfaction, her work is making a difference in her family and community. Sereana sees good opportunities in the future and wants to go higher in her career.



Kasanita Vakairai, Deckhand

Kasanita Vakairai says women are commonly found in jobs such as teaching and nursing, but fisheries also offers potential. Her job offers a good income and the opportunity to travel. Kasanita says barriers to fisheries for women can be overcome with work experience and support.

More people are becoming aware of careers in fisheries and she aims to gain more senior roles.



Joana Kasani, Deckhand

Joana Kasani has spent nearly a year as a deckhand on both a fishing and merchant vessel. She completed a basic fisheries course after wanting to try something new, and enjoys her time at sea. As her experience and skills increase, Joana is confident that she, and other women, have a

future in fisheries. Anything is possible, she says, with hard work and more awareness.



Adi Kelera Lutunauga, Deckhand

Adi Kelera completed a fisheries course on fish handling, vessel maintenance and general duties. Apart from earning an income, she enjoys going out to sea and the chance to visit different places. Women are often unaware of fisheries as a career and the

mostly male industry can be challenging. It is important to work at a very high level, and aim to succeed. Her own ambitions are to learn more and to one day be captain.



Viviana Vakavuraka Bogitini, Deckhand

Viviana Vakavuraka Bogitini believes this career is not only for boys, that we should also encourage young women to pursue this field. This is Viviana's very first trip in a fishing boat. The mother of one is looking forward to learning new things

and pursuing this career opportunity. She has undertaken a deckhand training course.



FFA press release: <https://www.ffa.int/node/2711#>

Pacific news service: <https://pina.com.fj/2022/06/13/first-female-crew-set-course-for-pacific-fishing-industry/>

FBC News: <https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/first-all-female-crew-set-off-on-first-fishing-trip/>

Fiji Times: <https://www.fijitimes.com/a-world-first-first-all-female-deck-crew-for-fiji/>

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About Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA)

FFA assists its 17-member countries to sustainably manage fishery resources that fall within their 200-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). FFA provides expertise, technical assistance and other support to its members who make decisions about their tuna resources and participate in regional decision making on tuna management.

Find out more here: www.ffa.int