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COUNTRY STATEMENT - SOLOMON ISLANDS

by

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(1642/79)

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Country Statement - Solomon Islands - 1979

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SUMMARY

Prior to 1971, Fisheries in the Solomon Islands was mainly in the subsistence sector and the only commercial exploitation taking place was in the traditional Pacific Island marine products-Beche-de-mer, trochurs, Turtle shell, etc. This small industry was useful in as much as it generated much needed cash into the rural economy. Although useful, it was not substantial enough in resources to provide Government with revenue when the eventual day of independence arrived.

From that year full scale commercial surveys were undertaken to tap the resources of tuna that were known to inhabit the waters of the Solomon Islands. In 1973 a joint venture agreement was signed between Taiyo Fishery Company of Japan and the Solomon Islands Government to harvest the resources that the survey results confirmed. This industry has continued to flourish until at the time of writing there are two freezer stations, two Arabusi smoke factories and one cannery. An additional cannery is planned for construction during 1980.

To supplement the catch of the joint venture company, a newly formed company came into existence during the year 1977. The company, National Fisheries Developments Ltd., is to build ten skipjack vessels and operate them on their completion. The project is funded by a A.D.B. loan with New Zealand technical assistance.

In 1976 the industry was again the largest single production unit (by sector) in the country, exports were worth approximately A\$10 million. (A\$9.5 million in skipjack and the balance by traditional products).

Advances have been made in the internal fish marketing structure with freezers and ice plants being commissioned in Honiara and districts. This development will continue to have high priority with the Division.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

COUNTRY STATEMENT 1979

For presentation to the South Pacific
Commission at the Fisheries
Technical Meeting
Noumea

NOVEMBER 1979

N. P. Stone
Senior Fisheries Officer

INTRODUCTION

The Solomon Islands "National Development Plan" for the years 1975 through 1979 state the aims of Government and the Ministry of Natural Resources with regard to the Fisheries sector are:-

1. Management of the marine resources of the Solomon Islands and the preservation of the marine environment.
2. Improved availability of locally caught fish protein throughout the country and substitution of processed frozen fish imports.
3. Increased employment in the Fishing industry at all levels.
4. Increased revenue to Government from fishing activity.
5. Increased control and management participation in all aspects of the fishing industry by Solomon Islanders.

It is generally accepted within the Solomon Islands that the fisheries targets as laid down in the National Development Plan have been met and that general development has exceeded expectation.

The Fisheries resource of the Solomon Islands are probably the major untapped resource which as yet, has hardly been utilised. With the introduction of a 200 mile fishery limit on the 1st January 1978, over which the Solomon Islands claim jurisdiction over all marine resources as belonging to the coastal state, this broadens the scope by which fisheries will be developed in these islands.

The Solomon Islands Government therefore places high priority on fisheries development and supports it by maintaining an ever strengthening Fisheries Division in personnel and with vigorously seeking overseas aid so as to allow the Division to pursue projects quickly and with sufficient cash backing. The staff composition of the Fisheries Division as on 1st January, 1979 was as follows:

Chief Fisheries Officer	
Principal Fisheries Officer	- Licencing
Senior Fisheries Officer	- Development
Fisheries Officer	- Malaita District
Fisheries Officer	- Western District
Fisheries Officer	- Marketing
Fisheries Officer	- Training
Fisheries Officer	- Statistics
Asst. Fisheries Officer	- Eastern District
Asst. Fisheries Officer	- Western District
Asst. Fisheries Officer	- Malaita District
Asst. Fisheries Officer	- Marketing
Asst. Fisheries Officer	- Skipjack field officer

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Although many of the above posts are presently expatriate held Solomon Island students are at various overseas training institutions and with further graduates arriving back next year, it is hoped that total localisation of the Division can take place within the next two to three years.

A major item of equipment that the Division has been lacking - a research vessel - was approved during 1977. The vessel is of ferro-cement construction and has been funded by British aid. The vessel is presently under delivery, and hopefully, should be on station during the latter part of this year.

Development of the Solomon Islands fisheries could still be considered to be in its infancy, the first commercial enterprise started in 1973 with the formation of a joint company by the Solomon Islands and the Japanese company, Taiyo. The Fisheries Division itself, only became a separate functioning body in 1974 when it succeeded in breaking away from the control of Agriculture.

The future of fisheries involves the progressive development and management of the offshore fisheries through the auspices of our Joint Venture Company. (Solomon Taiyo Ltd.) and our own newly formed commercial company, National Fisheries Developments Ltd. Government will continue the development of the semi-commercial village level fisheries, and the marketing for such will be conducted through SIACO, a public owned but Government sponsored fish marketing company.

LOCAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

i) Fish Collection

In 1975 a pilot scheme was launched using insulated boxes. The scheme met with virtual instant success. The scheme expanded in August 1976 when the Taiyo Fishing Company of Japan donated two "Resco" block ice machines, one of which was installed in Honiara to supplement the initial machine while the other was commissioned in Auki on the island of Malaita.

Using scheduled Government and private shipping and where possible, the existing road structure, ice is sent out to the fishermen and fish/ice returned to the market centres. The original insulated boxes used in the scheme were broken/written off domestic refrigerators, these are now gradually being replaced by aluminium boxes locally made and injected with poly-urethane insulation and also by fibre-glass containers. Ice storage trials in the various containers have been carried out and the tests to date have proved that ice has a varying storage life of between five and ten days depending on where the container was held and the number of times the lid was removed.

The scheme has expanded until at the time of writing, there are twelve ice plants in operation within the Solomons, two in Honiara and nine in the outstations. Permanent concrete ice and fish storage bins have and are being built to gain maximum use from the machines.

An important addition to the project was made in March 1979, when the division took delivery of a 22 mtr refrigerated fish collection vessel from Japan.

With a hold capacity of 34 cubic metres and a range of nautical miles, the vessel is able to service the more productive 400 fishing groups in the islands. A regular weekly service is now possible, where before Government and private shipping was often unreliable.

ii) Marketing

In 1977, a public company, SIACO, was formed under the direction of Fisheries Division, to carry out this all important function. A technical officer, funded by U.K. aid was recruited under contract to undertake the daily operation of the company.

The formation of the company has created a vehicle through which to assist further fisheries development. Products such as rock lobster, oysters, crabs, prawns and other edible marine products are being exploited by islanders now that the necessary infra-structure is available.

It is estimated that eight (8) to ten tonnes of fish is now entering Honiara weekly. The majority of this fish can be attributed directly to the project or at least to private schemes that copies the project in design and are utilising project facilities, i.e. ice supplies.

iii) Baitfish

Another project which came into existence during 1979 was the feasibility trials into the possible localisation of the bait-fish industry. At present all bait-fish caught, is by the catcher vessels themselves using the traditional method of under-water lights and net. In future it is hoped that the villagers, in the proximity of the baiting grounds will be able to catch the bait, hold in storage cages and sell to the catcher vessels. This should allow a greater cash flow in the more rural areas.

A project funded by UNDP has supplied an FAO baitfish expert plus equipment and early results are encouraging.

iv) National Fisheries Developments Ltd.

One of the major new developments to take place in the Solomon Islands has been the formation of National Fisheries Developments Ltd. This is a joint venture with Government holding 75% of the shares and Solomon Taiyo the remainder. The reason for setting up this company, was that the present composition of the fleet supplying the joint venture company, Solomon Taiyo Ltd., is four vessels owned by the company and sixteen charter vessels. The result of this was approximately 40% of the cash income of the company was being lost overseas in chantage fees. As all delegates will be aware, this is a substantial amount for a developing country to lose in foreign earnings. The concept therefore of this newly formed company is for a locally owned company to own and replace these catching units, thus keeping the cash within the country.

The initial undertaking of this new company will be the construction of 10 (ten) 20 metre ferro-cement skipjack vessels. As each vessel is commissioned, the company will operate the craft as a commercial unit. All marketing of fish caught by the company's vessels will be through Solomon Taiyo for sale on the international markets.

This project has been funded by a \$5.8 million dollar loan from the Asian Development Bank. Technical expertise during the construction phase is being provided through New Zealand aid.

To train the crews for the manning of these vessels, the Honiara Technical Institute and Marine Training School has been upgraded with aid funds from the European Development Fund. Training aids such as a marine engine, generators, mockup bridges, etc., similar to those fitted in the vessels, have been installed in the shore training establishment. Two pole and line training vessels have been obtained from Japan, one 22.5 m glass fibre vessels and one 36.5 m vessel built of steel. Both vessels fish commercially when not pursuing a training role.

v) Turtle Program

Since 1975, Fisheries Division has supported a turtle programme aimed at stock management. Five species have been identified in the Solomon Islands.

- | | | |
|-----|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| (a) | Hawksbill | (<u>Eretmochelys imbricata</u>) |
| (b) | Greenback | (<u>Chelonia mydas</u>) |
| (c) | Leathery | (<u>Dermochylys coriacea</u>) |
| (d) | Olive Ridley | (<u>Lepidochyls olivacea</u>) |
| (e) | Loggerhead | (<u>Caretta caretta</u>) |

The first three species are known to nest extensively in the Solomons. Nest tagging however has been done on the Hawksbill and Greenback turtles and a sanctuary has been declared on the Arnavon Island group in the Western Province.

In 1979, funding was received from the World Wildlife Fund to assist the program.

A Peace Corp Volunteer and two local assistants are now based full time in the Arnavon Island group to continue studies.

JOINT VENTURE COMPANY COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The Government of the Solomon Islands through the Fisheries Division continue to work closely with Solomon Taiyo to achieve meaningful and worthwhile development. 1977 however, proved a disappointing year after 1976 which proved to be record year for catch rates per vessel. Although catch rates were considerably down, the value of fish exported did rise due to the world wide increase paid by the major tuna packers.

The fleet operated by the company increased from fifteen at the beginning of 1976 to twenty catchers at the years close.

In 1978, the total catch was the highest since the company was formed. However, when effort is considered, the catch per unit effort was still lower than in 1976. This was due to the very poor fishing which occurred from January to May.

The final catch records for 1979 are not available at the time of writing. Early returns look promising and 79 looks set to be a record year. The number of vessels fishing to the company is now 28 but this figure includes 5 new vessels recently commissioned.

POLE AND LINE CATCH RECORDS

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>PERIOD</u>	<u>TOTAL CATCH</u>	<u>NO. BOATS</u>	<u>CATCH/DAY/ BOAT</u>
1971	6 months	4711 tonnes	6	5.75 tonnes
1972	12 months	8005 tonnes	15	3.39 tonnes
1973	10 months	6508 tonnes	12	3.35 tonnes
1974	12 months	10331 tonnes	10	4.68 tonnes
1975	12 months	7168 tonnes	12	2.95 tonnes
				<u>CATCH/UNIT EF- FORT/BOAT</u>
1976	12 months	14809 tonnes	15	4.34 tonnes
1977	12 months	13004 tonnes	20	2.92 tonnes
1978	12 months	15712 tonnes	20	3.66 tonnes
1979	JAN-OCT.	18559 tonnes	28	4.77 tonnes

During 1976 and 1977 Solomon Taiyo sponsored a longline survey designed to evaluate the Solomon Islands domestic (200 mile) potential using a local base and crews. The preliminary survey results were encouraging and showed a profit. The local crew (16 against 5 Japanese) showed a efficiency in working this method and no problems were experienced with the crews spending prolonged periods at sea. Discussions then commenced to upgrade the survey into a pilot commercial operation.

The pilot operation was successful, the two vessels employed catching an average in excess of 2 tonne per fishing day.

The vessels continued operations through 1979, again with satisfactory catches, and all fish consigned to the high value Japanese shashimi market.

It is possible that further longline vessels will be operated by the company in 1980.

Generally, the Solomon Islands Government are happy with the progress made by the Joint Venture Company and would like to continue to use the Company as a vehicle to mount other surveys of the marine resources of these islands.