

Training experience for Offshore Fishing Skipper and Deckhand program students



Staff and students from Fiji Maritime Academy with the team from New Zealand High Commission's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

A passion to safeguard Fiji's marine environment spurred young Vunise Biuimawai to enrol in the Basic Sea Safety Fishing and Deckhand Fishing being offered by Fiji National University's (FNU) Fiji Maritime Academy (FMA).

Originally from Oneata, Lau, Biuimawai said growing up she was always drawn to caring for the environment. She said given the impact of Climate Change, coupled with over-fishing, countries that heavily depend on the marine environment for their livelihood need to ensure they have strict policies and regulations in place to safeguard and conserve resources for future generations.

"When I saw this programme being offered, I knew this was something I wanted to do," said Biuimawai.

After completing the one-month theory session, Biuimawai is now getting hands-on experience as she is onboard with shipping vessel operated by Sea Quest Company. The practical attachment will be for 12 months.

"I am glad I chose this course because it will help me achieve my dream which is to become a Skipper one day," said Biuimawai.

"I have completed my 3 months' attachment and I have learnt new things like Basic Sea Safety, Deckhand Fishing, Bycatch mitigation, knowledge of nautical techniques, Ship handling, Fish handling and Fish processing," she said.

The program which is divided into two structures - Basic Sea Safety Fishing and Deckhand Fishing was introduced following New Zealand government's announcement of offering 46 scholarships in this area. The programme is coordinated by the FMA in conjunction with the WWF-Pacific.

Head of Safety, Survival and Fisheries Department at FMA's Department of Maritime Studies Captain Tevita Robanakadavu said the program provides necessary qualifications and training for one who wants to be qualified in the fishing area.

Captain Robanakadavu while making a presentation to representatives from New Zealand High Commission's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ MFAT) said there has been no formal training for people to operate in this field prior to the implementation of this course..

The visiting team headed by NZ MFAT Development Officer Rose Frendin was briefed on the progress of the programme.

"Out of the 46 students that went through the Basic Sea Safety, 31 students are enrolled in Deckhand fishing while 15 students are getting trained in the Offshore Skipper course," said Captain Robanakadavu.

"We are preparing the fifteen students to become Ship Captain which in the fishing industry are called Skippers. The Offshore skippers are responsible for taking the ship beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)," he added.

Offshore Skipper course is a three-year program while Deckhand Fishing is a one-month course.

"All our students are currently on attachment. We have students who are doing their practical with Fiji Fish, Solander, Sea Quest and some other fishing vessels," he said.

The program is designed for school-leavers who have passed Form 6 with English, Mathematics and Physics subjects.



First-year student Vunise Biuimawai (left) with her colleague Timaima Nukusere.