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\$3m trade

Geraldine Panapasa (Friday, March 22, 2013)

AN estimated \$3m a year is paid to predominantly rural producers by Fiji's beche-de-mer export traders, according to Crick Carleton, a management consultant and strategist from Nautilus Consultants in the United Kingdom.

And the huge upturn in the Chinese economy and increase in disposable income available to many more families have led to the escalated demand for beche-de-mer or sea cucumber.

It is very unlikely that any realistic increase in the supply of beche-de-mer from global resources will satisfy this market, the environmental specialist said.

"We believe that with better management and more attention to quality, the value of this trade could be doubled without any increase in the quantity of exports," said Mr Carleton whose work was focused on marine and coastal issues, fishery development, marine policy and economic development of coastal communities.

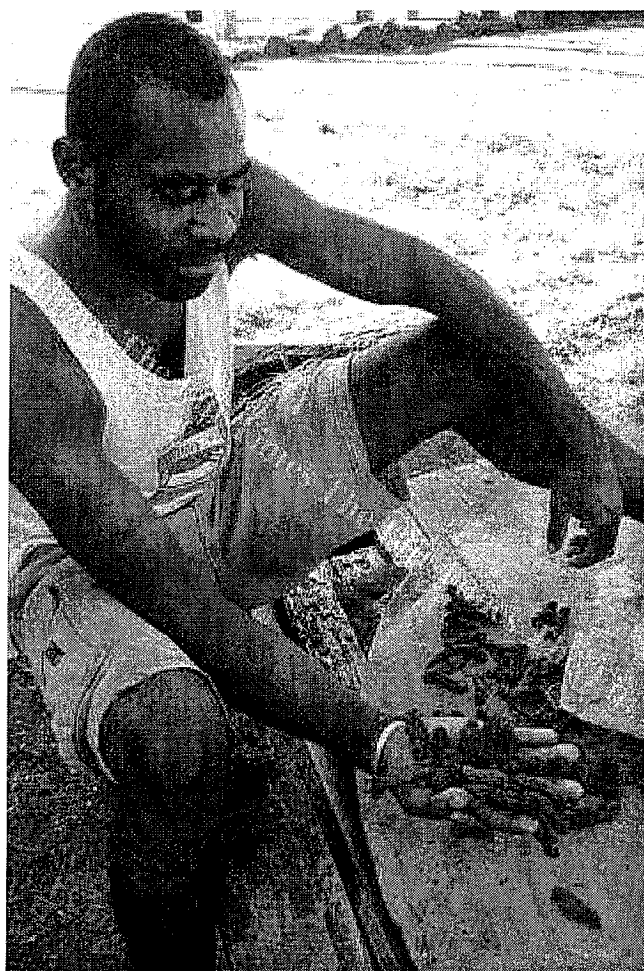
He said most sea cucumbers were harvested by rural coastal households, many of whom had limited alternative sources of income.

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

fisheries development officer (economics) Michael Sharp said Fiji alone did not have the productive capacity to meet the global demand for beche-de-mer but with good management, there was an opportunity to increase the value generated from the trade.

"There are 21 odd species of sea cucumber that are of commercial interest in the Pacific, which range in price from \$US2-\$US100 (\$F3.57-\$F178.63) per kilogram paid to the producer, with retail prices reaching up to \$600 per kilogram," he said.

"The value generated by Fiji is dependent on the species, the size and the quality of processing.



Lemeki Vakausausa with dried Greenfish (*Stichopus chloronotus*), a species of sea cucumber on Yadua Island.
Picture: GERALDINE PANAPASA

"Improvement management will result in increased biomass of high value species and larger individuals, which, in combination with improved processing, is estimated to double the annual value of the fishery."

He said mismanagement and poor quality significantly reduced economic value of beche-de-mer generated by Pacific islands.

"It is difficult to estimate the total demand for sea cucumber but as the Chinese economy continues to grow, it is thought that the demand for sea cucumber will increase. At present, it appears that demand outweighs supply," he said.

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