

## **Community-led Oyster Farms in Fiji: A Case Study of Gender-Responsive Aquaculture**

**Purpose:** This panel will highlight gender-responsive nature-based aquaculture approaches in Fiji. Topics discussed include Fiji's approach to ensuring women are active participants in its burgeoning aquaculture industry, and examining how the government is working with NGO's, the private sector, and communities to enhance equitable access, decision-making, and benefits. A case study of nature-based aquaculture focused on community-led oyster farms will be featured as well.

**Chair/moderator:** Dr. Veronica Lo, Senior Policy Advisor, IISD

### **Participants:**

**Prashneel Chandra**, Senior Research Officer (Aquaculture Division), Ministry of Fisheries, Fiji: Highlights of initiatives the Ministry of Fisheries in Fiji has been undertaking to elevate women's participation in aquaculture, the challenges they have faced, and the direction Fiji will be working towards in the future.

**Georgia Exell**, Policy Analyst, International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD): Highlights from IISD's AQUAPearl Gender Gap Analysis, describing a synthesis of identified gender and climate vulnerabilities and risks for the aquaculture sector, the barriers for effective participation by women and the opportunities for equitable participation, and the effectiveness of existing aquaculture initiatives.

**Kinisimere (Rosi) Batibasaga**, Fisheries Officer, World Conservation Society - Fiji (WCS): Engaging with local communities as part of the Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) process is a key part of the AQUAPearl trust-building process. WCS will discuss how their work has evolved to understand the different roles in Fijian communities, how women are involved, and how they can continue to grow their role within the Fijian aquaculture industry.

**Justin Hunter**, Founder & CEO, J. Hunter Pearls: What role can the private sector play in enhancing women's roles in nature-based aquaculture? This presentation will examine how conservation and sustainability can only be successful when communities are involved, educated, and seen as partners in business, rather than a hurdle to work around.

**Roko Vuiyasawa and Sakiusa Niwa Kiti**, IISD Consultants: Quality assurance standards are necessary to ensure the safety of shellfish consumption in Fiji and ensure that there are markets to help sustain women's livelihoods opportunities from community-led shellfish initiatives. This talk will outline AQUAPearl's activities to encourage cross-sectoral collaboration.

### **Contributors (with short bios):**

**Dr. Veronica Lo, Senior Policy Advisor, IISD:** Veronica works for IISD on policy and practice for inclusive nature conservation and climate adaptation. Veronica has previously held roles with the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Convention on Biological Diversity and with various United Nations agencies. Much of her work has focused on research and policy analysis on ecosystem-based adaptation and supporting partnerships to enhance synergistic implementation of the Rio Conventions. As an academic, she has worked

across disciplines and ecosystems, from experimental coastal field ecology to participatory approaches for protected areas management.

**Georgia Exell, Policy Analyst, IISD:** Georgia's work with IISD involves participation on the Canada Adaptation team, creating guidance and research into municipal- and watershed-level adaptation planning. Georgia also coordinates the AQUAPearl and Intersectional Climate Risk Assessment (iCRA) projects within the Resilience team. Prior to IISD, Georgia worked with the Canadian Beverage Container Recycling Association (CBCRA)'s Recycle Everywhere initiative, where she led outreach and engagement efforts for programming in post-secondary institutions, multi-family dwellings, and First Nations communities across Manitoba. She also served as an environmental planner with TERA Environmental Consultants, performing a variety of tasks, including supporting the development of applications for Environmental Assessment Certificates and providing datasets and analysis for over 300 communities. Georgia has a master's degree in geography from the University of Guelph and a bachelor's degree in anthropology and environmental studies from the University of Victoria.

**Justin Hunter, Founder & CEO, J. Hunter Pearls:** Justin Hunter grew up in the small town of Savusavu in Fiji where his love for island life and the ocean began. Moving to the United States as a young man Justin completed his high school education and university in Washington State. After completing his marine science degree Justin began working for his family business, Taylor Shellfish, focusing on rearing edible oysters in Washington State and Hawaii. With over 10 years' experience working for the family-owned shellfish company, Taylor Shellfish, Justin returned to his hometown of Savusavu with a dream of cultivating one of the world's rarest pearls, Fiji Pearls. Aware of the obstacles pearl farmers in Fiji had faced before him Justin implemented new pearl farming techniques and establishing vital relationships with the local villages that would see him become a pioneer in the pearling industry in Fiji and establish Fiji Pearls as a global brand.

**Prashneel Chandra, Senior Research Officer, Aquaculture Division, Ministry of Fisheries, Fiji:** Prashneel Chandra is a Senior Research Officer in the Aquaculture Division, for the Ministry of Fisheries in Fiji. Prashneel has been with the Ministry of Fisheries for 12 years. Prashneel has a Bachelor of Applied Science in Fishing and Fisheries Sciences and Management from the University of the South Pacific.

**Kinisimere (Rosi) Batibasaga, Fisheries Officer, WCS:** Rosi Batibasaga joined WCS in 2019 as an Intern and later progressed to her current role as a Fisheries Officer. Prior to this role, she volunteered with WWF and WCS and served as a Research Assistant for visiting PhD candidates from various universities. Rosi is deeply passionate about marine and terrestrial conservation, with a particular focus on using traditional ecological knowledge to enhance resilience in coastal communities. Her expertise spans turtle surveys, biological monitoring, socioeconomic surveys, community engagement, environmental awareness, and workshop facilitation.

**Roko Vuiyasawa, IISD Consultant:** Raiova (Roko) Vuiyasawa is currently the Lead Consultant for the AQUAPearl Quality Assurance Program, building on 6 years of experience working in marine studies and aquaculture. As an Aquaculture Assistant with SPC over two terms, Roko carried out water and biological sampling for testing, participated in consultations with stakeholders to develop a quality assurance protocol, and gained experience in eel aquaculture. Roko has a BA in Marine Affairs & Geography and a Postgraduate Diploma in Climate Change from the University of the South Pacific.

**Sakiusa Niwa Kiti, IISD Consultant:** Sakiusa Niwa Kiti, a current supporter of the AQUAPearl Quality Assurance Program (QAP) project, plans for sample transportation to lab facilities, assists with sampling in Savusavu, and schedules stakeholder meetings with relevant ministries and project partners. After graduating, Sakiusa began maintaining coral nurseries and assisting with reef conservation as a marine biology intern with Captain Cook Cruises. He later interned with the Pacific Community (SPC), where he gained knowledge of freshwater prawn cultivation, eel growth monitoring, and tilapia hatchery management. During SPC's early oyster testing phase, he also served as a field assistant, assisting with logistical planning, budgeting, and lab team communication. Sakiusa is dedicated to supporting community-based aquaculture and improving food safety regulations.