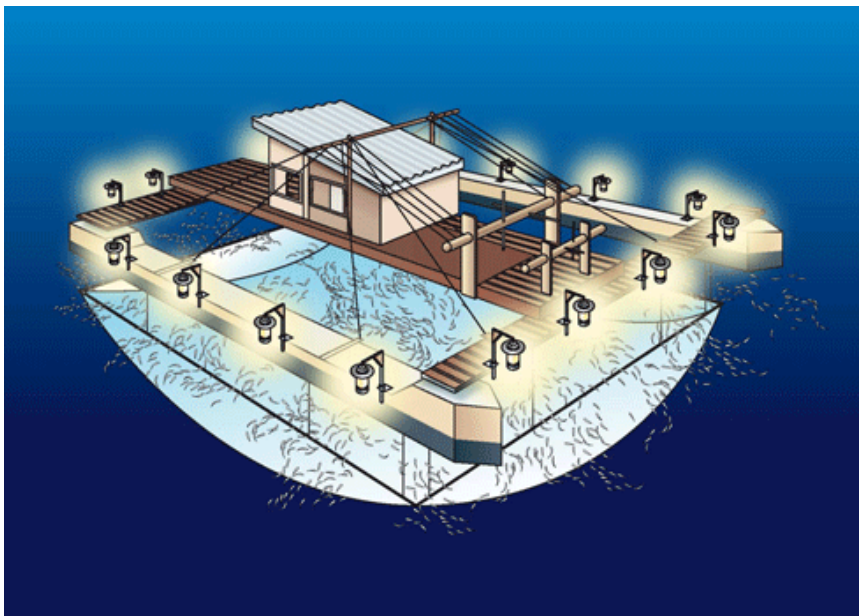


Small fish make a big splash in the Pacific

Pacific Islanders are being encouraged to ‘fish small, not big’, as the effects of climate change take a grip on their islands.



Credit: Ecoconnect Communication

A fishing platform (or ‘bagan’) will help fishers change their fishing effort from large reef fish such as groupers and snappers, to small open-sea fish like sardines and anchovies.

The bagan was launched and tested in late February in Majuro in the Marshall Islands to demonstrate a fishing practice suitable for fishers across the Pacific.

The project is the brainchild of Michel Blanc, a Fisheries Development Adviser with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), with input from the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency.

‘The bagan is a platform with a hole in the centre, winches at each corner, a lift net hanging underneath and a string of lights,’ Mr Blanc says. ‘It’s a simple idea – the fish are attracted to the lights and then we haul the net to catch them.’

‘We need to find new sources of food, because the population of the Pacific Islands is rising rapidly and we can no longer depend entirely on reef fisheries.’

SPC predicts the human population in the Pacific will increase by 50 per cent by 2030, while tropical Pacific reef fish populations are predicted to decline by up to 20 per cent by 2050.

Fish are becoming harder to catch because over-fishing has reduced their numbers. A threat looming over the fishery is ocean warming and acidification, which bleaches then kills the coral where parrot-fish, grouper and snapper live.

‘Small fish like sardines have lots of advantages,’ says Mr Blanc. ‘They breed quickly, they are highly nutritious, and they swim in schools which makes them easier to catch.’

The fish can either be eaten or sold in local markets. Preparing fish for market will open up new job opportunities for women.

Part of the training involves learning new recipes. Michel says he prefers a simple approach: ‘fillet the fish, cook them for a very short time in lime juice and then eat them in a fish salad’.

The bagan is a fishing technology used extensively in Indonesia, although the 10 square metre demonstration platform was built in Kiribati and shipped in kit form to Majuro.

Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community/Ecoconnect Communications

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