Media Advisory

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ATTENTION: News Directors, Chiefs of Staff

Australian researchers host young South Pacific islanders for hands-on training.

Press Release

Australian researchers in Brisbane are hosting two young South Pacific islanders for six-weeks of hands-on training in veneer production at Australia's leading timber product research facility.

'This is a really exciting opportunity for these two young people" said University of Tasmania's Associate Professor Gregory Nolan. Greg is project leader of an Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) funded project focusing on uses for the senile coconut stems in Pacific Island nations. The CocoVeneer project aims to enhance livelihoods in South Pacific communities through producing a sustainable veneer product from coconut palm stems and utilising any residue material for agricultural and similar by-products. Other project participants include the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF), the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities (SPC), and the national food agencies in Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

As part of the ACIAR project, Ilikimi Carati-Bokadi and Moana Bergmaier-Masau are currently undergoing extensive training at DAF's Salisbury facility to develop their skills in independent research and development with veneer-based products.

"This is all very challenging but exciting" said mother of two, Moana. With a Bachelor in Science and a Graduate Certificate in Timber, Moana has been working as a coconut wood veneer technician with SPC since 2013. "I never expected an opportunity like this to come up," she said "but I am learning so much. All the research and technical team at DAF are so professional in their approach, but so easy to work with. Its hard work but fun at the same time."

"It's a real joy to have them with us" said Rob McGavin, Research Facility and Project Manager at the DAF facility at Salisbury. "And it just reinforces the relationships that exist between South Pacific communities and Australia". Rob is also leading the research into peeling the coconut into veneer and assembling products.

After their return to Fiji, Moana and Ilikimi will help support adoption in the Pacific of a quickly developing processing technology: the use of spindleless lathes to process small diameter logs into veneer for engineered wood products.

Dr Denis Blight, Chief Executive of the Crawford Fund has been thoroughly impressed by the progress and initiative shown by these two young Fijians. "This demonstrates the real value of Australia's ongoing involvement with development projects and we are happy to assist these two people develop their skill." The Crawford Fund has generously helped sponsor the training.

"The training of Moana and Ilikimi will improve the understanding and future research in the area of veneer production at SPC in the South Pacific. They will be able to use the skills they have learned over their visit to train and guide other members of the CocoVeneer production team in Fiji." Associate Professor Gregory Nolan stated.

The CocoVeneer project follows the Cocowood Project where the use of senile coconut palms in wood products was examined. ACIAR, a statutory authority that aims to improve agricultural practices in developing countries through research and development, has funded both projects.

To learn more about The CocoVeneer Project please visit cocowood.net.

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