

# Biosecurity in new training project

BIOSECURITY Cook Islands has begun a new training project for its staff in collaboration with the Ministry of Primary Industries, New Zealand and the Pacific Community (SPC).

Early last month, a team assembled to carry out logistics arrangements such as a venue for the training sessions, timeframes and accommodation in Rarotonga for those participating.

New Zealand's Ministry of Primary Industries entomology manager, Lalith Kumarasinghe, says biosecurity is important for all Pacific countries and it is vital to protect agriculture and the environment.

"Cook has a great biosecurity system in place and this project that we are about to start will help to further enhance the system."

Kumarasinghe said the training would also enhance the ability of biosecurity offices in the Cook Islands to recognise invertebrates and diseases associated with plants.

He said it was vitally important for them to enhance these

skills as they would ultimately protect the community.

"The training will help staff make better and more sound biosecurity clearance decisions."

Kumarasinghe said the training provided an opportunity for two Cook Islands staff to have further training at the ministry's main laboratory in New Zealand.

The training project is made up of biosecurity staff from the Cook Islands and four from Niue.

It is organised by the Ministry of Primary Industries, funded by the NZ AID programme, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade NZ in partnership with SPC.

In addition, the project includes training of a "remote microscopic network" in the Pacific which is to be set up soon and will involve the Cook Islands.

Kumarasinghe said the internet-based system would help biosecurity offices and lab staff to access diagnostic specialists online anywhere in the world.

The training programme will stretch over three years, with the



Agriculture minister Kiriau Turepu with the New Zealand Ministry of Primary Industries entomology manager Lalith Kumarasinghe and the SPC's Joshua Wainiqolo. 17022207


first year's sessions to be held in May, July and September this year.

SPC division resources facilitator Josua Wainiqolo said the organisation had been in partnership with the Ministry of Primary Industries since 2010 and was involved in similar projects

in Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands.

Wainiqolo said the second phase of the programme, to be hosted in the Cook Islands would include participants from Niue.

■ **Losirene Lacanivalu**




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