

Strife Over Policy Change At Fishery

By Harriet Diaz
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KOROR, Palau—New policies at Van Camp Seafood Co. in Malakal, brought about by new management have resulted in tying up the Truk Maru, leaving 21 Micronesian fishermen to search for berths aboard Van Camp's other boats. Nine crew members have sought aid of Micronesian Legal Services Corp., charging mismanagement and disagreement with some Van Camp management policies. Van Camp has operated in Palau for nine years:

Bob Carpenter, who became Van Camp's manager, said: "The boat has not made money in a year. The captain has been changed several times, gear is stripped from the boat and the losses continue. It's got to be either the boat or the crew. My job is to teach responsibility, which breeds good fishermen, as well as fishing."

The contract between Van

Camp and the Trust Territory government specifies that 90 per cent of a minimum guarantee of from \$130 to \$217 per month will be sent home to the fisherman's place of origin. This guarantee will not be paid the Truk Maru crew, most of whom have become, said Carpenter, "professional guarantee earners," until they find berths aboard other boats.

Carpenter feels that the guarantee is at the core of the lazy attitude many of his Micronesian fishing trainees have.

"Around the world, fishermen earn through shares of their catch," said Carpenter. "Normally, the crew gets 60 per cent of the net income and the boat owner gets 40 per cent, which is the arrangement with our trainees—except for the guaranteed minimum income.

Of the Truk Maru, Carpenter said: "They're the only boat not earning their cost of operation. It's either the boat or the crew.

"When I first got here and saw the situation, I changed captains, hoping that would help. The vessel was only making seven tons a month, while the other boats were making 20 to 30 tons.

"We also put \$1,300 worth of gear on the boat. When we checked, only about \$250 worth was left.

"Since then, said Carpenter, "we have changed captains twice. In November, in the hopes of making the captains more responsible, we raised their shares from 1.5 to 1.7, and gave them the responsibility to hire and fire their crew. One captain last month ran his boat so well he made \$800.

"But the situation aboard the Truk Maru continued, so the first of the month we tied up the boat, until we can find a solution," Carpenter said, "and told the fishermen to look for other berths. We are

short-handed on fishermen anyway, and they should be able to be put on."

Meetings with the Marine Resources Division, which was set up to handle such grievances, ended with the division approving the action, Carpenter said. The manager of the Marine Resources Division then proceeded to borrow the Truk Maru "since their boat is being repaired," Carpenter said.

Though the weather has been stormy and unusually bad for fishing since the Marine Resources Division borrowed the boat, it has been the highest producer in its class, according