

FIJI

The Republic of Fiji

Situated at the cross-roads of the south west Pacific, Fiji comprises about 320 islands, which range in size from the two principal islands - Viti Levu, on which the capital, Suva, is situated and Vanua Levu - both about 80 miles long, to small uninhabited islets.

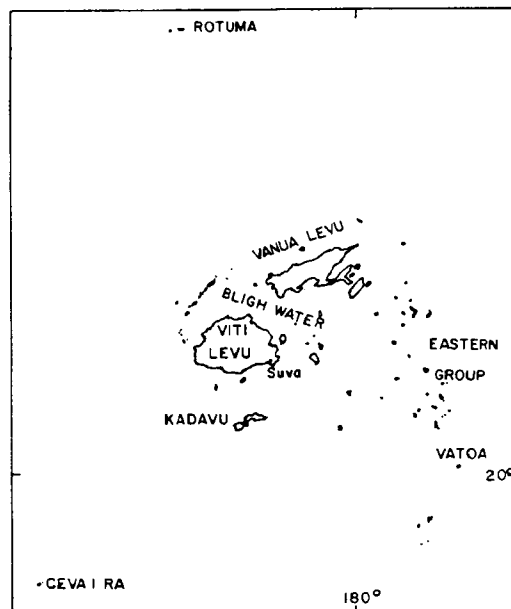


FIG. 1.- Fiji.

Although the total land area is just 5,327 m², the archipelagic baselines that join the islands of the main group enclose a sea area of 45,490 m². However, since Fiji claims a 200-mile EEZ, the nation's outermost maritime boundary - greatly extended by the off-lying islands of Rotuma and Ceva-i-Ra, which lie respectively 290 miles north and 265 miles south-west of Viti Levu - actually encloses a total sea area of 392,500 m².

The first European to sight Fiji is believed to have been Abel TASMAN, whom 1643 expedition came close to ship-wreck on the Heemsbercq Reefs, east of

Vanua Levu. Perhaps deterred by TASMAN's experience, the next navigator to venture anywhere near the Fiji group was James COOK who, in 1774, sighted the island of Vatoa. However, it was not until 1789 - when, during his epic voyage in an open boat after the mutiny aboard HMS BOUNTY, Lieutenant BLIGH undertook a running survey as he passed through what is today called Bligh Water - that it began to be appreciated.

Fiji's modern history really began in 1874, when after decades of turmoil, the Fijian High Chiefs ceded the islands and their inhabitants in perpetuity to the British Crown. A century of relatively stable development culminated when, in 1970, Fiji became an independent member of the Commonwealth. In 1987, following two military coups, the nation was declared a Republic.

In the early years of British rule, a large number of workers were transported from India to work in the sugar plantations, so that today the population of about 800,000 is composed almost equally of Fijians and Indians. Sugar and tourism are the mainstays of the economy, but the garment and fishing industries also contribute significantly, gold is mined in modest quantities.

Hydrographic Service

Following on from early explorers, the first systematic surveys of Fiji waters were undertaken by Captain C.R.D. BETHUNE on HMS CONWAY (1838), whilst the 1840 surveys of Commander C. WILKES (U.S. Exploring Expedition) were used to produce the first chart of the whole Fiji group.

Captain H.M. DENHAM (HMS HERALD) completed numerous surveys between 1853 and 1857 and, after Cession, other HM Ships worked in Fiji during the remaining years of the century. After World War II, NMNZ Ship LACHLAN (1952-1963), together with HM Ships COOK (1957-1963), DAMPIER (1966) and HYDRO (1957-1975), were variously deployed in Fiji. In 1968, with the assistance of the United Nations, a small indigenous Survey Unit was established within the Fiji Marine Department. In 1976, the Survey Unit, by then comprising three surveyors and a small motor boat, was transferred to the newly-established Naval and Division in December 1988, it was returned to the Marine Department and its military personnel became civil servants.

From 1979 to 1991, the Fiji Hydrographic Service (FHS) was headed by an officer of the British Royal Naval Surveying Service and - with overseas training provided by UK, Australia and New Zealand, and recently Pakistan and Japan - it is today staffed with 11 surveyors, 5 cartographers and 2 electronic technicians.

Notable development milestones have included the 1981 publication of the first metric, four colour chart produced to international standards (nine local charts and a publication are now available); Fiji's membership of the IHO (1983); joint surveys conducted with HMNZS MONOWAI in the 1980s; and the 1987 acquisition of Research Vessel TOVUTO, a 900-ton ex-seismic research vessel, given to Fiji by Australia and a joint survey project with Japan International Cooperation Agency from 1994 to date.

With the 200-mile EEZ, Fiji acquired a vast, but little known 'back yard'; indeed, even within the main archipelago, less than 10% of the seas have been surveyed 'to modern standards' (i.e. with an echo-sounder, and at scales of 1:100,000 or larger). The aim of FHS is thus not different from that of the hydrographic community worldwide, to use its slender resources wisely whilst, at the same time seeking to promote a better understanding in government of the key role that hydrographic survey and nautical charting activities play in the development of any maritime nation.

The present Chief Hydrographer is Mr. F.R. MAHARAJ.