

MILNE BAY PROVINCE

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Provincial Rural Development Officer.

Rodney W. Abaijah was born at Bwagoaia station in the Misima District of the Milne Bay Province. He attended Bwagoaia Primary School before transferring to Kila Kila in the Central Province. He completed form one at Port Moresby High School and forms two, three and four at Sogeri Secondary School. He attended Vudal Agricultural College in Rabaul from 1967 to 1969.

After graduating in 1969, he spent 12 months working on pig research at Goroka and Erap. In February, 1971, he attended UPNG preliminary year and 1st year Science. In February 1973, he became Rural Development Officer in Alotau, then was posted to Esa'ala District. In May-August 1974 he attended a Middle Management Course in Sydney. On his return to Alotau he was appointed Associate DRDO Milne Bay Province in November 1975.

Rodney is married with one child. His wife, formerly Mary Paulisbo of Misima, is a former Head Mistress of Nimoa Community School in the Misima district.



Rodney Abaijah

PROVINCE DESCRIPTION

The total area of the Milne Bay Province is 251,133 sq km but the land area totals only 20,246 sq km.

The Owen Stanley Range ends in the Milne Bay Province. It enters the Province at a height of 10 000 feet, and slopes away down to the coast. Nonetheless the mainland can be described as generally mountainous although only the mountains in the extreme south west of the Province reach some 1 524 m or more. This section of the Province, stretches across hundreds of miles of tropical ocean and contains hundreds of large and small islands, most of them well watered, green and fertile, and are pleasant, attractive regions in contrast to some of the high, gloomy and broken country of the mainland.



Tobua Island

The Island Groups of Milne Bay are:

Trobriand Group

These Islands are all of coral. Some rise abruptly from the shore to a height of about 91.4 m forming coral cliffs. Others are only just above the surface of the water.

Laughlan Group

Also known as *Budibudi*

This group comprises five islands and several islets and rocks, and lies 65 km to the east of Woodlark. The islands are coral and sand.

Woodlark Group

Woodlark Island or Murua, to give it its native name, was at one time the chief goldfield of Papua. The island comprises a succession of hills and valleys and is covered in parts by dense tropical growth.

D'Entrecasteaux Group

Fergusson Island has a linear extension of 61 km in a north-west and south-east direction, with an average width of 40 km. There are three groups of mountains, and several lakes, the largest of which is lake Rabu. The most impressive features on this island are the numbers of extinct volcanoes, hot springs, geysers, solfataras, fumaroles and magnificent deposits of sulphur and geyserite.

Normanby Island is about 72 km long and from 20 to 25 km at its greatest breadth. There is a range of mountains whose highest peak is 1 097 m.

Goodenough Island is separated from Fergusson by the Moresby Strait. A mountain range extending through almost the whole length of the island culminates in two rugged peaks of about 2 438 m in height. This range is flanked by an extensive plain.

Louisiade Archipelago

The Louisiade Archipelago contains the numerous islands found in the extreme south-eastern corner of the District. Some of the main islands in this group are:-

Sudest or Tagula Island, approximately 80 km in length and 25 km at its greatest breadth, is formed by a succession of irregular hills and mountains. The highest point is Mount Rattlesnake, 914 m.

Rossel Island, approximately 33 km in length, possesses a most irregular and tortuous coastline.

Misima Island, has a linear extension of 64 km in an east-west direction, being irregular in width, varying from 10 to 11 km in the eastern portion and tapering suddenly from near the centre of the island to a narrow strip from 1 to 3 km wide in the western portion. The island is very mountainous with Mount Oiatau (1035 m) the highest peak.

Conflict Group

The Conflict Group is about 110 km east of Samarai and comprises over 20 small islands.

Samarai Group

This is a small group of islands off the south-eastern tip of the mainland of Papua New Guinea. South-east from the Samarai Group lie a number of lesser island groups.

Samarai is a very picturesque group of islands off the south-east tip of the mainland. In 1899 Samarai became the main centre for the gold rush and later the base for coconut plantation development.

Alotau in Milne Bay itself replaced Samarai as Provincial Headquarters in 1971; in 1975 the overseas wharf at Alotau was opened.

The natural vegetation of much of the province, including the higher parts of the D'Entrecasteaux and Woodlark Islands, is rainforest. The drier north coast, lowland areas of the D'Entrecasteaux Islands, much of the Louisiade Archipelago, the Trobriands and the northern part of Woodlark are covered with secondary regrowth forest or grassland resulting from clearing and burning for gardening and hunting.

There are three distinct rainfall patterns in the Province.

The islands are continuously wet and have an average annual rainfall of 3 810 mm.

The north coast area is a relatively dry zone. It has a marked dry season from May to December, the period when the south-easterly winds are dominant. Cape Vogel and the head of Goodenough Bay are the driest sections of the Province.

The south coast and the Milne Bay areas have an intermediate rainfall pattern with some seasonality. Samarai receives an annual rainfall of 2 682 mm with its driest periods from December to February, when the rainfall averages 160 mm per month.

The soils on the coastal plains are metamorphic, clay, sandstone and alluvial. The island groups consist of metamorphic, volcanic rocks surrounded by raised coral lime and alluvial on the lower plains.

Transport is one of the major problems facing development in the province. Contributing factors are the nature of the topography, the distribution of islands and so on, which make development and extension activities difficult.

PEOPLE

The population of the province in 1975 was 112 265 inhabiting the 20 254 km² of land mass, giving an average population density of 5.5 per km². The total available work force is only about 40%. The rate of increase in population over the 1966-71 period averaged 2.6%. This is more or less the same as the average annual increase of the country.

The number of people absent from their villages varies throughout the province, averaging about 15% of the population; 11% represent absentees from home villages but residents in other parts of the province. Reasons for absenteeism vary from district to district. One of the main reasons is for work in urban areas. Students absent at school account for over 50% of the figure in the Samarai and Misima areas. Absence of people from the villages causes some problems, especially in land matters.

There are 31 language groups in the province. The main ones are Kilivila (Losuia district), Bwaidoga, Dobu, Duau and Iduna (Esa'ala District), Daga (Rabaraba District), Tawara (Alotau District), Suau (Samarai District) and Misima.

The languages most used by Radio Milne Bay are Dobuan, Wedau and Police Motu (all *linguae francae*) and Misima, Suau and English.

There are 20 health centres, 18 run by Missions.

There are 129 primary schools, 4 high schools and 4 vocational centres. The missions play a major role in education, providing 92 of the community schools, 3 of the high schools and 3 of the vocational centres.

Missions also run coastal vessels and have properties in the province.

The level of literacy in the younger generation is high.

The Department of Primary Industry training centres at Bubuleta and Kuiaro give basic agricultural and fisheries training to 80 to 100 farmers and fishermen each year.

The Ahioma Centre near Alotau gives training in Community Education to both government welfare assistants and village leaders.



A trainee farmer at the Farmer Training Centre, Bubuleta, husking corn to allow them to dry quickly

SELF-HELP GROUPS

The Milne Bay Province is well known for its many different groups or organisations. These range from the Ialeba-Tavawa Association of Milne Bay to the Vivigain Rice Growers' Club.

Other groups are:-

- Damuni Association (Alotau)
- Samarai Island Union
- Ahioma Association (Goodenough)
- T.K. Association (Trobriands)
- Northern Normanby Co-operative Association (Esa'ala)
- Sineada Women's Association
- Milne Bay Cattle Farmers Association
- Milne Bay Association (Alotau)
- Baniara Trading Company (Raba-raba)
- Daga Rural Producers' Co-operative (Agaun)
- Wedau Rural Producers' Co-operative
- Pearl Farmers' Association (Samarai)
- Louisiade Fisheries Co.
- T.K. Development Corporation (Losuia)
- Tofa (Agricultural) Association
- Faiawa Cocoa Group (Goodenough)

Village Agricultural Committees are established and operating in most areas.

ECONOMY

Agricultural development has mainly been confined to a narrow coastal fringe on the mainland and to the scattered islands of the Province, although the highlands (Agaun Daga area) on the mainland are proving suitable for crops such as coffee and cardamoms.

The greater portion of land is unsuitable for commercial agriculture, although within these areas lies a large portion of subsistence gardening land.

A number of commercial fishing ventures have been established since 1973. Fish is marketed in Alotau and Port Moresby.

The known forest potential of the Milne Bay Province is assessed at 106 075 ha. In addition, 43 200 ha are believed to have economic potential but require more detailed assessment. Timber rights have been purchased for 58 000 ha and a further 20 800 ha are controlled by the government.

Manufacturing in the Province is negligible. It is dominated by sawmilling and joinery. Boat building and marine engineering (repairing) is perhaps the second most important activity followed by Mission-based small boat building. These manufacturing activities are scattered throughout the Province.



Labourers unloading copra at Samarai Wharf

A cultured pearl industry is undertaken by Con. Dennis George and Sons. They are making progress with establishing this industry in Bwanabwana Council area. Thirteen small farms have been established on Basilaki Island. Half pearls are being processed from six of these farms. Government participation is being investigated.

Cottage industries also have potential. The most flourishing is wood carving particularly in the Trobriands where the value output is estimated to be in excess of K500 000 per year. This trade was severely affected by the loss of the hotel at Losuia by fire and would have ceased but for day tourists and the development of two outlets in Port Moresby. Two guest houses have, however, been opened and the trade is showing signs of recovery to its former level.

Pottery has been developed as a minor industry in the Amphlett Islands, Esa'ala District. Prospects for the pottery are very limited as clay has to be obtained from Fergusson Island and transport of the fragile pots to markets from these isolated areas is a handicap.

SUBSISTENCE AND NUTRITION

This area has been neglected, particularly by the field officers. It has been reported, at the Food Crops Conference in Lae 1975, that 53 per cent of the children attending Maternal Child Health Clinics in Milne Bay Province are malnourished. An educational programme to create local awareness and eventual adoption of an improvement plan is the starting point. Plans for 1977/1978 include a survey of the food crops, analysis of their food value by the Chief Food Chemist in Port Moresby, a combined education and training programme with Health Education and Welfare on nutrition and the establishment of demonstration plots and seed nurseries and food gardens at Bubuleta. A Fresh Food Marketing Branch is planned for 1979.

CATTLE

The total number of small-holder cattle projects in the province is 174 with 5 500 head. Plantation and mission cattle number about 2000 head. There are two slaughter houses, one at Alotau (Gili) and one at Samarai (Mwamwaneune). Plans for the next three years are to stock village projects and establish new projects, to train farmers on general cattle and pasture management, to organize markets and to establish more slaughter floors and train field staff for meat inspection. A feasibility study on a canning factory and investigations into markets for meat outside the Province will be conducted.



Alotau market

FISHERIES

Commercial fisheries have been established in the Losuia and Samarai areas, in the Calvados Chain of the Louisiade Archipelago and in the Alotau area. The present annual rate of production is 240 tonnes, with 120 tonnes purchased from Samarai, and 120 tonnes from Losuia. Several locally-owned boats are now fishing commercially.

The Department of Primary Industry runs a freezer in Samarai and has a fleet of six vessels for collection of fish.

There are 12 portable deep freezer units operating in the Milne Bay Province. They are being used in areas where there is little or no other source of income to villagers. They are serviced by 22-foot launches equipped with ice boxes. These launches (dories) were built at the fisheries station at Kiuaro (near Samarai) by unpaid fisheries trainees under supervision. They have Yanmar 12 h.p. diesel engines, a crew of two, and a capacity for 200 kg fish. The freezer units are all powered by portable diesel generators, originating from a grant by the New Zealand Government. They have proved very reliable and robust.

The holding capacity of the freezer units is close to 500 kg, with a freezing capacity of 100 kg. Clearance of units is done every day; maintenance is done on week-ends. The fish is marketed in Samarai and Alotau; occasionally in Popondetta and Port Moresby.

The T.K. Development Corporation has a shore-based freezer, a fishing vessel with freezer, and two DPI dories assisting in the Losuia area. All their fish is marketed in Port Moresby. Louisiade Fisheries (formed by the Local Government Council and the Catholic Mission) operate on a similar system in the Calvados Chain, Sudest and Rossel Islands. They have installed a freezer in the M.V. "Pollyanna". The vessel "Tanya II" operates in the Suau to Oranjerie Bay area, most of the catch is sold in Brisbane, but some reef fish are sold in Alotau.

Crayfish appear in and around Losuia and Oranjerie Bay areas in November. The commercial potential could be investigated.

Future plans are to increase production and improve market outlets in Popondetta, Port Moresby and possibly the Highlands. Fishermen will be assisted with rural credit and training in freezer maintenance, and group-fishing on a self-help basis will be encouraged. If feasible foreign aid for a fish meal factory may be sought.

PIGS AND POULTRY

Projects financed by the Development Bank on intensive level pig and poultry production have not proved successful, largely due to management problems.

An expatriate producer turns off 500 chickens a month and a project near Alotau turns off 100 chickens a month. The only intensive piggeries are at Giligili, Hagita, and Cameron High Schools.

Plans are to maintain existing poultry farms and introduce new strains suitable for the village situation, to establish two new poultry projects and implement pig breeding programmes, and to expand training facilities at Bubuleta for pig and poultry farmers.

COFFEE

It is estimated that 400 ha of Arabica and 130 ha of Robusta are producing coffee. There are about 3000 Arabica coffee growers and 900 Robusta coffee growers in the province. Rabaraba district is the main producer.

It is planned to maximise production of coffee to 200 tonnes by December 1978. Existing coffee plantings will be renovated and the handing over of coffee purchasing to local growers will be encouraged. If feasible finance for a coffee factory will be applied for.

COCONUT

Coconut is grown in every area of the province. Estimated area planted is 20 000 ha and about 70% of this is bearing. There are 11 plantations and about 30 000 village planters. Production is estimated to be about 4000 tonnes from village plantings, and about 2000 tonnes from plantations.

It is planned to plant new coconuts, build hot air dryers and to train farmers on copra culture and processing methods at Bubuleta.



Gili-Gili Plantation, Alotau

Photographs: Office of Information

