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*A review of the SPARTECA trade
agreement*

Roman Grynberg and Matthew Powell

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Enquiries

The Editor, Working Papers
Economics Division
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
Canberra 0200
Australia

Tel (61-6) 249 4700

Fax (61-6) 257 2886

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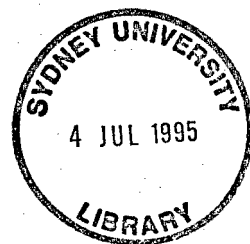
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Dr Roman Grynberg is Senior Lecture in the Economics Department at the University of the South Pacific, Suva.

Matthew Powell is Statistical Advisor to the Ghanaian Statistical Office, Ghana.

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*a*bstract

This paper examines the effect of the SPARTECA (South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Co-operation Agreement) treaty on trade between Forum Island Countries (FICs) and Australia and New Zealand, and attempts to determine whether or not the treaty has achieved its stated objectives. The SPARTECA treaty is unusual in that it clearly specifies measurable objectives. The paper also addresses the reasons for the very rapid development of the garment export industry in Fiji in the post-1987 era and why this failed to occur in other FICs with identical access rights under SPARTECA to the Australian and New Zealand market. The paper considers the current debate over the development of rules of origin and whether or not the pressure from Fiji to relax the rules of origin is likely to yield substantial gains for the Fiji garment export sector.

A review of the SPARTECA trade agreement

The SPARTECA treaty was signed by Australia, New Zealand and the FICs—Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Pacific Trust Territories, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Western Samoa—in Kiribati on 14 July 1980 and came into force on 1 January 1981. The treaty was endorsed the previous year by Forum Trade Ministers. The objectives of the treaty are

to achieve progressively in favour of Forum Island Countries duty free and unrestricted access to the markets of Australia and New Zealand over as wide a range as possible; to accelerate development of the Forum Island Countries in particular through the expansion and diversification of their exports to Australia and New Zealand; and to promote and facilitate economic co-operation, including commercial, industrial, agricultural and technical co-operation (South Pacific Bureau for Economic Co-operation 1981:2).

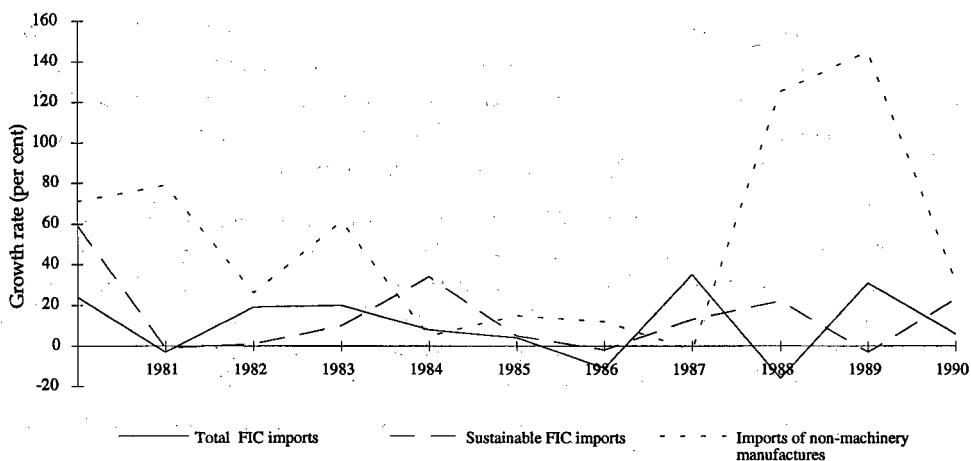
Several objectives of the treaty can be subjected to testing to ascertain the effectiveness of SPARTECA. They are

- to accelerate the development of Forum Island Countries through the expansion and diversification of their exports to Australia and New Zealand
- to promote and facilitate this expansion and diversification through the elimination of trade barriers
- to foster the growth and expansion of Forum Island Countries' exports through the promotion of investment in those countries
- to promote greater penetration of exports from Forum Island Countries into the Australian and New Zealand markets through such measures as cooperation in the marketing and promotion of goods
- to promote and facilitate economic cooperation, including commercial, industrial, agricultural and technical cooperation.

How has SPARTECA affected Forum Island Countries' exports?

Unfortunately, there is no long run of data for pre-SPARTECA years to enable the calculation of growth rates and the comparison of pre and post-SPARTECA results using official Australian and New Zealand statistics. Relatively high rates of growth of FIC exports into New Zealand did occur in the post-1987 liberalisation period (Figure 1). The growth rate of total exports from FICs into New Zealand between 1979 and 1980 (24 per cent) was actually higher than the average for the SPARTECA period although this difference, at 5 per cent, was not statistically significant.

Figure 1 Growth rates of Forum Island Countries' exports to New Zealand, 1980-90 (per cent)

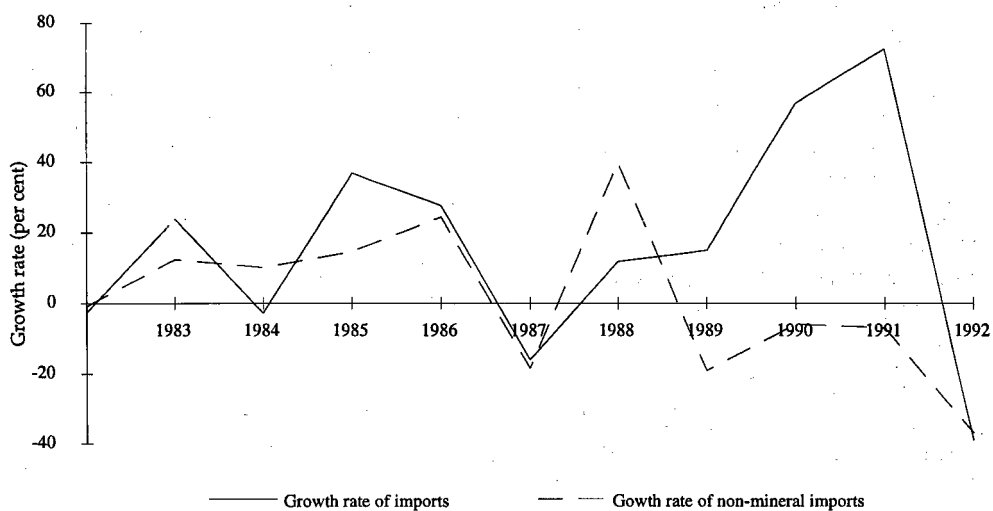


Source: New Zealand Department of Statistics.

Australian data indicate that total FIC imports grew by 15.3 per cent between 1981-92 (Figure 2). What is significant, however, is that the value of nominal non-mineral exports from FICs actually decreased by 1.3 per cent per annum over the same period. The Australian data also appear to show volatile annual rates of growth that are more substantial than those of New Zealand. The reason for this stems from a different composition of exports. FIC exports to Australia are weighted far more towards minerals and as a result, there tends to be more price volatility as well as volatility stemming from new mineral developments.

Even on examination of specific sub-groups, it is still difficult to see an acceleration in trade growth. When considering only sustainable (that is, non-mineral) exports, one observes a higher growth of exports from FICs in the pre rather than the post-

Figure 2 Growth rates of Forum Island Countries' exports to Australia, 1982-92 (per cent)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

SPARTECA era in both Australia and New Zealand. The failure to accelerate the growth of nominal exports following SPARTECA, however, may be the result of price changes masking real effects.

Given the importance of whether or not trade has grown, the International Economic Databank for the period 1970-91 is used to assess SPARTECA. This database provides trade estimates that vary with those provided by Australia and New Zealand, although the general trends appear to be similar and provide a useful indication of the degree to which trade expanded in the years prior to, and following, the promulgation of SPARTECA. What is regrettable about this particular database is that data need to be divided at the beginning of SPARTECA—the peak of the post-1980 commodity price boom. As a result, the decline in the growth of exports appears far more dramatic than would be the case had SPARTECA not been promulgated at the peak of a trade cycle.

In the decade following the accession to SPARTECA, trade actually slowed in all categories except non-machinery manufactures (Table 1). What is also discernible is the difference between Australia and New Zealand. While the growth rate for FIC exports to Australia has been negative, there has been some, albeit modest, growth in exports to New Zealand. Preferential access to the New Zealand rather than the Australian market has not been of great benefit to FICs. In large part this is due to the fact that New Zealand, with its substantial Pacific population, has a more natural trade complementarity with FICs.

Table 1 Exponential growth rates of real Australian and New Zealand imports from Forum Island Countries in the pre and post-SPARTECA periods, 1970-91 (per cent)

	1970-91	1970-80	1981-91	1981-87
Fic exports to Australia	-1.6	6.3	-7.0	..
Fic non-mineral exports to Australia	-0.5	5.2	-3.0	..
Fic non-machinery manufactured exports to Australia	4.9	2.5	12.2	2.5
Fic exports to New Zealand	0.5	6.4	-2.9	..
Fic non-mineral exports to New Zealand	3.4	9.3	-0.1	..
Fic non-machinery manufactured exports to New Zealand	25.0	25.7	18.0	1.8

Note: The real import figure is determined by deflating by the US Consumer Price Index.
Source: International Economic Databank, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Have nominal and real exports increased?

From nominal export figures, there is a discernible increase in exports only in the case of New Zealand imports measured in New Zealand dollars. While total FIC exports to Australia increased in nominal terms over the period, there was a marked and substantial decrease in non-mineral imports.

There are two approaches that could be followed to obtain information on real imports: deflating import values using a suitable price index or estimating volume changes directly. Attempts to estimate volume changes directly require information on the volume of imports for a specific item available annually and consistent over time (that is, they refer to a stable mix of items). Data on volumes of imports are only available for New Zealand, and even here the pre-1983 data transcribed from trade bulletins appear to use different volume measures than the later data obtained from the New Zealand Department of Statistics. Moreover, there were changes in the detailed classification system in 1988 making it difficult to compare data for the whole period. Therefore, series were constructed at a 2-digit level. In every case except apparel, however, the indices were unstable, indicating changes in composition. It was eventually decided to use the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Import Price Index for New Zealand and the CPI for Australia.

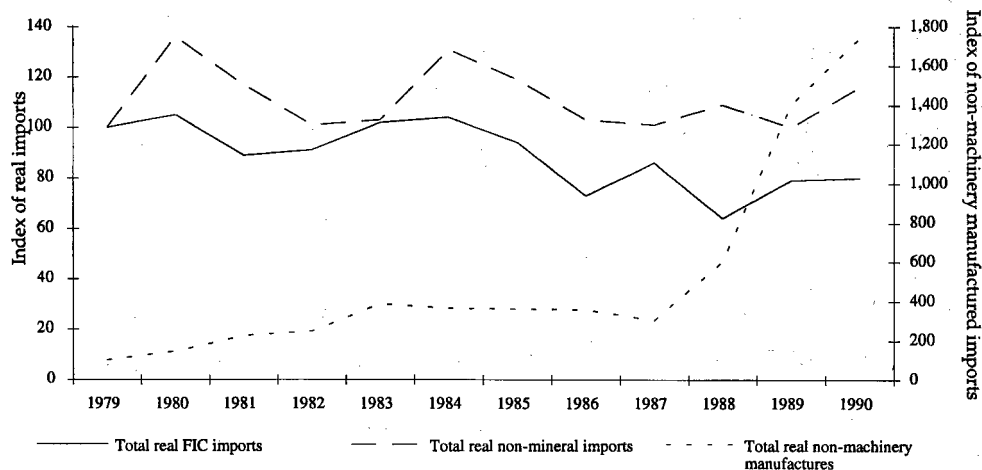
Using the New Zealand CPI as the deflator, total real exports from FICs fell after the accession to SPARTECA and have not recovered to pre-SPARTECA levels (Figure 3). Sustainable real exports also fell initially, but had recovered by 1990 to stand 16 per

cent higher than they did in 1979. The most exciting area has been exports of manufactured goods, which have increased by over 17 times in real terms since 1979. If exports are deflated by the Import Price Index rather than the CPI, not even total exports rise above the 1979 level until 1987. Growth in both total and sustainable exports does not begin until 1987 and 1984, respectively—well after the introduction of SPARTECA. The increase in sustainable real exports towards the end of the period is concentrated in manufactures.

Total real exports to Australia increased dramatically in 1990 (Figure 4). This was chiefly due to the opening of the Porgera gold mine. There was a secular and marked decline in non-mineral exports to Australia. Moreover, unlike the case of New Zealand, the decline in non-mineral FIC exports to Australia occurred in nominal and real terms. It is significant to note that this decrease occurred despite the rapid increase in garment exports from Fiji after 1988. The boom in garment exports only offered a minor and temporary respite from the marginalisation of the Pacific as only a source of gold and phosphates.

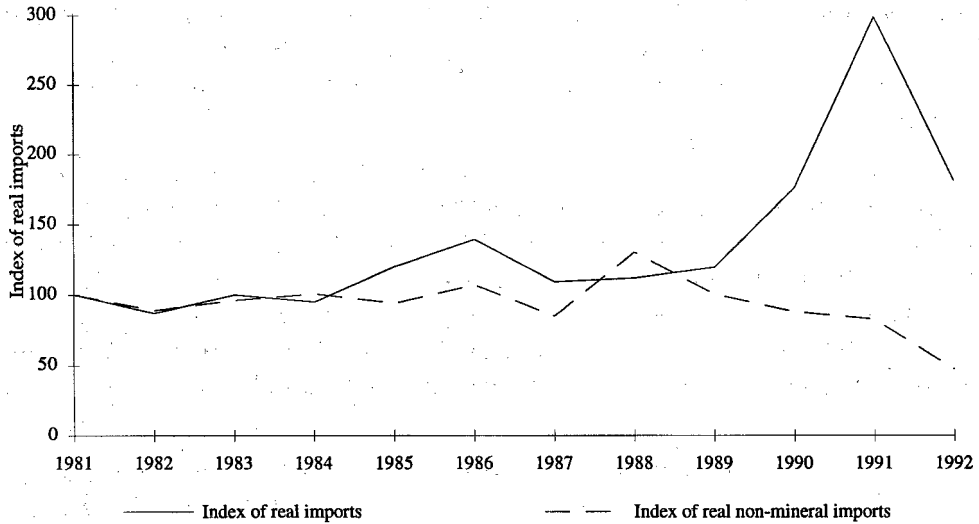
The International Economic Databank confirms that there has been a secular decline in trade after rapid trade growth in the pre-SPARTECA era in both Australia and New Zealand (Figures 5 and 6). The International Economic Databank includes gold and as a result the decline in trade appears even more dramatic.

Figure 3 Real Forum Island Countries' exports into New Zealand, 1979-90 (1979=100)



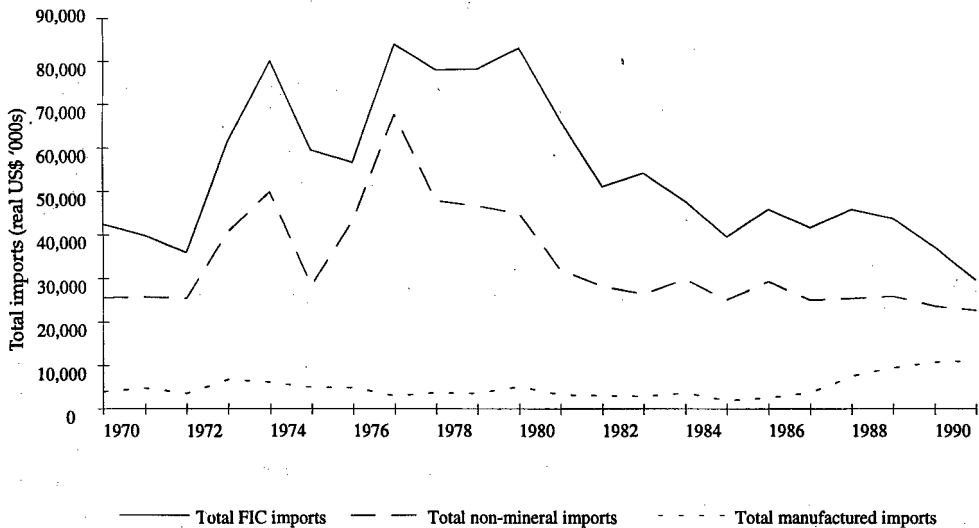
Source: New Zealand Department of Statistics.

Figure 4 Real Forum Island Countries' exports into Australia, 1981-92
(1981=100)



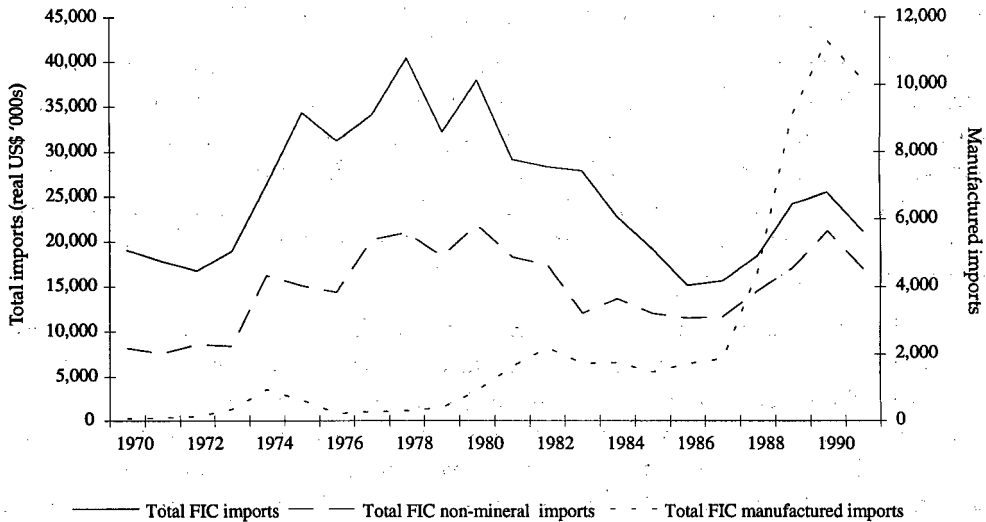
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Figure 5 Total real exports to Australia from Forum Island Countries, 1970-91
(real US\$ '000s)



Source: International Economic Databank, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Figure 6 Total real exports to New Zealand from Forum Island Countries, 1970-91 (real US\$ '000s)



Source: International Economic Databank, The Australian National University, Canberra.

Does increased trade occur in SITC categories?

The answer to this question is necessarily subjective as there can be no definite answer as to the level of imports that indicate that 'trade' is definitely carried on in a particular 2-digit SITC category. Moreover, the choice of categorisation will itself affect the results obtained, but is determined by the data available. Using NZ\$10,000 at 1979 values for New Zealand and US\$10,000 at 1979 values for Australia, the number of categories in which trade with New Zealand occurred almost doubled between 1981 and 1984, rising from 22 to 40.

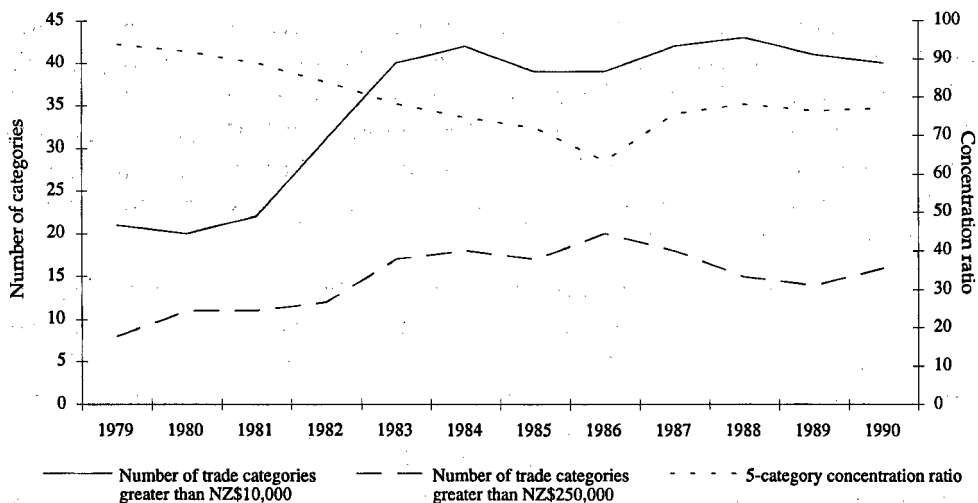
An alternative but equally subjective criterion for trade concentration is a concentration ratio giving the percentage of total exports from FICs accounted for by the largest N commodities. Taking N=5, the concentration ratio for exports of FIC goods into New Zealand declines from 94 per cent in 1979 to about 64 per cent in 1986 before rising again to about 77 per cent at the end of the decade. That is, trade concentration fell until 1986 and then rose again as the Fiji garment trade became relatively more important. The increase in concentration towards the end of the period is a phenomenon which probably appears when only a limited number of categories are examined. This is indicated by repeating the 'number of categories in which trade occurs' test using

NZ\$250,000 rather than NZ\$10,000. This shows a doubling in the number of categories between 1979 and 1983 followed by a fall after 1987. In the case of Australia, a similar analysis shows that the degree of concentration has definitely fallen since 1980, most markedly since 1987. Therefore, trade with New Zealand may thus be said to be taking place in more categories since the signing of SPARTECA (Figure 7).

The situation in Australia is slightly different to New Zealand. The measure of trade diversification remains arbitrary. The data employed for Australia are based on 5-digit SITC categories, and therefore the actual results for the two economies are not comparable. Moreover, the cut-off employed in Australia is substantially larger than that of New Zealand using A\$100,000 and A\$1,000,000 in real terms. If these broad measures are employed, however, it is clear that in Australia there is some trade diversification occurring.

The data for Australia, however, show a marked difference in trade concentration compared to New Zealand. While there has been a diversification of trade using broad measures, the degree of concentration in FIC-Australian trade is very high and increasing as indicated by the upward trend of the 5-category concentration ratio (Figure 8). This is the exact opposite of the movement of trade concentration in New Zealand. While the concentration ratio was static until 1987, it decreased in 1988 with the introduction of garment exports from Fiji. With the opening of the Porgera gold

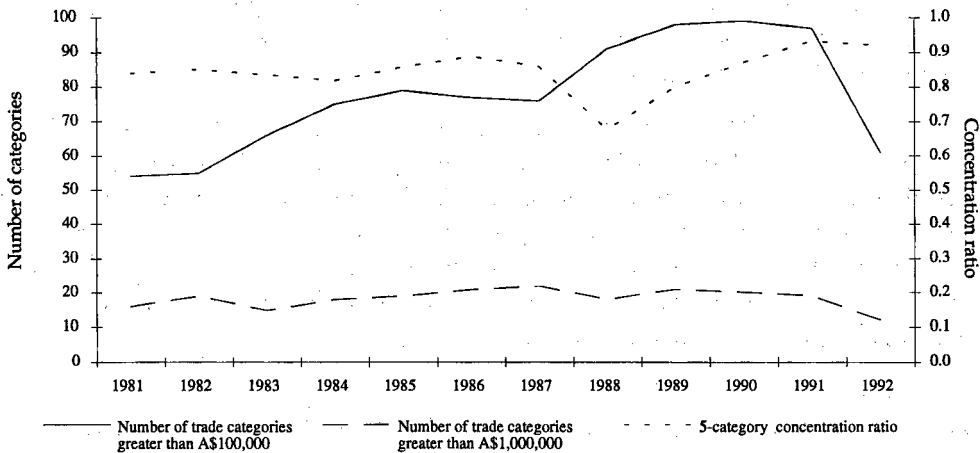
Figure 7 Measures of Forum Island Countries' trade diversification with New Zealand, 1970-90 (number of categories, concentration ratio)



Source: New Zealand Department of Statistics.

mine, however, the concentration ratio increased to very high levels. Virtually all exports from FICs to Australia are comprised of gold from Fiji and Papua New Guinea, phosphates from Nauru, coffee from Papua New Guinea and garments from Fiji. Exports of phosphates, and possibly garments, are in a state of decline. In the case of other products, trade tends to occur for a few years and then disappears altogether, indicating either transient niche markets or re-export or entrepôt trade.

Figure 8 Measures of Forum Island Countries' trade diversification with Australia, 1981-92 (number of categories, concentration ratio)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Has there been an increase in the share of Forum Island Countries' exports in total Australian/New Zealand imports?

This is perhaps the most important measure of the success of SPARTECA. Exports from FICs may rise for a number of reasons: greater economic growth, a greater openness to world markets and so on. These factors, however, will affect exports from all destinations, not just FICs. By looking at FICs' share of imports, the effects and changes relevant to FICs can be understood. Unfortunately, suitable data are available only for New Zealand. Analyses already undertaken, however, indicate that the effects of SPARTECA appear more marked for exports into New Zealand and thus the results are more favourable than those for Australia.

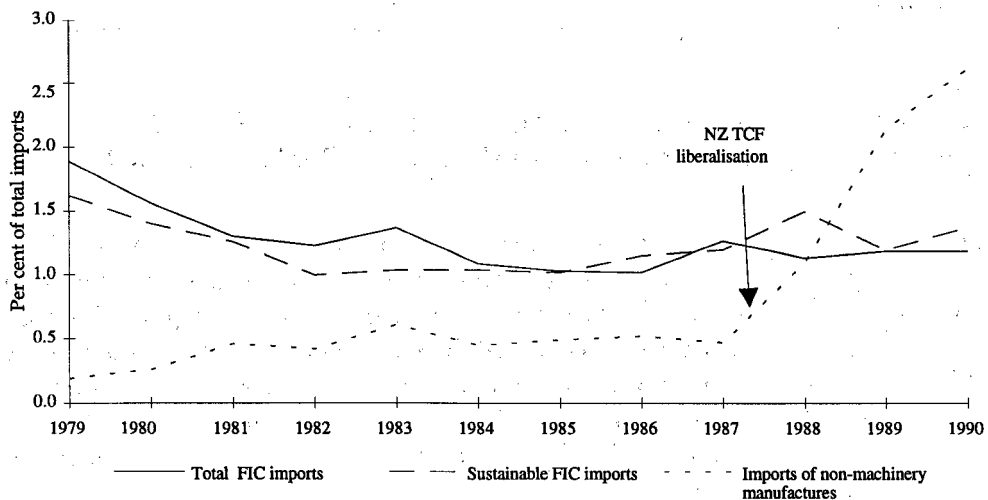
The penetration ratio of FICs' overall sectors into New Zealand has stagnated or fallen since 1979. The ratio fell from 2 per cent in 1979 to a low of 1 per cent in 1986

before recovering to 1.2 per cent by the end of the decade. If manufactured goods (excluding machinery) and transport equipment are examined, the picture is quite different. The penetration ratio in these areas rises from 0.2 per cent in 1979 to about 0.6 per cent in 1983 and then dips until 1987 when it starts rising again to reach almost 2.6 per cent in 1990. The picture is even more dramatic in the area of apparel, where there is a plateau followed by a sudden rise from 7.8 per cent in 1987 to 22 per cent in 1988. The trend of rising penetration of manufactures, however, is still maintained if apparel is excluded.

The change in 1987 is interesting as this was the year New Zealand revised its access provisions for textiles. The fact that the share of FICs' manufactured exports rose from 1979 while the share of apparel exports did not rise significantly until after 1987 suggests that the loosening of the access provisions was important in promoting FIC exports to New Zealand (Figures 9 and 10).

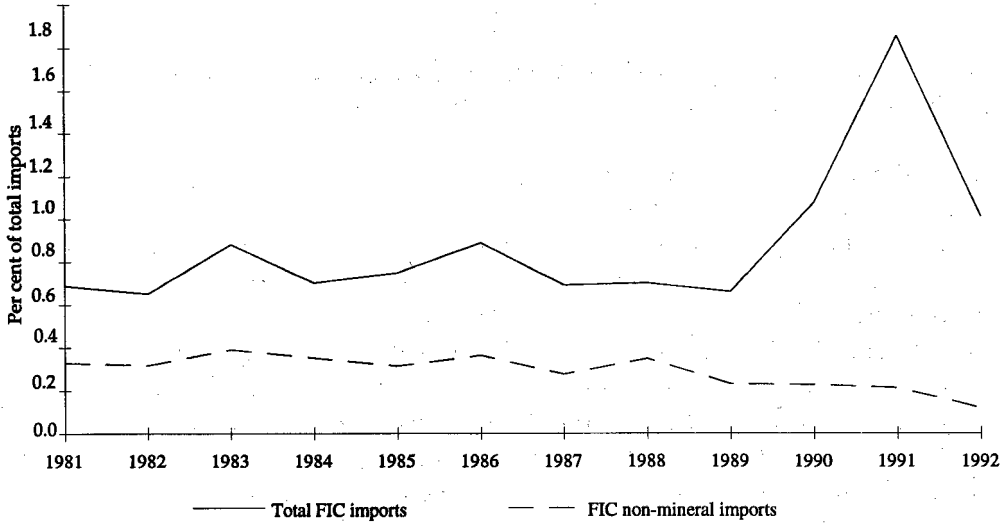
The penetration ratio for Australia appears to demonstrate quite a different trend. Trade with New Zealand has always been more diverse, while penetration of the Australian market has been more substantial. This penetration, however, consists largely of gold exports from Porgera. Strictly speaking, this does not constitute penetration of the domestic market because the final product may be re-exported. If one removes minerals from the penetration ratio, it is clear that exports from FICs as a percentage of total Australian imports are declining.

Figure 9 Forum Island Countries' penetration of the New Zealand market, 1979-90 (per cent of total imports)



Source: New Zealand Department of Statistics.

Figure 10 Forum Island Countries' penetration of the Australian market, 1981-92 (per cent of total imports)



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Has trade with other regions grown faster than trade with Australia and New Zealand?

FIC exports to newly industrialising economies, Japan and the United Kingdom have grown faster than those to Australia and New Zealand. It is worth noting, however, that when one considers textiles and clothing alone, exports to Australia and New Zealand have grown much faster than those to the rest of the world.

Has there been a greater penetration of the New Zealand or Australian market?

The growth of real imports and the change in penetration ratios for non-mineral exports suggests that the effects of SPARTECA were felt earlier in New Zealand than in Australia. FIC exports to Australia in real terms are still below pre-SPARTECA levels in all areas except manufactures, and even in this area there was no rise until after 1986. In New Zealand, on the other hand, FIC exports of manufactures rose from the outset. Moreover, it is possible that the earlier growth in exports to New Zealand may have been the result not of easier access provisions under SPARTECA, but of pre-existing agreements with economies such as the Cook Islands. It is interesting to note that Australian imports

of apparel from FICs appear to have grown faster and sooner than New Zealand imports. This may be partly due to the fact that Australian apparel imports from FICs started from a lower base than those in New Zealand.

Is the expansion of trade related to changes in economic policy of Forum Island Countries rather than SPARTECA?

The real expansion of trade did not occur until after 1987. This year saw both a liberalisation of the access provisions under SPARTECA for garments entering New Zealand and dramatic changes in the economy of Fiji. The apparent differences in FICs' success in exporting to Australia and New Zealand may be due not so much to the differing access provisions under SPARTECA as to New Zealand's close traditional links with the Pacific. It is even arguable that the expansion of Fiji garment exports to New Zealand was a result of internal policy matters rather than the impact of SPARTECA. If it was simply a result of New Zealand's liberalisation of imports, one would expect the effect to be felt throughout the region, especially the Polynesian states. The fact is that the benefits accrued principally to Fiji which simultaneously undertook an effective 50 per cent devaluation of the currency.

This issue is important as Fiji is leading FICs in a push to have Australia liberalise the rules of origin under SPARTECA, arguing that they constrain the export of garments because any decrease in FIC costs could lead exporters to decrease ex-factory costs below the 50 per cent threshold. The counterargument to this is that what is constraining exports are the relatively high costs of production in Fiji rather than access provisions under SPARTECA. Moreover, Australian industry is already moving towards lower rates of protection and import duty. Therefore there exists little benefit for Fiji to attempt to extract further concessions as the margin of preference is rapidly eroding and the only possible growth of its garment industry will have to come out of increased domestic productivity. As a result of the on-going policy debate, the relative importance of liberalised access provisions, as opposed to that of landed costs, is worthy of further consideration.

One way to address the question of whether it was the change in access provisions in 1987 or the Fiji reforms that affected the growth of trade is to examine the differences among various FICs. Real growth in trade occurred only in the area of manufactures in general, and garments in particular, and hence this area will be examined. There have been only two major FIC exporters of garments to New Zealand and both have had vastly different experiences under SPARTECA. While the Cook Islands, originally the larger supplier, was able to maintain its market share intact until 1987, it suffered a severe decline after that year. Fiji, meanwhile, moved from a position where it supplied just over 0.5 per cent of New Zealand garment imports in 1987 to one where it supplied over 20 per cent in 1989.

Among the minor exporters, Tonga lost market share while Western Samoa and Papua New Guinea gained market share, but all retained a share well under 1 per cent of the market. The picture is less dramatic concerning the whole manufacturing sector, but still retains the same essential features with the Cook Islands holding its own against a slow increase in Fiji supply up to 1987 and then being left behind by the increase in Fiji sales. Such marked economy effects are evidence that measures taken in FICs, in particular those taken by Fiji in 1987-88, appear to have had an extremely important effect on sales.

A quantitative separation of the effects of heightened margins preference, as opposed to the effects of the Fiji reform on garment trade volumes, cannot be readily undertaken. The fact that Fiji was the only economy that experienced an increase in garment exports following 1988, however, suggests that economic reforms may have substantially contributed to this increase. Fiji has the most developed economy and the most skilled labour force of all FICs and as a result, the type of economic reforms undertaken in Fiji in 1987 may not necessarily be as successful in other FICs. Nevertheless, following the reforms Fiji managed to increase exports. After 1987, the US value of FIC apparel exports to the United States only rose by about 50 per cent, while those to Australia more than doubled and those to New Zealand rose by more than eight times. This particular figure is important as it suggests that the abandonment of quotas and licences which took place at this time had an important effect. What all this suggests is that both SPARTECA and the changes in Fiji's economic policy were necessary to produce the surge in apparel exports after 1987.

Has SPARTECA been a success?

It would be difficult to argue that SPARTECA has been a major success. Since its promulgation, non-mineral FIC exports to Australia have steadily declined even in nominal terms and non-mineral exports to New Zealand probably declined. The only notable success has been the development of the Fiji garment industry in the wake of the New Zealand textile, clothing and footwear (TCF) deregulation in 1987. The deregulation of TCF imports, however, affected all 13 island members of the South Pacific Forum. The reason that Fiji benefited is that it undertook a series of economic policies which included a 50 per cent effective devaluation of its currency and the establishment of tax-free factories. This saw an almost unprecedented expansion in garment exports, initially to New Zealand and then to Australia.

This growth of the Fiji garment industry is without doubt the great success of SPARTECA. The treaty has otherwise failed to fulfil its stated objectives. While there has been an increase in the range of goods traded both to Australia and New Zealand since 1981, there has been no decrease in the concentration of exports since the beginning

of the treaty. In fact, there has been a steady rise in the importance of gold, phosphate, coffee and garments in trade between the FICs and Australia. A similar, but less pronounced increase in the concentration of imports was also found in New Zealand.

SPARTECA appears to have had the effect of increasing the range of goods in which trade occurs and this effect, particularly in New Zealand, began quite soon after the treaty was signed. It is not possible to demonstrate conclusively, however, that the liberal access provisions applied by New Zealand have been the key factor in allowing exports to New Zealand to grow faster than those to Australia.

While there were major benefits for Fiji from the post-1987 liberalisation, part of these benefits have come at the expense of other FICs which already had preferential access arrangements with New Zealand. For example, SPARTECA had severe negative effects for the Cook Islands, which have seen their traditional markets in New Zealand taken over by Fiji. Thus for those small island states SPARTECA was not only of no benefit, it forced them to compete with Fiji—by far the least cost producer in the South Pacific. They, like other economies in the region, have failed to become competitive and have progressively lost their share of the market.

By the mid-1980s, the treaty was clearly a non-reciprocal free trade agreement and despite the clear limitations of the rules of origin, FICs simply did not make use of the treaty because they were unwilling to adjust their micro and macroeconomic policies accordingly. Donors were aware that any substantial increase in trade was unlikely to develop but the recipients were never willing to prove them wrong by assuring that their economies would be attractive to foreign investment—something that remains an anathema to many Pacific island economies.

If the treaty appears to have had so little effect then the counterfactual is certainly worth positing. Would FICs be any worse off had Australia and New Zealand not offered SPARTECA? The Fiji garment industry aside, there appears to have been little benefit. Gold, phosphate, coffee, copra, coconut oil and other agricultural products would still enter duty free. If there has been no benefit from SPARTECA, however, it is primarily because FICs themselves are unwilling to take advantage of the treaty.

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