



# VATU-I-RA COMMUNITY BULLETIN



Ni sa bula vinaka! Welcome to the twenty-fifth edition of the VATU-I-RA COMMUNITY BULLETIN. The bulletin brings together news and results from ongoing work by the Wildlife Conservation Society within the Vatu-i-Ra Seascape.

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## LAUNCH OF WAILEVU MANAGEMENT PLAN

Tui Wailevu, Ratu Kinijoji Rarokoqica Maivalili (High Chief of Wailevu District) oversaw the launch of the Wailevu District Ecosystem-Based Management Plan on 22nd March at a ceremony outside his home in Wailevu Village.



Above: The management plan is blessed on the beach in front of Wailevu Village

The management plan has been developed by communities over the past two years. It includes management rules for a network totaling 67 km<sup>2</sup> of marine, freshwater and terrestrial protected areas, as well as additional regulations to protect local resources within the district and its customary fishing grounds (*iqoliqoli*).

Wailevu is the largest district in Fiji, with 27 villages and over 6,000 people. Considerable coordination is required for effective management across its large terrestrial and marine areas. The management plan also includes communities in the Upper Nasekawa River Basin area of neighbouring Koroalau district, demonstrating a commitment to co-operation across boundaries as part of an Ecosystem-Based Management approach.

Right: Tui Wailevu and Dr. Stacy Jupiter shake hands over the Wailevu management plan.

The Tui Wailevu said the launch marked “a historic occasion for the people of Wailevu.” He thanked the Provincial Office, the Wildlife Conservation Society and other partners “for their support as we take steps to manage our resources for future generations”. Dr. Stacy Jupiter, Director of the Wildlife Conservation Society’s Fiji Country Program also took part in the ceremony. “This reflects a community-driven approach that is informed by extensive scientific assessments alongside local ecological knowledge”, she stated. “I congratulate the people of Wailevu on the management plan, which provides a focus for them working together to maintain healthy ecosystems that benefit all their communities.”

With blessings and endorsement from their traditional leaders, the resource management committees (for Wailevu West and Wailevu East) will move forward with renewed belief to raise awareness, implement and monitor their plan.



### KEY EBM MESSAGES:

*Preservation of functional integrity of Fiji’s seascapes through community based management.*

- Successful 'ridge-to-reef' management depends on broad stakeholder input
- Inland and coastal communities need to manage their actions and resources together
- 'Ridge-to-reef' management protects habitat for all stages of life
- The success of protected areas for conservation and livelihoods relies on combining bottom-up community engagement with top-down planning
- Public health and livelihoods depend on environmental health
- Healthy ecosystems are the best defense against climate change impacts to livelihoods

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## ROUND KUTA MAT WEAVING TRAINING

WCS visited parts of Bua and Cakaudrove provinces before Christmas to conduct round kuta mat weaving training sessions. We have been really excited about this project, which hopes to revive the traditional Buan craft of making mats from *Eleocharis dulcis*, the freshwater reed known locally as kuta. It will also help women to generate income for their families and communities, reducing the financial pressures that contribute to unsustainable fishing, farming and logging practices.

The main objectives of the workshops were to:

- Enhance kuta weaving skills amongst local women;
- Encourage women to pass on their kuta weaving skills within communities (training of trainers);
- Explore opportunities for a co-operative to generate and manage income; and
- Raise awareness about good practice in managing kuta plantations.

A special vinaka vakalevu to our specialist trainer Edith Whippy, from Nakabuta in Wainunu, who not only taught the weaving techniques but motivated us all with her own story. Kuta mats are now Edith's major source of income, so if she can do it – so can they! We are looking forward to seeing the ladies make and sell their mats in 2013.



**Above:** Women about to start weaving round kuta mats in Kavula, Lekutu, Bua

## LOCAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN BUA

The Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) network is a partnership of organizations and communities involved in marine conservation projects who have joined together to learn collectively and improve the success of their efforts. Every two years, FLMMA members hold provincial learning meetings in Bua Province to share information, plan and support each other.

On 26-28 November in Nabouwalu village, communities from each of Bua's 9 districts came together in the name of FLMMA with the Provincial Office, Fisheries Department, i-Taukei Affairs, WCS and the Institute of Applied Sciences at University of the South Pacific.

As well as analyzing data and sharing experiences, participants explored growing pressures on local resources. Land is increasingly being converted for farming, landowners are tempted by lucrative logging propositions, and limited livelihoods opportunities encourage coastal communities to fish unsustainably. Major infrastructure developments are proposed including roads, ports and a new town. These will increase viability of previously untapped mineral and timber resources, opening the way for more logging and mining. Reflecting on how these pressures affect forests, rivers, and reef ecosystems and the services they provide, participants were able to find humour within the seriousness of the issues when enacting how they will communicate key messages back to their communities in role-play exercise.



Top: Participants analyse data during the BYMST Training in Nabouwalu, Bua. Bottom: Participants representing each district in Bua have established the Bua Yaubula Management Support Team (YMST)

## WESTERN BUA SURVEY

Alongside local ecological knowledge, the provision of robust data are a key factor enabling effective Ecosystem-Based Management. In late 2012 WCS undertook marine surveys in the customary fishing grounds (*iqoliqoli*) of the districts (*tikina*) of Bua, Dama, Lekutu, Navakasiga and Vuya in Bua province.

The sustainability of fisheries is a major issue for Bua's coastal communities, who are heavily reliant on marine resources for income as well as sustenance. Data is currently being analysed so it can be used in the coming months to inform district management planning, enabling consideration of which reefs are most resilient and productive, and therefore where communities might best locate any marine protected areas (MPAs).

The survey team was initially based in Navuneivu village in *tikina* Bua, before moving on to Yadua Island, Yaqaga Island and eventually Nabouwalu Village. The great hospitality received was a big help as they battled to overcome wet and windy conditions that preceded the arrival of Tropical Cyclone Evan.

In the evenings, informal talking (*talanoa*) highlighted communities' interest in using data to help maintain sustainable fisheries for future generations whilst meeting their current needs for income generation.

The marine surveys replicated methods previously applied in the districts of Kubulau, Wainunu, Nadi and Solevu (WCS, 2010) and the range of data now provides an overview of the health of coral reefs and fisheries across the province of Bua. This will also help stakeholders as they work towards developing an integrated coastal management plan for the province of Bua in 2014.

We are currently analysing the data and look forward to feeding the results back to stakeholders soon.



Above: Members of the WCS survey team getting ready for another dive.

## FLMMA AGM IN NAVAKAKA, CAKAUDROVE

The Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) network's Annual General Meeting was held in Navakaka village in Cakaudrove in December 2012. The opening speech by the Manager of Provincial Services of the iTaukei Affairs Board, Mr. Timoci Namotu, outlined the workshop objectives to:

- Capture and share lessons learned and best practice;
- Review FLMMA governance and management; and
- Discuss the role/status of Yaubula Management Support Teams (YMSTs) in expanding and maintaining the network.

Kini Koto of the Wildlife Conservation Society led a session on management of land-based activities and their impacts on the marine environment. Participants shared their experience of good practice in this area, including: reforestation of native trees; substituting chemical weed-killers to the collective effort of *solesolevaki*; and

strengthening village by-laws in relation to unnecessary burning. These initiatives are working to restore and maintain healthy freshwater and marine ecosystems whilst meeting the needs of the communities who rely on them. Subsequent discussion, however, identified a gap between awareness of the threats and practical measures to address them, highlighting the need for collaborative planning across wider areas as part of a 'Ridge to Reef' approach.

Overall the AGM was a great chance to share knowledge, reflect and refocus. Everyone who took part learned something new and the prominent role of community representatives further built their capacity as local leader. The next step is to address the challenges identified as we pursue our goals in 2013! The FLMMA AGM was co-funded by the ADB-GEF Coral Triangle Initiative program and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation Grant to the Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) network.

FIJI ECOSYSTEM BASED MANAGEMENT  
(EBM) = HEALTHY PEOPLE, PROCESSES  
AND SYSTEMS

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## ONGOING AND UPCOMING EVENTS

- **April 22—May 21: reef surveys in eastern Koro Island**
- **April 8—13: Village EBM Awareness Sessions in *tikina* Vuya**
- **April 29—May 4: Village EBM Awareness Sessions in *tikina* Dama**

## CLANS CONSERVE FORESTS AND RIVERS

WCS Fiji and partners have been engaging with land owning clans (*mataqali*) to protect forest and rivers in the Mt. Navotuvotu – Mt. Kasi forest corridor, a largely undeveloped area of Viti Levu, Fiji's second largest island. The area provides critical ecosystem services to communities who are heavily dependent on natural resources for their health, livelihoods and resilience to the impacts of climate change. A growing range of pressures (including from logging, mining and invasive species) mean that without management, there is a high risk that endangered plant species will be lost due to forest clearing and endemic and vulnerable freshwater fish species will be threatened by the effects of sedimentation.

Accompanied by the iTaukei Lands and Fisheries Commission and Department of Forestry, clans looked at the threats to their forest and river habitats, including logging concessions, roads, mining sites and hanging culverts (which prevent upstream migration of some species to breed). They also considered maps of forest coverage, land productivity and the biodiversity of waterways and riparian buffer zones.

The clans identified areas they want to preserve as Community Forest Parks and River Buffer Zones. As well as safeguarding ecosystem services, such as clean water and flood protection, the aim is to integrate these within networks of protected areas at district-level, guarding against damage to downstream coastal and marine ecosystems as part of an Ecosystem Based Management approach.

“Strengthening conservation and management across the Mt Navotuvotu - Mt Kasi forest corridor, Fiji” is a WCS Fiji project funded by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund.



Above: Members of the mataqali Navakalama in Natua Village, Wailevu West, Cakaudrove during the first consultation.

Please send your questions and letters to the Vatu-i-Ra Community Bulletin Editorial Team, using the contact details above.

TAQOMAKI NI NODA VEIKABULA



The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) is a U.S. based international NGO, with conservation programs all around the world, including Fiji. Over the past century, the WCS has worked to establish more than 130 parks and protected areas on land and at sea as well as working on threatened species. WCS works to save wildlife and wild places by understanding and resolving the critical problems that threaten key species and large, wild ecosystems around the world.