

**Key Messages:**

- 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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# EBM-FIJI NEWSLETTER

Volume 4, Issue 3

September 2012

## Grouper groupies get in the groove!

Onlookers at Suva's Hibiscus Festival in August received a surprise performance: a flash mob of more than 120 people danced to a modern version of the tune, *Stayin' Alive* by the Bee Gees. The dance, and the apt song, signified the launch of the Fiji Spawning Aggregations Campaign on the theme of *More Eggs, More Fish*.



Led by a diverse group of partners—from government agencies and non-governmental organizations to private sector companies and communities—the campaign aims to decrease fishing pressure on key grouper species from July through October, which is

the time of year grouper or *kawakawa* reproduce in Fiji—the grouper spawning season. The ultimate goal of the campaign is to ensure that the fishery can continue to support communities and commerce in Fiji for the long-term.

The impetus behind the dance was to share a conservation message in a non-traditional format. "There are so many messages given to the public on a daily basis," said Sanivalati Navuku, manager of the Sea-Web Fiji program. "Instead of sharing another gloomy message that warned about our ocean's future, we wanted to reach out in a fun, engaging way that encourages others to join us in reaching our goal. We are people of the islands, made of music and dance, so this was a perfect way to kick off this campaign." You can watch the flash mob at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XG82yaHzwUU>



The flash mob was a follow-up to the official launching of the campaign the day before. Speaking at the launch, Fisheries Permanent Secretary Inoke Wainiqolo said, "This is the time when most of our fishermen go and catch them [grouper] and when you catch them at this time you do not allow them to spawn and improve their population".



By decreasing fishing pressure on key grouper species during the peak spawning season, and thereby increase the health of the fisheries, the campaign will improve the ability of communities to meet their dietary and income needs.



A suite of activities are planned for the coming months, from raising awareness with decision-makers and resource-owners about the importance of spawning aggregation sites, to partnering with the business sector to pave the way towards a sustainable seafood market in Fiji.

In addition, the campaign is designed to build on the conservation ethic in Fiji, through a combination of iconic branding and the cultivation of a diverse group of ocean champions. These campaign strategies are expected to increase interest and buy-in to other conservation actions, ultimately improving the health of groupers as well as other marine resources.

Anti-clockwise from top left: The flash mob gets started; grooving for groupers; Black saddle grouper, *Plectropomus laevis*, a valuable delicacy; Brown marble grouper, *Epinephelus fuscoguttatus*, at its spawning grounds in Fiji's waters.

## MPAs to boost marine conservation work in Macuata

Fifteen marine and mangrove protected areas have been identified and endorsed by traditional leaders within the Qoliqoli Cokovata of Macuata, a major achievement for the protection of the Great Sea Reef. The MPAs were identified after a reconfiguration and rigorous consultation process that began in December 2011 and ended in June 2012. Marine protected areas are broken down into three classes, those that are permanently protected, seasonally opened every 10 years and seasonally opened every five years.

WWF South Pacific consultant Francis Areki said this is a major achievement for WWF in engaging the four districts of Mali, Dreketi, Sasa and Macuata to agree on the direction for the preservation of biodiversity in their areas for now and the future. The Qoliqoli Cokovata is a unique one for Fiji where four districts jointly own a Qoliqoli area that spans 1344 square kilometers. "There were initially 14 tabu areas that were identified by the communities based simply on traditional knowledge of their Qoliqoli (fishing ground)," Areki said.

Identification of the new MPAs is based on both scientific and traditional knowledge and consulting communities with overlays with income and livelihoods. Scientific knowledge was ascertained from marine biological surveys WWF carried out in 2005 and 2006 with emphasis on biodiversity, spawning areas, fish abundance, types of fish and endangered fish species. A socio-economic survey also helped confirm which marine areas to protect that don't adversely impact on the income and livelihoods of community members.

"The scientific survey identified three major areas that needed protection in the Qoliqoli Cokovata – Cakau Utulei, Cakau Vatuka and Cakau Talailau that are biologically significant areas and which communities have now agreed to conserve," Areki said.

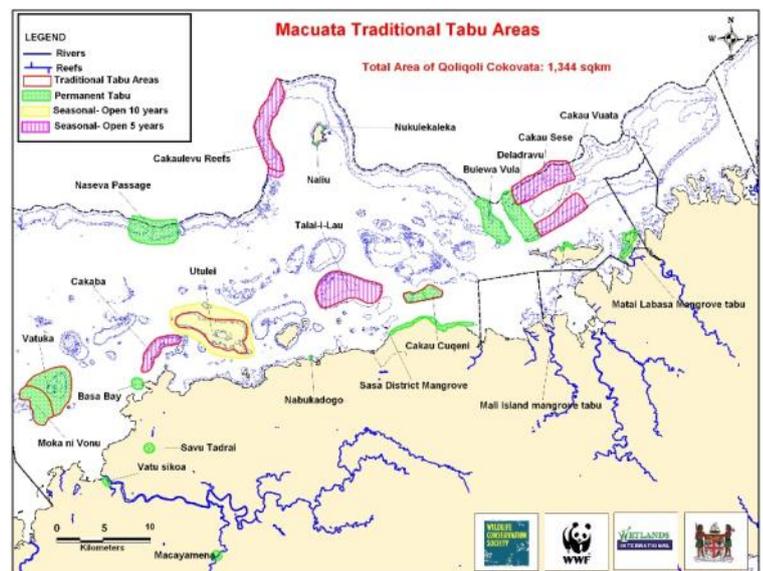
In December 2011, WWF South Pacific began a transparent consultation process starting with the 37 the villages within the Qoliqoli Cokovata leading up to the district wide consultations.

Also consulted were three villages belonging to the district of Seaqaqa who traditionally are included in the Qoliqoli Cokovata. "The issue discussed was how to set up an MPA that will protect biodiversity, income and community livelihoods," Areki said.

Findings from these consultations were presented at a sitting of all four districts in June at Naduri village in Macuata where areas to be conserved were finalised for the endorsement by traditional heads the Vunivalu Dreketi, Tui Mali, a representative for the Tui Sasa and the Tui Macuata.

"Right now WWF is trying to strengthen the self management for the Qoliqoli Cokovata committee, finalising the management plan, a fundraising plan and establishing a trust for the communities," Areki said. "Since the institution of MPAs in the Qoliqoli Cokovata in 2005, communities have seen the benefits in the increase in the abundance of fish for their daily livelihood."

Below: Map of Qoliqoli Cokovata tabu areas.



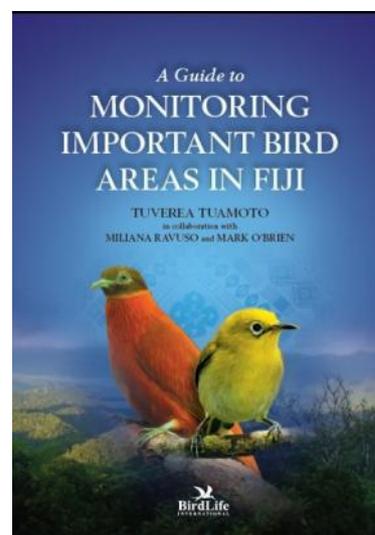
## Fiji's framework for IBA monitoring

The BirdLife Pacific Secretariat has just published a user-friendly guide to monitoring Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in Fiji.

*A Guide to Monitoring Important Bird Areas in Fiji* provides detailed guidance on how to assess threats to IBAs through a scoring system based on state (condition of the site and its biodiversity value), pressure (threats to an IBA), and response (variables that track conservation action at an IBA) indicators.

"The book is a framework to assess the state of Fiji's IBAs, threats that may affect them, and any conservation actions being undertaken to protect these IBAs", said Don Stewart – BirdLife Pacific Director.

The handbook was compiled based on BirdLife International's global IBA monitoring framework, and although it focuses specifically on examples from Fiji, the tools are universally appropriate and definitely applicable to the region. "The book has been designed so simple and minimal data can be collated by all levels of stakeholders, including community groups, government forestry



workers and project staff", said Miliana Ravuso – BirdLife Pacific Programme Coordinator.

"Having such a manual in place to dictate the inflow of information about IBAs provides a mechanism for conveying strong technical and scientific information to national data therefore informing national and regional policies".

Copies of the manual can be sourced at the BirdLife International Pacific Secretariat office in Suva, Fiji.

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## Conserving forests & streams in Vanua Levu

The forests and freshwater areas of Vanua Levu's Mt Navotuvotu-Mt Kasi forest corridor are nationally significant sites for biodiversity conservation which contain globally threatened species: they are recognized as critical for conservation. At the same time, these forested catchments provide ecosystem services to the people of Bua and Cakaudrove provinces who depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods. However, the forests and rivers are threatened by logging, mining and invasive species. Almost 60% of the Mt Navotuvotu Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) is under logging concession, while 80% of the Mt Kasi KBA falls under a mining tenement.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Fiji Program has recently started a project to work with local communities directly to establish Community-managed Forest Parks (CFPs) and Riparian Buffer Zones (RBZs), in order to preserve the biodiversity value and ecosystem services provided by this important forest corridor. The project has four phases:

1. Spatial prioritization
2. Consultations with landowners & community leaders
3. Creation of management support networks
4. Strengthening Fiji's legislative framework for protected areas



Over the last few months, WCS has compiled spatial data about threats to biodiversity in Bua and Cakaudrove – for example the location of logged areas inside logging concessions, information on farming suitability, and mining exploration areas. Positions of 110 hanging culverts (left) were surveyed in June. Hanging culverts block the passage of amphidromous fish which spawn in freshwater before the larvae migrate out to sea, returning upstream after their larval stage.

In July, WCS conducted freshwater biodiversity surveys of nine unexplored rivers and creeks across the project area, with all surveys recording the presence of endemic fish (e.g. right, *Stenogobius* sp., Teardrop goby). Existing spatial datasets recording the presence of terrestrial and freshwater endemic species in Fiji have also been collated. Building on the previous work of NatureFiji-MareqetiViti, maps showing native forest owned by clans willing take further steps towards conservation of their forests have been compiled.



All this information will be combined in a spatial prioritization exercise using decision-support software (Marxan with Zones). The analysis will balance the costs of establishing protected areas in places likely to be used for another purpose (logging, mining, farming), with the benefits of protecting areas with high biodiversity value and willing communities. The key results from this phase will be a list of high priority clans which will guide the landowner consultations in the next phase of the project, and maps showing proposed locations of CFPs and RBZs.

From October 2012 through to January 2013, WCS will target 10 high priority clans to discuss development of CFPs, as well as regarding priority locations for stream protection to establish RBZs. The results of biodiversity surveys and the spatial prioritization will be presented as a starting point for participatory discussions to develop zoning plans and management rules. In Wainunu, Kubulau and Wailevu, WCS are already working with communities to refine existing management plans. Here WCS will facilitate an adaptive management cycle to strengthen terrestrial protected area networks. In Nadi, Solevu, Vuya and Dama districts, WCS will assist communities to develop ecosystem-based management plans.

WCS will help community members establish a management committee for each CFP, and work to strengthen new and existing district-level resource management committees especially on roles and responsibilities for monitoring RBZs. WCS and partners, including management support teams (YMSTs) from the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area Network, will work with each committee to create management action plans and raise awareness of regulations under Fiji's Forest Decree, Forest Policy and Environment Management Act. WCS have started working with women to establish a cooperative for selling round mats (right) woven from *kuta* (Water chestnut, *Eleocharis dulcis*) as a way of generating revenue to support management costs.



Finally, by working through the Protected Areas Committee, WCS will identify legislative gaps to be filled under the development of new protected area legislation. Fiji's Forest Policy already supports the development of PFEs in principle, though recognition of CFPs and RPZs needs further strengthening under Fijian law.



Left: Fiji Forest Industries' base near Labasa; FFI kindly provided information about their logging activities.

This project is kindly supported by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF), a joint program of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, and the World Bank.



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## First Natural Resource Management Strategy

Macuata Province in Fiji has taken the lead in the design of a Natural Resource Management Strategy (NRMS) for the sustainable use and protection of resources in the face of development. Community leaders, environment officers and experts gathered at the landmark NRMS Workshop coordinated by WWF South Pacific in Labasa.



Once formulated, the strategy will be incorporated into the Macuata Provincial Council's annual corporate plan to ensure that development in the province is sustainable and safe so as not to cause detriment to food security or livelihoods.

In opening the workshop, *iTaukei* Affairs Board Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Colonel Apakuki Kurusiga, applauded Macuata province. "I am both excited and delighted that this is the first Province to conduct a workshop such as this out of the 14 Provinces in Fiji," Colonel Kurusiga said. Colonel Kurusiga added that the development is both timely and crucial. "Today there are a lot of social and economic expectations on the local natural resources of Macuata, given the Government's

Look North Policy for major infrastructural developments and increased economic investments. There is an increasing trend of investors in projects such as mining, logging, tourism, agriculture and fisheries to name a few."

At its core, the strategy will safeguard the interests of people within the province, an estimated 89.4% of whom live in the rural areas and heavily depend on the use of natural resources for their daily sustenance. Formulating the strategy corresponds to the vision of Fiji's Road Map to Democracy 2009 to 2014 for the sustainable development of Fiji.

WWF South Pacific Policy Officer Alfred Ralifo said a key aspect of the workshop will be the identification of areas that need protection and management. "These are areas of cultural, ecological or economical significance both on land and the aquatic environment," Ralifo said. "For example the Great Sea Reef is an area of high biodiversity."



Top left: Deliberations at the NRMS Workshop. Above: Kasaqa Tora from the National Trust of Fiji aids stakeholders discussing components of the strategy.

## Moon Reef Oceans Festival 2012

Youth groups and school children in Fiji's Dawasamu district in Tailevu province celebrated their first ever Oceans Festival in July with a traditional *iTaukei* fun fare and games. Over 200 people attended the festival, which promoted the uniqueness of Moon Reef and its resident pod of Spinner dolphins as an opportunity for local ecotourism.

Dawasamu district on the northeast coast of Viti Levu has been a site for researchers at the Institute of Applied Science (University of the South Pacific) and part of the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area network since 2005. The district organised



Above: Muscle power in the tug-of-war.

the event through a partnership between the Dawasamu Environment Movement and the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC) in Australia.

"By being the first district in Fiji to hold its own Oceans Festival, we have volunteered our future to the conservation of the ocean and being coastal people this is the day to thank God and celebrate the many provisions we receive from the sea," said Marika Dakuwaqa, Principal of Dawasamu Secondary School when he opened the festival.

Everyone enjoyed traditional games such as *Veitika* (Javelin), *Tali Su* (basket weaving), and the coconut relay—a challenge where teams of five climb coconut trees then husk and scrape the nuts to the loud cheers of spectators!

"The University is really keen to continue and further expand its relationship in developing community based eco-tourism with the people of Dawasamu," said Dr Gayle Mayes, Lecturer in Tourism, Leisure and Events Management at USC, whose 13 students helped to organise the event as part of their course.