



REEF TALK

ISSUE NO4 MAR 2009

Strong reefs

Strong islands



REEFS

PROTECT

IT'S
TIME
TO

GIVE

BACK

Solomon Islands school is regional champion

Saint Joseph Catholic Secondary School – Tenaru from the Solomon Islands out-conserved ten other school groups from around the Pacific region to become the challengecoralreef champion.

In announcing the winner of the 2008 Pacific Year of the Reef campaign competition for 13-18 year-old youth, SPREP Coral Reef Management Officer, Caroline Vieux, expressed her pleasure with the presentations made by a group of young, motivated, and resourceful individuals who have set an example for other Pacific islanders to follow.

“Saint Joseph’s team showed initiative, commitment, and innovation throughout their activities in working to protect a coral reef that they, and others, regularly use,” Vieux said.

The winners devised a programme of three community education visits, shore clean ups, coral planting, and a monitoring visit over five months to help rehabilitate and restore Visale Reef on Guadalcanal island. A group of 21 students led by senior biology teacher, Mr Philip Tohupao, completed their planned activities to much praise from surrounding communities and the general public.

The team acknowledges that participation in the project has taught students the importance of coral reefs to their livelihoods, linkages between land-based activities and coral reef health, and practical skills in handling and planting coral to assist reef rehabilitation. Both the community educational component and practical side of the project were welcomed by the Visale community, who encouraged the team to involve neighbouring schools in their work.

Competition results were presented by Tohupao and student, Malakai Malasy, at the recent International Youth Coastal Conference in Townsville, Australia as part of the champion’s prize. SPREP’s Coral Reef Management Officer, Caroline Vieux, also highlighted the project at a side event at the World Conservation Congress in Barcelona, Spain. Both presentations, made during October, received positive feedback and encouragement.





Pacific Year of the Reef Legacy

A final word from SPREP's Campaign Coordinator Caroline Vieux

When I look back over the past year, I am overwhelmed by the support and effort that people have put in to help make the Pacific Year of the Reef a success. We wanted to encourage people to act now and to save our reef now, because we are past the stage of giving warnings. If we don't start to save our reef, our kitchen cupboard and our livelihood, then we can lose it all.

I'd like to share all highlights for this year but we'd need a whole separate Reeftalk for that! What stood out for me most was the enthusiasm from the school students that worked hard for the *ChallengeCoralReef* campaign, our Pacific-wide secondary school competition gave me hope. Some 20 schools from throughout our Pacific region submitted action plans on how to restore and protect their coral reefs. We were able to finance 11 of these action plans, which has laid the groundwork for a promising future. Some of the projects addressed waste issues, it allowed for young people to take the lead and hold public awareness meetings in their communities and it also saw our



next generation take the initiative to save our environment.

One extremely important factor that helps to ensure the success of a Campaign is the funding to allow for activities and projects to take place. In 2008, we had the strong support of the Coral Reef Initiative for the Pacific Programme (CRISP), which allowed for our project to be funded at the regional level. We are grateful for their support and flexibility as it meant that we were able to implement the awareness campaign so that coral reef projects could reach as much of the Pacific region as possible.

Thank you everyone for all the work you did in 2008 to help save our reefs. Please ensure this important work continues well beyond the end of the Year so that our coral reefs can flourish!

Fa'afetai Lava.



Fijian butterflyfish count a great success

More than 40 organisations and resorts throughout the country, the general public, and 160 upper primary school students from the island of Beqa, participated in the Great Fiji Butterflyfish Count held over half-hour periods in November to estimate abundance and variety of butterflyfish species nationwide.

Enthusiastic public participation among snorkellers, divers, and participants in glass-bottomed boats was a highlight for organisers, particularly Marine Ecology Consulting's Helen Sykes.

"The count was a fantastic awareness-raising event with many participating organisations reporting that their guests and students immensely enjoyed the activity," Sykes said.

Owners of Lawaki Beach House and volunteers involved students of Dakuibeqa and Uluinakorovatu primary schools on Beqa between 10 – 14 November by holding educational presentations about marine life conservation in Fiji and fun learning activities developed

by SPREP. An evening information session on the same topic was also held for adults of one community. Additional sessions for students in classes 5 to 8 of Uluinakorovatu Primary School introduced them to snorkeling and water safety which they put into practice the following day during their participation in the butterflyfish count.

"The school activity was a great success with enthusiastic participation by schoolchildren, teachers and community members alike," Sykes said of the Beqa schools' participation in the SPREP-supported activity.

Lawaki Beach House was responsible for this success, as they supported instructors, arranged logistics, provided snorkel gear, and donated a TV and DVD player to one of the schools in a bid to improve marine education and participation in conservation among youth on the island. A similar programme is being planned by CORAL and the US Peace Corps for a school in Kubulau on the island of Vanua Levu. Participants throughout Fiji used



waterproof slates with images of all 27 species of butterflyfish found in Fiji (compared to 116 worldwide) against which they marked each sighting of each species. Results of these general public surveys will be complemented by those of systematic scientific surveys over precisely measured areas.

"The scientific surveys have been completed and we expect to post final analysed results at <http://www.fjiibutterflyfishcount.com> by the end of 2008," Sykes explained.

Analysis of results will be completed by Fiji Reef Check and the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network. Most butterflyfish are easily observed since they live in shallow tropical waters (up to about 20m deep) and feed in extensive areas of live coral in good condition. Their abundance and diversity indicate the presence of live hard coral, and water quality and temperature requirements of those corals. Therefore, general coral reef health can be inferred from results.

Cans, bottles, and plastic removed from Avarua Harbour

“
Let’s sea to it!
Keep our island and lagoons clean!

” was the message taken to heart by 81 volunteers who marked a CleanUp the World event held in Cook Islands in September.

The annual event was coordinated by the Cook Islands National Environment Service, The Dive Centre, Whale Education and Research Centre, and the Ministry of Marine Resources in a bid to improve the health of underwater ecosystems. The clean-up campaign focused on cleaning Avarua Harbour and nearby coastal areas of Avarua town centre.

In thanking volunteers, Director of the Cook Islands National Environment Service, Vaitoti Tupa, praised all who spent a Saturday morning making clean coasts a reality.

“This is a great example of how people can cooperate to take action and make positive contributions to communities,” Tupa said.

Tupa also acknowledged the support organisers received from



non-Government organisations, local businesses, regional organisations including SPREP, and the 2008 Year of the Reef campaign. Volunteers were rewarded with sausage sizzles, certificates of participation, and tee-shirts.

The severity of the litter problem was enunciated by The Dive Centre’s Sabine Janneck who acknowledged the tangible impact of cleaning the local area.

“Although there was less rubbish underwater compared to last year, we collected almost twice as much rubbish on-shore this year as we did in 2007,” she said.

“We collected a truck-load of rubbish in only two hours consisting of at least 689 aluminium cans, 654 plastic bottles, 468 plastic bags, 593 plastic glasses, 256 glass bottles, and 635 food containers,” Janneck explained.

With vital information collected on different types of materials littering their island environments, the event is also a useful tool for local education campaigns. Information is also provided to Project AWARE which submits this information to the Ocean Conservancy. The data becomes a powerful tool that is used to inform the public, governments and businesses of the damaging effects of debris.

Contact Deyna Marsh of the Cook Islands National Environment Service at deyna@environment.org.ck for further information on this event or other community environmental activities in the Cook Islands.





Population increase major threat to American Samoan coral reefs

Population pressure was identified by American Samoa’s Coral Reef Advisory Group as the single most potent threat to the US territory’s coastal resources at a territorial Population Summit in September that gathered key stakeholders to discuss problems and devise collaborative solutions to this challenge.

The two-day summit, held in Utulei, and titled “Managing Change: Population Pressure in American Samoa,” addressed the issue of rapid population growth and its potentially severe adverse impacts on natural resources and quality of life of American Samoan residents.

In opening the summit, Governor Togiola Tulafono urged the approximately 150 participants to consider the need for responsibility in ensuring the sustainability of the island’s resources.

“In our island setting, the primary threat to our quality of life comes from people and how responsibly we behave when using our land, water and air,” Governor Tulafono said.

Discussions at the summit focused on tightening immigration policies and enforcing sponsorship categories; creating a public-informed national health policy that provides affordable and quality health services; integrating diverse policies and smart planning linking population growth with land use, infrastructure, sanitation, and waste water management; and improving knowledge of and access to reproductive health choices.

The inclusion of waste management concerns was a priority of SPREP’s Solid Waste Officer, Esther Richards, who attended the summit - a view shared by Alyssa Edwards, the Coral Reef Advisory Group’s Coral Reef Management Fellow.

“Our entire population lives along the coast and as land-based sources of marine pollution are one of the major threats to our marine environment, implementing measures dealing with improving land use and waste management should significantly improve the health of our marine resources, including our coral reefs,” Edwards said.

Participants’ recommendations were drafted into a “Population Declaration to the People and Leaders of American Samoa” and presented to Governor Tulafono and Fono leaders for consideration and implementation. The summit also called for the establishment of a Population Pressure Commission



to develop and monitor multi-sector population policies.

Approximately 40% of American Samoa’s population of about 69,000 is under the age of 15 and, coupled with immigration, American Samoa’s population is likely to increase in the future. Further information on American Samoa’s population pressure strategy can be accessed at www.crag.as or contact Alyssa Edwards, the Population Pressure Local Action Strategy Coordinator, at alyssa.edwards@doc.as

Drama, dance draw youth to conservation action

Lessons learnt in engaging youth in marine conservation projects in Pacific island nations were one of the many outcomes of the second conference of the International Pacific Marine Educators Network held in Townsville, Australia in mid-October.

The success of using drama, dance, and other creative expressions were reported in presentations by WWF in Cook Islands and Fiji, USP in its work on Nanumea Island in Tuvalu, the Fiji Locally-Managed marine Areas network, and Fremden Shadrack of Live and Learn in Vanuatu. All these were done in the conference strand entitled "Linking the Pacific."



Future Pacific leaders share vision at world meet

'Involve youth in building resilience of Pacific islands to climate change' was the message shared by Pacific youth representatives with delegates at a SPREP-sponsored side event at the IUCN World Conservation Congress held in Barcelona in October.

Ron Simpson and Luisa Tagicakibau from Fiji, and Deyna Marsh from the Cook Islands combined Pacific cultures through drama, song, images, and dance to convey this message and the vision statement of the 40 participants who attended the Pacific Future Environment Leaders Forum that was held in Suva earlier in the year.

Active member of the 2008 Pacific Year of the Reef Cook Islands campaign team and officer with the Cook Islands National Environment Service, Marsh stressed the need for the inclusion of young people by current leaders in planning and implementing projects.

"Young people in the Pacific know its time to take action in this climate of change, and through a vision statement developed at the Forum we are calling on more young

people to be part of the change and our leaders to guide us and support us," Marsh said during their presentation.

The three representatives called on Pacific leaders and elders to involve youth in projects, provide opportunities for capacity building, encourage young people, and facilitate youth action to help their communities and governments achieve their sustainability goals.



The same message was echoed at all youth-related sessions throughout the week-long meeting.

The group also identified obstacles to Pacific youth involvement in planning and decision making with Tagicakibau highlighting the 'culture of silence.' Suggestions for

overcoming this and other obstacles to included establishing a youth and environment resource centre that could provide youth and youth groups with access to information, training opportunities, and funds for youth-led projects.

"The positive responses we received after our presentation was overwhelming and we were also inspired by young environment leaders from other parts of the world," Marsh recalled.

SPREP's Coral Reef Management Officer, Caroline Vieux, also participated in a side event celebrating the 2008 International Year of the Reef campaign and Saint Joseph Tenaru School's win in the Pacific-wide 'challengecoralreef' competition, and the launch of the SEM Pasifika Guidelines with other socio-economic monitoring guidelines developed for other global regions.



Wallis and Futuna leaders study Samoan protected areas

A high-level delegation from Wallis and Futuna spent four days in early December studying marine protected area management around Upolu to gain first-hand insight into community-based marine conservation in Samoa.



The ten-member team was led by some of the highest chiefs representing the Kings of Wallis, Sigave and Alo, comprised representatives of the Department of Environment, non-Government organisations, fishermen's associations, members of Parliament, and the Government of France.

Presentations from the Fisheries Division on their different activities with communities and their Community-Based Fisheries Management Programme kicked off the study tour. According to SPREP's Coral Reef Management Officer,

Caroline Vieux, who accompanied the group, the presentations introduced the group to the process of establishing and maintaining marine protected areas.

"These presentations helped inform delegates of the process on setting-up fisheries reserves and how the Samoan Government has worked hand-in-hand with communities to assist them in monitoring and restocking protected areas, and aquaculture," Ms Vieux said.

The following three days were spent in villages visiting both fisheries reserves with the Samoan Division of Fisheries and the Aleipata-Safata Marine Protected Areas with the Conservation Division of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. These visits provided opportunities for the visitors from Wallis and Futuna to directly discuss issues with, and collect views of, community members on their marine protected areas.

Wallis and Futuna are in the process of designing management plans for their coastal and marine resources and had expressed interest in learning from the community-based approach taken in Samoa with a view to replicating it. This high-level visit, organised by SPREP as part of the Coral Reef Initiatives for the Pacific programme, was designed to convince key decision-makers in Wallis and Futuna of the need to move marine conservation efforts forward.

The choice of Samoa as a source for case studies was motivated by the common history of Futuna and Samoa and the dedication of communities to protect their marine resources. The group was determined to apply lessons learnt on their four-day visit among their people.

Network review to benefit communities

“Sharing Lessons learned in Community Marine Management across the Pacific” was the theme of the Indo-Pacific Regional Meeting of the Locally Managed Marine Area (LMMA) Network held in Suva, Fiji in November.

Some 100 participants attended from 16 countries, making it one of the largest gatherings of its kind. Participants shared ideas and common challenges faced by community members and those who work with them focusing on marine resources management and conservation in the Pacific.

Members of the five-day meeting came from local communities, government agencies, non governmental organisations, and numerous institutions such as the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) Coral Reef Management Officer Caroline Vieux and Marine Conservation Analyst Paul Anderson.

The conference attendees divided into several groups for a two-day session. Partner and support agencies met in Suva, while community delegates congregated in Vatu-o-lailai. Both groups focused on marine resource management topics such as “initiation of community engagement and planning, implementation, sustainability and scaling-up, also monitoring and adaptation.” Dividing the conference into two groups also widened the scope for participants to engage, learn, and share experiences and lessons learnt in a smaller, more familiar working group atmosphere.

The community participants visited sites, like the nearby alternative livelihood project at Namada



Village being guided through the “plantation walk.” The group used the opportunity to discuss objectives of their projects with the local communities, facilitating the learning of new methods which could be used in their national projects.

“Self-improvement action plans” and “take home points” were developed by the community participants, from lessons learnt during their session activities. The design of these hopes to help the participants focus on the key points they found useful to share to the communities upon their return home.



Meanwhile the partners and support agencies group held plenary sessions and small group discussions during the two days.

On the last day in Vatu-o-Lailai, both groups came together during a plenary meeting to share summary presentations of each group’s results.

These presentations outlined a range of lessons learnt, guidelines and proposals for improving practices in resources management initiation and planning, pointing out implementation challenges, and consideration of sustainability.

According to SPREP’s Coral Reef Management Officer, Caroline Vieux, the “lessons learnt” exchanges would work to strengthen the network in the future.

“The conference allowed people to learn from successful communities that have applied community-based adaptive management strategies, and to act as a think tank to identify strengths and weaknesses of the network to improve it,” Vieux said.

SPREP’s assistance to the conference was provided under the Coral Reef Initiatives for the South Pacific program (CRISP).

Cook Islands, Samoa focus of new marine DVDs

Working to overcome one of the Pacific region's major hindrances to conservation planning has brought collaborative efforts in marine environment protection by two neighbouring island nations closer to fruition.

The ReefBase Pacific project and SPREP have acted as a focal point for information gathering and sharing on reef-associated livelihoods, fisheries, and biodiversity worked with agencies in American Samoa and Samoa to gather scattered records into a central, digital repository to improve information management that supports decision-making in all aspects of conservation in the sector-wide "Two Samoas" project.

Explaining the utility of an information management tool such as ReefBase Pacific to the Two Samoas project, SPREP Project Assistant Ewan Cameron stressed that sharing data and information between agencies and nations can lead to achieving common objectives.

"American Samoa and Samoa share a similar ecological, geographical and cultural context, a common vulnerability, and sets of challenges which would best be addressed by collaborative efforts," Cameron explained.

"These will allow the two jurisdictions to enhance their expertise and information bases, minimise duplication of effort, maximise resource efficiency, and improve management programmes leading to healthier environments," Cameron elaborated.

Cameron has worked with agencies as diverse as the Department of

Commerce, Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, and the Coral Reef Advisory Group in American Samoa; and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and Department of Fisheries in Samoa. Data and documents collected from these and other agencies have been digitized, collated, and entered into a database. DVDs of this comprehensive Nearshore Marine Resources Digital Compendium database are scheduled for distribution in early 2009.

The Cook Islands has also benefited from an accurate and accessible information repository with SPREP assisting with digitizing and compiling publications and records of key contacts for ease of reference by the National Environment Service and Ministry of Marine Resources. Responding to this request has led to a collaborative geographical information system project between relevant Government departments and SPREP.

SPREP's focus on these countries complements the work of other ReefBase Pacific Project Assistants based around the Pacific region who focus on other island groups. The two DVDs of the SPREP's work with American Samoa and Samoa, and Cook Islands will be modeled on the easy to use ReefBase Pacific DVD Version 1.0 that is currently available. Records will also be integrated into the online Pacific-wide database with accessibility options specified by nations concerned.

Access the ReefBase Pacific database at <http://pacific.reefbase.org/> or contact Ewan Cameron at ewanc@sprep.org for more information.



Meeting sets priorities of regional programme

Representatives of 20 projects in 12 Pacific island countries and territories attended the annual CRISP General Meeting at SPREP headquarters in Samoa between 22-26 September. Attendees included all CRISP programme component leaders, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community and the World Conservation Union, which joined the annual gathering for the first time.

The mid-term review of the CRISP programme was the main topic of discussion, covering activities since 2005. Thierry Clement of the independent consulting agency Oreade-Breche, and author of the mid-term review report, presented conclusions of its thorough investigation and addressed specific recommendations for each programme component. Fruitful discussions over four days

concerned the development of new action plans which will improve and conclude most programme actions by the end of 2009.

In its final year, the CRISP programme will also participate in two major events: the Pacific Science Inter-congress in French Polynesia and the International Marine Conservation Congress in Washington D.C. The bio-prospecting component of the programme will hold a workshop side event at the meeting in French Polynesia on the legal aspects of use and benefits of natural marine resources.

Priority will also be given to two major economic studies, one in Solomon Islands and the other in Vanuatu, to assess the coastal resource management and sustainable development impacts

of locally-managed marine areas. Other programme activities in 2009 will include new partnerships and projects in post-larval capture and culture techniques. The aquaculture department of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community will collaborate with agencies in French Polynesia and Cook Islands on projects to develop giant clams and mantis shrimps, while Ecocean and Hawaiian Sea Life will launch a similar project on Christmas Island to supply the American ornamental fish market.

The CRISP Coordination Unit will continue to examine options to ensure that the work and lessons of the programme continue after the financial assistance of the French Development Agency ceases at the end of 2009. Opportunities provided by the 10th European Development Fund are currently being explored.



Sustainable wetlands management focus of recent country training

The five Pacific Island signatories to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands recently completed a one-week training session designed to enhance sustainable management of their important wetland sites.

The Pacific island parties to the convention: Fiji, Marshall Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea and Samoa, were brought together in an informal and interactive setting to familiarise with the Ramsar management planning process and format. It was a week of "hands on" work to develop draft management plans for Ramsar sites and other priority national wetland sites.

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) coordinated the one-week training during March in partnership with the Ramsar Convention Secretariat and IUCN Oceania, in Nadi Fiji.

Participants also discussed followup actions, which they agreed they could work on during 2009. Furthermore, participants agreed that a follow-up workshop be held in one year's time to update on progress of these targets and designate further actions as needed.

The immediate actions identified include updating the Ramsar Information Sheets for their Ramsar sites; writing World Wetlands Day summaries to be submitted to the Communications Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) officer of the Ramsar Secretariat; and to identify all national Ramsar focal points and provide these details to the Ramsar Secretariat. National focal points cover the different aspects of the national implementation of the Ramsar

convention including CEPA and scientific and technical issues.

"The main part is the draft management plans, of which we started to develop the structure over the week of training. We'll assist the island parties to develop these plans further over the next 12 months," said SPREP's Associate Ramsar Officer Vainuupo Jungblut. He added, "the participants have expressed support for these actions and with a little bit of encouragement we can get these done in a timely manner."



Another issue discussed at the one-week gathering was that of identifying funding sources. International non-governmental organisations that work in Pacific Ramsar sites were identified as potential sources of assistance, whether for technical or financial support. The private sector in each of the countries was also identified as another potential source of assistance for specific activities, such as the production of wetlands awareness materials such as posters and leaflets, in each of the countries.

"There are many opportunities for forming stronger partnerships with various stakeholders within Pacific Island Ramsar parties, such partnerships could enable assistance towards the effective management of Pacific Island Ramsar sites."

For more information on the Sustainable Management workshop please contact SPREP's Associate Ramsar Officer, Vainuupo Jungblut at vainuupoj@sprep.org



Feedback from participants from the week...

"This is one of a very few workshops where I felt relaxed and enjoyed the sessions. Very informative and glad I made it to this workshop."

"Involve more Government and non Government agencies."

"Invite more countries"

"The sessions were done/organized in a very relaxed manner. It helped everyone relax, concentrate and helped everyone to discuss issues openly."



Leatherback turtle nests surveyed in Bougainville

The leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*) is the world's oldest and largest turtle. Having witnessed the extinction of the dinosaur and the development of mankind, this magnificent sea creature is now facing extinction in our Pacific Ocean.

In January, the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) was contracted by the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council (WPRFMC) to conduct a leatherback turtle nesting beach survey on Bougainville Island in Papua New Guinea.

The survey recorded 46 leatherback turtle nests and one false crawl. Of the 46 nesting sites found along the beaches of Bougainville, there were also 12 unidentified turtle nests, which were determined to belong to green and hawksbill species.

This survey also served to verify nesting sites recorded during an aerial survey in 2007 by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Bougainville

lies between Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, with all three having nesting populations of the leatherback turtle.

SPREP's Coastal Management Adviser Jeff Kinch and Marine Conservation Analyst Paul Anderson spent six days traveling around Bougainville by dinghy interviewing, surveying and sharing turtle awareness with the local communities as well as measuring turtle nests along the shore.

Kinch has now compiled a report for the WPRFMC, which makes recommendations for communities, the Bougainville Fisheries Section and non-governmental organisations on possible intervention measures in Bougainville.

"There was a high density - close to 43 % of all the nests were in a 5.4 km stretch of beach between the villages of Papanoa and Naboi, this would be the most likely spot for conservation work along with some educational outreach about turtles, as these nests will likely be



harvested for eggs," said Anderson. Communities in Bougainville frequently harvest the eggs of the turtles for food.

During the field testing, an education outreach program was also held with local communities on Bougainville, involving distribution of the awareness booklet *Leatherback turtles: Their future is in our hands*, and stickers detailing protection legislation under the PNG Flora and Fauna Control Act.

"For villagers this has been part of their diet for a long time, their diet, their cultural resource and part of their biodiversity. Like fisheries, you want to manage it well, you don't want to catch all your fish or you will have no more in the future, just like turtles. We need to help conserve them or they will disappear as a species on earth," explained Anderson.

The leatherback turtle population in the Western Pacific has declined by 95 per cent in the last 30 years.

More information on leatherbacks can be obtained in a SPREP fact sheet on the topic available from <http://www.sprep.org/factsheets/index.htm>.

If you would like more details please contact SPREP's Coastal Management Adviser Jeffrey Kinch at jeffreyk@sprep.org or SPREP's Marine Conservation Analyst Paul Anderson at paula@sprep.org. T: (685) 21929 F: (685) 20231 W: www.sprep.org



Discovering the best way to choose top marine sites

Debating the best method of identifying priority marine locations for conservation action may be a thing of the past with the adoption of the Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) analysis process by SPREP and member countries and territories this year.

The KBA process answers this hotly debated question by mapping locations of IUCN Red Listed threatened species and populations that are highly aggregated in time or space. Data is catalogued, mapped, and analyzed using geographical information systems.

The analyzed results will be one of several outputs of the KBA process which will yield a number of other output according to SPREP's Marine Conservation Analyst, Paul Anderson, who is leading trials of the process with marine resource data from Samoa.

"The primary output of applying the KBA process will be identifying types of habitat and the location of species of concern that are currently represented in managed areas, and linking existing sites into a strategic system of resilient and connected managed marine areas which conserve and enhance biodiversity by including underrepresented sites, species, and informing replication of key habitat types," Anderson explained.

Secondary, but equally important, the results of the project will assist in future iterations of this work and other marine applications.

"Other stand-alone products will include the collation and cataloging of information sources for species location data and supporting literature in a bibliographic database

and national marine datasets of spatial and attribute data that make up geographical information system," Anderson elaborated.

Analysis of species data and gaps within the datasets will be used to point the way forward for future studies.

The main challenges in implementing the project have been acquiring and selecting appropriate data from the abundance of species data gathered over years of research and the lack of spatial data for the marine environment, especially near-shore depth profiles and habitat boundaries.

SPREP's trial of the KBA process in Samoa and regionally, with endangered sea turtle populations, was presented at the recent annual Pacific Geographic Information Systems/ Remote Sensing conference in Suva, Fiji. Practitioners at the conference were encouraged by the applicability and flexibility of the approach. Conference participants were particularly interested in the sound scientific foundation for selecting high priority conservation sites.

The adoption of the KBA process by SPREP is in response to conservation objectives and pledges of SPREP members that call for expanded coastal and marine protection, the declining status of the health of nearshore marine biodiversity caused by expanding fishing ranges, and population pressures that have decimated coral health and young fish populations. Identifying appropriate marine areas for conservation action will designate safe havens for marine life and sites of global biodiversity significance.



REEF TALK

The Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) is an intergovernmental organisation working with Pacific island countries and territories to strengthen environmental management and promote sustainable development.

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