



FROM THE 9TH PACIFIC ISLANDS CONFERENCE ON NATURE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTED AREAS

The 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation Conference and Protected Areas is hosted by the Government of Fiji in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, the Pacific Island Roundtable for Nature Conservation and IUCN Oceania.

This media coverage is a partnership supported by the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS), SPREP, University of the South Pacific (USP), Fiji National University (FNU) and the Pacific Island News Association (PINA).

Fiji President calls for 'new culture' of conservation



PHOTO: NANETTE WOONTON

Fiji's President His Excellency, Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, in garland, with Attorney-General and Acting Environment Minister Hon Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum and Minister of Works Hon Timoci Natuva.

By **WATI TALEBULA**

Second year journalism student at FNU

Fiji's President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau believes the Pacific needs to bring ordinary people into its conservation efforts to overcome "the culture of the throwaway package"

Ratu Epeli told delegates gathered for the opening of the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in Suva on December 2,

2013 there was a need for a revolution in personal attitudes.

"For too long, Pacific peoples have embraced one of the worst facets of western consumerism - the culture of the throwaway package," Ratu Epeli said.

"Our villages, towns and cities are strewn with litter, our beaches with plastic bottles and plastic bags, and other non-biodegradable containers of every kind," Ratu Epeli said.

"We can blame the manufacturers for packaging their products in these containers in the first place. But the responsibility for disposing of them properly is solely our own - all of us.

"We need to inculcate a new culture in the Pacific, one of personal commitment

to conservation and sustainable development and the daily observance of it in all our lives. Do not use our pristine environment as a rubbish dump."

Ratu Epeli reminded the participants of the uniqueness of the Pacific Islands' common identity and challenged them to make the most of it.

The five-yearly regional conservation conference brings together government representatives, NGOs, development partners, international organisations and individual communities from through the Pacific.

The President also shared Fiji's hopes to see that "grand coalition" broadened and strengthened to include more representatives of the corporate sector.

"We are convinced that only through an effective public and private partnership as well as a holistic approach to conservation, can we tackle the complex challenges now before us," Ratu Epeli said.

He urged everyone to put away their differences and work together.

"It is high time for the world to put aside the differences and embrace the binding targets to dramatically reduce carbon emissions. At the very least, it is the prudent thing to do."

Ms Wati Talebula is a member of the media team providing coverage of the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas from 2 - 6 December in Suva, Fiji. This is a partnership between the Fiji National University, University of the South Pacific and SPREP whereby a team of 10 journalism students are mentored by senior reporters as they cover the conference. This activity is funded by the Pacific Assistance Media Scheme (PACMAS).



9th PACIFIC ISLANDS CONFERENCE ON NATURE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTED AREAS

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Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Dr Flannery tells of 'critical decade'

By **SHAHANI MALA**
Journalism student at FNU

A world renowned scientist has told a Pacific Island gathering on nature conservation in Suva, Fiji that the evidence of climate change is overwhelming and clear and that this was the critical decade to take decisive action.

Dr Tim Flannery says we are already seeing the social, economic and environmental impacts of a changing climate.

In his presentation to the Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, Dr Flannery said "it is beyond reasonable doubt that the burning of fossil fuels is the primary cause".

"Decisions we make from now to 2020 will determine the severity of climate

change our children and grandchildren experience," Dr Flannery added.

The director of the Australian Climate Council shared evidence on how climate change was having an impact in Australia.

"The hottest month recorded for Australia was on 7 January 2013," said Dr Flannery during his presentation this morning.

The average daily maximum temperature for the whole of Australia was over 39 degrees Celsius for seven consecutive days from the 2-8 January 2013, Flannery noted.

He said severe heatwaves occurred across 70 per cent of Australia in late December 2012 and early January 2013.

Dr Flannery made reference to the floods in Queensland in December 2010, where 300,000 homes and businesses lost

power in Brisbane and Ipswich.

Major bush fires in Australia is also being attributed in part to climate change.

"Climate change exacerbates bushfire conditions by increasing the frequency of very hot days," Dr Flannery said.

He provided evidence that between 1973 and 2010 the Forest Fire Danger Index increased significantly at 16 of 38 weather stations across Australia, mostly in the southeast. None of the stations showed a significant decrease.

"Projected increases in hot days across Australia, and in dry conditions in the southwest and southeast, will very likely lead to more days with extreme fire danger in those regions," Dr Flannery said.

Fiji takes over as chair

By **PRIYA CHAND**
Second-year journalism student at USP

THE FIJI GOVERNMENT HAS EXPRESSED its "absolute commitment" to help tackle the challenges of protecting the environment.

Acting Environment Minister and Attorney-General Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum said Fiji accepted its role today as chair of the 9th Pacific Island Conference on Nature Conservation Protected Areas with humility and pride.

He said it was the government's obligation first to serve its own people, to empower them through a host of policies.

"That service extends to our commitment to work with all of you to tackle and resolve the great environmental challenges we all face as we struggle to protect our surroundings."

Mr Sayed-Khaiyum also thanked Papua New Guinea for its role as the conference's previous chair.

People at the forefront of nature conservation



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Mr Tuinaceva and a colleague at work.

MY THOUGHTS

Personal perspective by Mr Eroni Tuinaceva, a journalism student of the Fiji National University.

Today marked the launch of a week-long effort to continue the uphill battle against global warming and its associated problems.

The speeches were a particular highlight as they reflected the message that people need to be at the forefront of nature conservation if natural resource are to remain sustainable into the future.

On a more personal note, today also marked the first time for me to be involved in an inter-tertiary, inter-organisational media team covering a major event.

It has been quite enriching working with other budding journalists from USP as well as working journalists who have all been incredibly helpful and inspiring at the same time.

I look forward to working with everyone over the next few days, growing in my profession and establishing a lifelong network of colleagues and, hopefully, also friends.

Lastly, the conference has presented an array of opportunities to broaden one's knowledge of all things environment and will certainly build my capacity to cover environment-related stories with more understanding and clarity, particularly when dealing with those tricky acronyms and environmental jargon.

BIGGEST PACIFIC NATURE CONSERVATION GATHERING

FROM FACEBOOK

The 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas is now underway in Suva, Fiji from 2 - 6 December. Hosted by the Government of Fiji in partnership with the Pacific Island Roundtable for Nature Conservation, SPREP and IUCN Oceania. It is held every 4 - 5 years.

Below are photos from the opening day's events. **Photos: SPREP**

For more information on the conference please visit: <http://www.sprep.org/pacificnatureconference>

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Registration and paying of fees.



These two were in high spirits as the conference bags lined up to be distributed.



Cook Islanders at the conference, Joseph Brider, Teina MacKenzie and Audrey Brown-Pereira.



Over 700 people have registered for the conference.



Delegates ready for the first day.



Conservation International and SPREP gather before the meeting starts.

Conference packs are handed out.



Journalists and photographers out in force.



A huge pig and a kava plant were presented to the Fijian President.



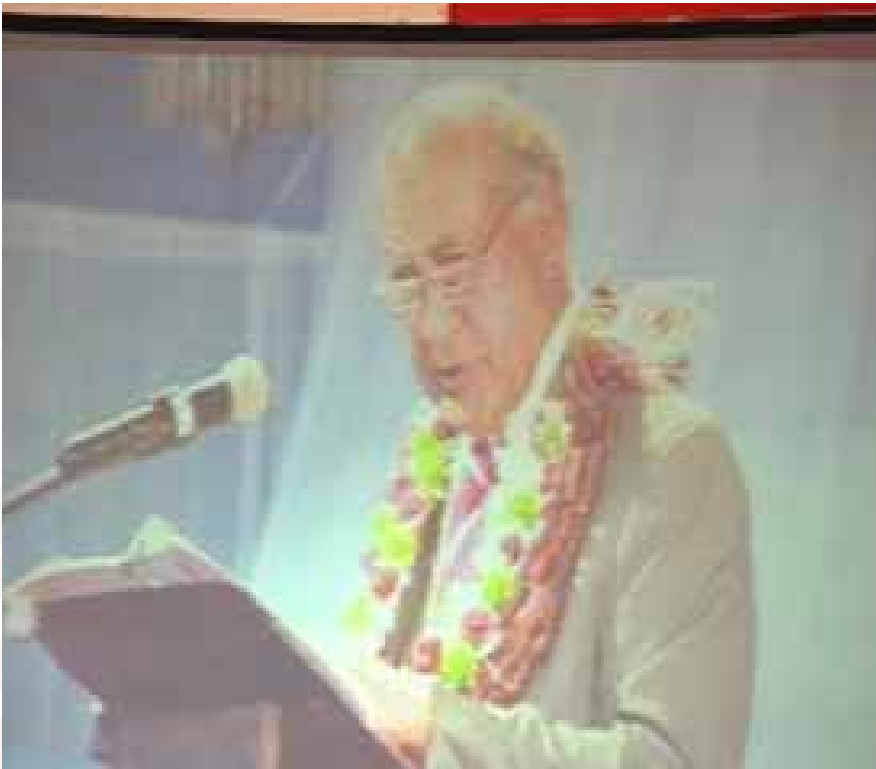
Fijian President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau drinks a bowl of kava during the opening.



Fijian soldiers performed the traditional ceremony of welcome.



Participants listen intently during the opening ceremony.



Fijian President His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau speaking during the opening.

Fiji steps up conservation efforts

By **CAROLYN KITIONE**
Journalism student
University of the South Pacific

Fiji is committed to stepping up its work in conserving and protecting its natural resources, said Fijian President Ratu Epeli Nailatikau when opening the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas this morning.

Ratu Epeli said Fiji had put in place a range of initiatives to encourage a “cultural transformation that could well be emulated by other Pacific nations.”

“We now have zero-rated duty on biodegradable plastic, zero duty on portable sewage treatment plants and zero duty on water desalination plants for use in areas where fresh water is scarce,” Ratu Epeli said.

“One of our manufacturers sells water in a plastic bottle that completely dissolves within 12 months.

“Just imagine the transformation of our surroundings if every plastic bottle strewn around the Pacific could be gone in a year.”

This, said Ratu Epeli, was an excellent

example of the benefits from working with the private sector.

He said efforts to empower local communities have continued although the overall picture had become bleak.

The President said the Pacific was baffled by the global community’s “seemingly endless debate” and indecisiveness on climate change, while the the region’s existence comes under direct threat.

Ratu Epeli said Fiji was conscious of the need to make climate change “our number one environmental priority.”

Ratu Epeli told delegates: “We have to confront the fact that however much control we can exercise over our immediate environments as Pacific islanders, there are much bigger forces at work that are beyond our control.

“They require a global response and unfortunately the world is not responding adequately enough.”

The conference theme is “Natural Solutions: Building Solutions for a Changing Pacific”.

“At this conference we need to build on our successes thus far with a renewed commitment to do better – much better.”

Marine focus vital for action plan: Mr Sheppard

By **JUSTINE MANNAN**
Journalism student at FNU

A new action strategy for conservation in the Pacific to be developed at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in Suva should focus on terrestrial and coastal marine and ocean issues, says the Director-General of SPREP, David Sheppard.

In presenting a review of the previous action strategy, Mr Sheppard said a better focus on marine issues was important since the region comprises 30,000 islands with 98 per cent of the area covered in water.

“Some species such as the big eyed tuna are increasingly threatened and key species such as sea turtles. I think the leather back turtle, in fact, went up a category of threat in the IUCN red list which was released three weeks ago,” Mr Sheppard said.

He added in order to protect marine resources, it is important that communities come together, from grassroots level to help protect marine species.

“In our region as we know, virtually all land, is owned under community ownership, land and marine resources and the people have the experience of many of thousands of years of living sustainably with their environment.” Mr Sheppard added: “Any conservation programmes must be implemented with and through local communities.”

Mr Sheppard suggested retaining the mission, visions and goals of the previous Action Strategy because they were still considered valid for the next five years. However, it was up to participants to decide while reviewing progress.

The Action Strategy is significant because it provides a regional framework for the conservation which guides the Pacific Island countries and territories, the donors, NGOs and regional organisations.

Justine Mannan is a student at the Fiji National University and a member of the Media Team providing coverage of the Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas from 2 to 6 December in Suva, Fiji. This is a partnership between the Fiji National University (FNU), University of the South Pacific (USP), SPREP and Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) whereby a team of 10 journalism students are mentored by senior reporters as they cover the conference. This activity is funded by the Pacific Assistance Media Scheme (PACMAS).

Dr Thaman highlights forgotten ecosystems

By **ERONI TUINACEVA**
Journalism student at FNU

Delegates attending the 9th Pacific Islands Nature Conservation Conference raised their concerns following a presentation by SPREP's Director-General David Sheppard on the review of the Pacific Islands Action Strategy for Nature Conservation.

Professor Randy Thaman, an academic and conservationist at the University of the South Pacific, in particular raised three key concerns he believed would need to be implemented in the next five-year strategy plan.

"We talk about ridge to reef, but we have left out agricultural ecosystems," Professor Thaman told delegates. "For many of our countries, they have the most useful biodiversity and are the foundation for livelihood, stability and security against climate change."

He highlighted the unrealised diversity of agricultural and agroforestry ecosystems and the dangers they face on a number of fronts.

"They are more threatened by monoculture, invasive species and reclamation compared to competition from other ecosystems," Professor Thaman said.

He also spoke on the need to better track neglected coastal literal forests.

"No one has mentioned coastal literal forests, which are along beaches and inside of mangroves. Those species are



Professor Randy Thaman recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award for the inaugural Pacific Islands Environment Lifetime Achievement Awards

more threatened than mangroves in many places. But they're hard to map because they're little strips or strands."

Professor Thaman also discussed an innovative biodiversity assessment carried out in Japan that could serve as a model for future studies.

"This study being done by the Japanese is called Sato Umi, which consists of the traditional village, tree lines, agricultural systems, vegetable gardens, the forest and coastal areas. This is where much of their

biodiversity and ecosystems are protected, and we need to look in to that," he said.

Professor Thaman added his concern for the loss of ethno-biodiversity.

"One of the most threatened parts of biodiversity is traditional knowledge about it. Very few people, except older men and women, know that and if we don't capture that and marry it with modern science and taxonomy, then we won't know what we're protecting," Professor Thaman said.

Rat eradication programme works in Cook Islands

By **JOSEPHINE NAVULA**
Journalism student at FNU

A conservation initiative in the Cook Islands has succeeded in protecting the country's birdlife.

Elizabeth Munro, Cook Island's biodiversity officer, said the programme's success has meant that it would be replicated next year.

She said they engaged in the programme after it was established that rats were a significant threat to the islands' birdlife.

"The birds were nesting on the ground and rats were feeding on their eggs and little chicks so we had to do something about it," Ms Munro said.

She said a baseline monitoring survey

was first conducted in 2002 on the Island of Suvarrow. The Island had nine per cent of lesser frigate bird and three percent of the world's trailed tropic bird.

"Our environment officers did a baseline monitoring of the islands that have the presence of the rats, and in May of this year they carried out the eradication programme for six weeks."

The programme involved the setting out cereal bait pellets that contained *brodifacoum*, one of the world's lethal pesticides.

Pacific Cooperation Islands Initiative project Coordinator, Bill Nagle said some birds may feed on the bait but it would not harm most of them like the affect rats.

"We cut out the tracks and hand distribute them, most of the ground birds

feed on that too, but it was for the short-term period only. But it won't kill a lot of birds like the rats, and they usually come out at night when no one can see them," he said.

The operation was in partnership with Birdlife, Te Ipukarea Society and National Environment Service of the Cook Islands.

Birdlife International's Technical Support Officer Sia Rasalato said there was a need for the operation because the island was considered an important bird area between the Cook Islands and the rest of the region.

The eradication programme was also conducted in the Cook Island's Anchorage Island, Motou Island and Motukena Island.

Redefining a sustainable Pacific future

By **PRIYA CHAND**
Journalism student
University of the South Pacific

Pacific Island countries need to find long-term mechanisms in order to adapt to the changing environment, says Taholo Kami, the current Chair of the Pacific Island Roundtable for Nature Conservation (PIRT).

He said while short-term mechanisms lasting three to five years were good, there was a need to strengthen the commitment and redefine what a sustainable Pacific future was.

"A sustainable and a green blue economy is where our natural environment is intact and well managed, where our people are happy and healthy and where our economy sustains us," he said.

Mr Kami said in order for this to prevail, it was important to put an "extraordinary" emphasis on strengthening society by long-term reinforcement of governance systems.

He was speaking at the 9th Pacific Island Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas which opened at the Vodafone Arena in Suva, Fiji today.

"Leadership should be made very clear in which direction we are heading off to," Mr Kami said.

"Thus, environmental policies and priorities need to be made clearer."

He also said securing funding for long-term projects was equally important and that governments could come up with tactics to accommodate it.

Mr Kami applauded the Fiji Government policy to direct some of the takings from

the increased departure tax from 2014 toward environment initiatives.

"For example, if you are doing a community environment project and run out of money, that money from the tax can be utilised and the project will not come to a halt," he said.

"Through this conference this week, we will celebrate the partnerships that have been formed, refocus our roadmap and rethink our engagement with Governments, partners, communities."

The conference theme is 'Natural Solutions: Building Resilience for a Changing Pacific.'

Priya Chand is a second-year journalism student at the University of the South Pacific. She is part of the SPREP media team of student journalists covering the weeklong event.

Leaders urged to focus on renewable energy

By **STEVE POGONOWSKI**

Leaders of south west Pacific islands should increase their commitment to renewable energy and decreasing fossil fuel use in this decade to reduce their environmental footprint, attendees were reminded on the first day of the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas taking place in Suva.

Australian environmentalist and global warming activist Dr Tim Flannery gave the keynote speech, titled 'Climate Change and Conservation in the south west Pacific', at the Vodafone Arena in Suva.

Dr Flannery is a member of the Wentworth Group of scientists and became Australia's first chief climate commissioner in 2011. In 2013 he founded the Climate Council to continue communicating authoritative climate change information to the Australian public.

In 2005 he was honoured as Australian Humanist of the Year and, in 2007 he was named Australian of the Year. Dr Flannery has also written many books, including *The Future Eaters* (1994), *The Weather Makers* (2005) and *Here on Earth* (2010).

This morning he discussed the effects of increased carbon dioxide emissions and fossil

fuel combustion over the past century and the long-term impact that it is expected to have on temperature and acid levels in the ocean.

He said this is the "critical decade", where global and national decisions on fossil fuel use by 2020 would determine long-term temperature and sea level rises and biodiversity losses.

"To stabilise the climate at a manageable level, most of the world's fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground," Dr Flannery said.

"What we are doing with the world's oceans in terms of putting more carbon dioxide into them amounts to systemic poisoning. As we heat our oceans, we encourage coral bleaching and loss of species diversity.

"For the Pacific island countries, coral reefs are not just your supermarket, they are also your fortifications against the ocean."

While traditional energy providers have been slow to invest in renewable energy, Dr Flannery said they were now "scrabbling to catch up" as wind and solar technology reduced in cost and gained greater acceptance as alternative energy sources.

He praised Fiji for its commitment to investment in renewable energy and to encouraging local manufacturers to use biodegradable plastics.

THE TEAM



This publication is brought to you by a team of journalism students from the University of the South Pacific and the Fiji National University. Nine students make up the team that are guided by their mentors who consist of Ms Mereseini Marau, Ms Merana Kitone and Ms Irene Manuelli. The Chief Editor and graphic designer of this team is Mr Ricardo Morris.

Each day the students are assigned stories which they are to complete under the guidance of their mentors. We aim to provide you with a daily bulletin this week which will be uploaded to the SPREP website.



VIEWPOINTS

What are your thoughts on the theme? Building resilience to change in the Pacific

Mimosa Tukurauwia, *Department of Environmental Protection & Conservation, Vanuatu*

"To come up with some solutions and some ways that are sustainable for the Pacific Islands that we can discuss to deal with changes. The beginning of the conference had a lot of ideas and suggestions."

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Vox pop and photos by MARYANN LOCKINGTON.

Maryann Lockington is a second-year journalism student at the University of the South Pacific and a member of the Media Team providing coverage of the Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas from 2 to 6 December in Suva, Fiji. This is a partnership between the Fiji National University (FNU), University of the South Pacific (USP), SPREP and Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) whereby a team of 10 journalism students are mentored by senior reporters as they cover the conference. This activity is funded by the Pacific Assistance Media Scheme (PACMAS).



Pondet Ananchai, *Chulalongkorn University, Thailand*

"Personally, I understand that the Pacific is at the frontline of climate change and it's not fair to suffer when they aren't one of the biggest industrialised areas that have contributed a lot. Science and technology are powerful tools and could be integrated with civil society to find a sustainable solution."



Philippa Cohen, *WorldFish Centre, Malaysia*

"It's really important because change is inevitable, local and international change like community priorities, management and resources. We need resilient ecosystems to support benefits for the development of communities."

Reports reveal increasing threat to species diversity

By **STEVE POGONOWSKI**

Pacific Island countries and territories face internal and external threats to their biodiversity, according to two draft reports discussed at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas this afternoon.

The State of Conservation in Oceania report and the Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific islands, due to be released in 2014.

Stuart Chape, Director of Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management for the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), said the State of Conservation report showed a grim picture of endangered and threatened species levels in the Oceania region.

One example was the health of shark numbers: of 75 species in the Oceania

region, the report identified 27 per cent as under threat.

Turtle conservation is also facing challenges across the region, as harvesting is the key reason for their declining numbers.

Fiji was also shown to contain the highest number of invasive species in the region.

"There are many challenges over the next six years. Island countries need to be provided with the level of resources needed to deal with manageable threats," Mr Chape said.

"Monitoring and assessment of (these threats) needs to be taken seriously to deal with climate change."

David Sheppard, SPREP Director General, spoke on the upcoming Action Strategy for Nature Conservation in the Pacific islands 2014-2020 and the review of

the previous Action Strategy.

He supported the comments made by President of the Republic of Fiji, His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau, that putting people and communities at the centre of conservation programs is vital and furthermore helps to support the ecotourism industry.

"The people have the experience and the knowledge from living sustainably with the environment," Mr Sheppard said.

"Without a clean healthy, well-managed environment, there isn't a viable tourism sector."

He used the example of actions taken after a climate change vulnerability assessment in Choiseul Province, Solomon Islands as a blueprint for "working together to use ecosystem-based adaptation as a response to issues resulting from climate change."