



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).

Cook Islands Prime Minister pledges support for conservation

5 December 2013 - Suva, Fiji

Cook Islands Prime Minister Hon. Henry Puna addressed delegates at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in Suva, Fiji today. As a keynote speaker for the event he provided an overview of the successful nature conservation activities in the Cook Islands.

He expressed the importance of political will to help drive the planning and implementation of conservation initiatives, but also stressed the onus is upon us as individuals.

"Action must come alive at the individual level through work and everyday living," Prime Minister Puna said.

"At the country level our development policies should aim at promoting an inclusive green-based economy which will strengthen human well-being, social equality and environment sustainability.

"This is why we need to urgently change our lifestyles to accomplish high human development within the carrying capacity of nature. This is within our control."

He said the Pacific region has much to celebrate in terms of its Nature Conservation work.

Marine Parks and Protected Areas across countries and sub-regions have



Cook Islands Prime Minister Hon. Henry Puna addressing the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in Suva today.

been established, World Heritage Sites have been declared to protect our natural surroundings and actions have been under way to strengthen dying endemic species.

As well, Pacific regional declarations have been endorsed by Pacific leaders to protect our islands and their natural environment and the formation of the Pacific Island Roundtable for Nature Conservation an alliance of environment stakeholders that work together to strengthen nature conservation is a successful working body.

"Our examples of cooperation and initiatives to conserve, protect, and sustain,

have made headlines everywhere.

"We are accomplishing a great deal in our part of the world but often times that goes unrecognised or downplayed in the broader spectrum of global concerns. And we should put that right and say something about it.

"We can lead by example no matter what our size, no matter how our political clout may be measured by others."

Prime Minister Puna ended his speech by encouraging delegates to conclude the largest Pacific island gathering on Nature Conservation with actions.

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9th PACIFIC ISLANDS CONFERENCE ON NATURE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTED AREAS

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Solomon Islands makes landmark commitment on sharks



Ms. Agnetha Vae-Karamui, second from left, of the Solomon Islands Ministry of Environment at the announcement of Solomon Islands' commitment to shark conservation.

By JUSTINE MANNAN
Journalism student at FNU

The Solomon Islands Government took a major step forward at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, by announcing their commitment to shark conservation in the country.

Ms. Agnetha Vave-Karamui, of the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology (MECDM) in the Solomons, announced the commitment made by the Solomon Islands' Government.

"To achieve this commitment, we need to better understand and appreciate the value of sharks in our waters and will work towards a national plan of action and a comprehensive management plan for the sustainable utilisation of shark resources in the Solomon Islands," Ms. Vave-Karamui

said.

They recognise the role sharks play in the marine ecosystem.

"The important role that sharks play in the ocean environment helps keep marine ecosystems in balance. The marine ecosystem is really important in sustaining the livelihood and food security of more than 4000 coastal communities in the Solomon Islands," Ms. Vave-Karamui said.

Mr. Ian Campbell, the Global Shark Manager for the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), said he was excited the Solomon Islands was taking matters into their own hands and realising the importance of sharks in their waters.

"We are very excited that the Solomon Islands are actually putting some actions where their words are with regards to shark conservation in the Pacific region as a whole, the Solomon Islands government recognises that even in their own waters

they don't know what is going on with sharks but today they want to make a commitment to find out much more about these creatures" Mr. Campbell said.

Mr. Campbell added: "Even though people know about sharks, they do not really know anything about them in terms of details and data. These iconic species are not just important to marine ecosystems but also to indigenous people around the Pacific."

Justine Mannan is a member of the Media Team providing coverage of the 9th 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).

High level delegates pledge action

5 December 2013 - Suva, Fiji

The High Level Segment of the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas opened today in Suva, Fiji.

Hosted by the Government of Fiji, Pacific Leaders, Environment ministers and invited guests took part in a special session to deliberate on 10 key actions to improve conservation, reduce further degradation, and increase investment in biodiversity.

This high level commitment to 10 key actions will be presented to the closing gathering of the Nature Conservation and Protected Areas conference which tomorrow.



Cook Islands

Cook Islands PM lends support to Pacific nature conservation

FROM PAGE ONE

Over 700 delegates from throughout the Pacific region have come together in Suva, Fiji to develop a joint action strategy for Nature Conservation for the next five years.

"We need an action-orientated way forward that will allow us to achieve what is best for our environment, for us and on our own terms.

"We need progressive actions in marine and ocean management; ridge to reef development management, climate change and minimising its impacts; revitalisation of native flora and fauna; elimination of invasive species; capacity building; sustainable financing and advocating for a change in mind-sets, attitudes, behaviours towards conservation that creates buy-in and ownership; I guarantee you as a Pacific Leader you will have my support."



Fiji



Palau



Tonga



New Caledonia

How Ms. Thomas fell in love with nature

By **MARYANN LOCKINGTON**
Journalism student at USP

A young woman in a smart green dress - or jaba - stood before hundreds of people at the Vodafone Arena and opened her presentation in her indigenous Fijian (iTaukei) language with an introduction of herself.

Ms. Nunia Thomas hails from Drauniivi in Ra and in her introduction she identified her clan and family animal totem. Then she addressed the rest of the room in English to translate her introduction.

Acknowledging her cultural identity and mentors before passionately advocating the importance of the environment and biodiversity is a trademark of Ms Thomas.

The 32-year-old is the director of Fijian conservation group Nature Fiji-Mareqeti Viti. She completed post-graduate studies at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in 2007 and is now one of Fiji's leading herpetologists.

Ironically, Ms. Thomas talks about her path to her present work as an accident and blessing.

Ms. Thomas is the middle child of five siblings of the late Mr. Saimoni Aca Thomas and Mrs. Mereseini Thomas.

Ms. Thomas described her late father as a feminist who encouraged her to be a strong and independent woman. She described her parents as her mentors and advisors.

Ms. Thomas had a keen interest in language, literature and law but followed her parents' advice to pursue science.

"I was naturally interested in science anyway so I kept at it but at university level I wanted to do law," she said. "I initially was going to disobey my parents' advice."

Ms. Thomas is a former student of St. Joseph's Secondary School and at school, her English teacher, Mrs. Luvena was her mentor. After leaving high school she met her Mrs. Luvena on a bus, who advised her to pursue science.

After high school, Ms. Thomas applied for admission to the biology and chemistry



Ms Nunia Thomas of Nature Fiji-Mareqeti Viti.

program me at USP but because of limited space, she had to consider the only other option - environmental science.

"I looked at it and I thought okay, I'll go into environmental science and I did. It was geography and biology and I fell in love with geography right then and there," she said.

Thomas said her main inspiration were her lecturers and professors and the friends she made within the programme.

Ms. Thomas graduated in 2002 and became a graduate assistant at USP's South Pacific Regional Herbarium. She then secured a scholarship to go into post-graduate studies and was approached in 2007 by Mr Dick Watling to join Nature Fiji-Mareqeti Viti. After graduation, she joined Nature Fiji-Mareqeti Viti as their first recruit and since then has been involved in various projects and preparing of research

papers.

Her message to young people is listen to the advice of parents and mentors before making a decision. Ms. Thomas said she has had many challenges on her journey but she was taught by her parents to view the challenges as an opportunity. She hopes in the future, she could work with children and instil values in young people to have a better appreciation of their culture and nature.

Maryann Lockington is a member of the Media Team providing coverage of the 9th 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).



The endemic Cook Islands bird kakerori also known as the Rarotonga Flycatcher and Rarotonga Monarch.
Photo: Dave Sargeant.

Kakerori return testament to conservation efforts

By **ERONI TUINACEVA**
Journalism student at FNU

A prominent bird species endemic to Rarotonga has come back from the brink of extinction to re-establish itself in the Cook Islands' biodiversity. The Prime Minister of the Cook Islands, the Hon. Henry Puna highlighted the Rarotonga fly catcher or Kakerori revival during his address to the delegates attending the 9th Pacific nature conservation conference.

"Over the years, the Cook Islands has succeeded in re-establishing bird populations in the Outer Islands and Rarotonga. One such success is the story of the Kakerori – the endemic Rarotonga fly catcher," Prime Minister Puna said.

Mr. Puna recounted at the conference how, in 1989, with only 29 individual kakerori were left, the species was predicted to be extinct by 1999 if no actions were taken. The alarmingly small number of kakerori left also saw it listed as critically endangered on the IUCN Red List that year.

"As a result of this, the Cook Islands Government, New Zealand Government,

SPREP and local land owners formed a partnership to establish 2.6 square kilometres of the Takitumu Protected Area to give the kakerori a chance to survive," Mr. Puna elaborated.

The number of kakerori eventually replenished from 209 in 2001 to 330 in 2009. The programme is today self-sustained through generated income from guided tours.

"The success of the programme is due to good partnerships built on the belief that the kakerori needed to be saved and the generosity of the landowners in establishing the protected areas," Mr. Puna

The Prime Minister also believes the kakerori is a testament to successful local leadership of protected areas and commended the President of Te Ipukarea Society Mr. Ian Karika for spearheading the kakerori initiative as well as his achievement at the Pacific Islands Environment Leadership Awards.

Adding to the Prime Minister's remarks was the Deputy Director for the National Environment Service of the Cook Islands Mr. Joseph Brider. He explained in further detail the background of the kakerori project.

"So government in partnership with this family fenced off an area and built the capacity of the family to undertake the rat eradication process. The long term plan was that government would start off the project and then pass it over to the community and then finally the family would take it over," Mr. Brider explained.

The success of this project has allowed for the Environment Service to focus on other biodiversity work requiring attention.

"We don't think the current protected area can sustain large populations but that's not to say that birds can't leave the protected areas. The populations are quite stable so we're not seeing it as a priority at the moment," Mr. Brider added.

Eroni Tuinaceva is a member of the Media Team providing coverage of the 9th 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).

Pacific cetacean strandings website to go live

By **EDWARD TAVANAVANUA**
Journalism student at USP

Oceania's first stranding online database for whales, dolphins, and porpoises will be launched at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas this week.

Stranding is the phenomenon in which these sea creatures, collectively known as cetaceans, are beached on the shore, either dead or alive, and are in need of rescue.

The website, <http://www.apodstrandings.org> to be launched is aimed at increasing and developing the local documentation of cetacean strandings throughout Oceania, said Mr. Michael Donoghue, SPREP's advisor on threatened and migratory species.

"So far we've relied on environment staff or fisheries or NGOs to send in bits of paper," he said.

"This [website] enables a place that has got Internet access to report promptly, and we're hoping to get a lot more reports on whale and dolphin strandings."

The website would be a service for SPREP member countries and would help raise awareness in shoreline communities about the extent of strandings in the region.

Mr. Donoghue said a simple online form would be available on the website for stranding respondents to fill.

He said he was hopeful that the database, which could also be exported to Google Earth or other geographic information systems, would result in the collation of more photographic documentation.

The database would be searchable, and this would facilitate ease of access to the information, Mr. Donoghue said. He added that the system would also encourage respondents to take skin samples of the stranded cetaceans.

However, he clarified that samples would only be processed if they were suspected to be from a rare or unknown species.



Pacific Islands ecosystem report launched

By **WATI TALEBULA**
Journalism student at FNU

A review copy of a report on ecosystem management in the region was released at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in Suva this week.

Titled 'Pacific Island Ecosystem Management: Principles, Case Studies and Lessons Learned', a pre-print edition was released by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

Case studies include those from projects in Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia.

This report results from a complete

attempt to identify guiding principles for International Ecosystem Management in the Pacific.

The project was implemented through SPREP with funds from UNEP and the Australian Government's AusAid programme, via the International Climate Change Adaptation Initiative.

Wati Talebula and Edward Tavanavanua are members of the Media Team providing coverage of the 9th 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).

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Communities 'need strengthening' to manage resources

By **CAROLYN KITIONE**
Journalism student at USP

People must be given the chance to manage their own resources and earn the income they need.

Those were the remarks made by the Premier of Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands, Mr. Jackson Kiloe, at the panel discussion on community resilience this week.

Premier Kiloe said it was important to focus on the ability of the local people to control and shape their economies and environment.

"We must accept the fact that we rely on our land and sea ecosystems for our livelihoods and our wellbeing and understand that the impacts of climate change will put more pressure on this in the future," he said.

Premier Kiloe said the ability to engage with the private sector and churches needed to be strengthened and that people needed to understand their legal rights on their land.

That, he said, would improve governance and strengthen communities.

"Our governments need to strengthen



The Premier of Choiseul Province in the Solomon Islands, Mr. Jackson Kiloe.

our communities' ability to control and shape their own economy and environment and enable us to build our own communities - not just handouts from politicians," he said.

"Unfortunately, development and donor assistance has tended to create communities that are more reliant on outside assistance rather than solving our own problems like we did in the past."

Under his leadership, an integrated approach to climate change is being implemented, where different government ministries, development partners and non-

governmental organisations work under a single programme to attain a common goal of community resilience.

Premier Kiloe said that although the programme was still in its early stages, they had already started working with communities for a more "community-led" approach.

"By tapping into old methods of adapting to climate variability and introducing new technology we are trying to build solid communities for the future," he said.

Study shows signs of Nauru's healing

By **CAROLYN KITIONE**
Journalism student at USP

Hope remains for Nauru despite the damage caused by phosphate mining that has destroyed about 80 per cent of the island's environment.

In a video presentation at the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, Nauru's delegates said research had established that the island's ecosystem would be able to survive despite the strain from the strip mining.

The research was conducted by a team of scientists, led by Mr. Bruce Jefferies, SPREP's Terrestrial Ecosystems Management Officer.

In the video, Dr Sheila McKenna, a coral

reef health specialist, said Nauru's reef biodiversity appeared to support this.

Ms McKenna said while the reefs in Nauru had not been extensively explored, most areas of the coral reef were still healthy.

"There is a good chance that there is some endemism here of species only found here because you're isolated in the middle of the deep ocean," she said.

The land survey by the research team also showed the landscape was gradually healing from reforestation.

Botanist and ecosystems specialist Professor Art Wheeler said in the video he was disturbed by the damage to the ecosystem through mining.

"This is a very interesting place because there had been so much damage over the

years," he said.

"I've never been in a situation like this before; I'm just so disturbed."

The conference heard that 70 per cent of the land was uninhabitable and the biodiversity of the island was severely affected by decades of phosphate mining.

Nauru is dominated by a central phosphate plateau and is surrounded by coral reefs, ringed by wind-swept coconut trees and sandy beaches.

Carolyn Kitione is a member of the Media Team providing coverage of the 9th 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).

Fiji conservation project praised

By **WATI TALEBULA**
Journalism student from FNU

A forest conservation project in Drawa, Vanua Levu in Fiji was given a public commendation for its success in preventing loggers from cutting down forests, during an award ceremony for Pacific environmentalists this week.

Live and Learn Environmental Education received a commendation for Excellence in Ecosystem Management for its work in the communities in Bua Province.

After Live and Learn's awareness projects, a logging concession to a major Fijian company was cancelled.

From an initial focus on sustainable logging, there has been a more recent shift in emphasis to forest conservation and management in the Drawa block. The project promotes sustainable, adaptive forest management.

Ms Salanieta Vunimoli, receiving the award on behalf of the organisation, said she was happy to get the because the environment provided hope for the younger generation.

"Let us ensure that our fruitful land and bountiful seas be our beacon of hope to



Ms Salanieta Vunimoli receives the award on behalf of Live and Learn Environmental Education.

our young people."

They were recognised for the REDD+ Forest Conservation Project at Drawa, Bua in Vanua Levu as the Best Practise Case study in Pacific Sustainable Management.

The Live and Learn project came out on top of 14 other entries from around the Pacific.

Mr. Jerker Tamalander, UNEP Pacific Islands Ecosystem Management Case Studies project coordinator said there were more entries than he expected for

the award.

"There were 15 participants and I wasn't expecting that much but it was interesting to know that some people still care about our ecosystem," he said.

The award was presented by Mr. David Sheppard, the Director-General of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) during the 9th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation in Suva.

"Community ownership is one of the keys to successful ecosystem management," said Mr. Sheppard.

"While we have one award to present, there are conservation efforts from many that can be celebrated. These are captured in the report - Pacific Island

Ecosystem Management Principles, case studies and lessons learned that we have launched here today."

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 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).

Key bird species at risk in Nauru

By **Eroni Tuinaceva**, journalism student at FNU

A rapid assessment survey of Nauru's marine and terrestrial biodiversity has identified two key bird species that are threatened, one of which is at risk of extinction.

Nauru's integrated biodiversity project coordinator Mr. Asterio Appi presented the findings of the biodiversity rapid assessment survey to delegates at the Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas, in Suva.

"We brought in a group of marine and terrestrial scientific experts who surveyed everything from insects, plants and birds

to coral reefs, invertebrate species and general fish biodiversity," Mr. Appi said.

Two important bird species were revealed in the survey to be at risk of dying out.

"One of the key things we wanted to look at was the endemic Reef Warbler and the Black Noddy," Mr. Appi said.

"The black noddy is a key source of protein for the islanders and apparently it's been over-harvested for many years now. So we want to put recovery plans into place but in the event there isn't a need for such measures, we'll have to look at awareness programs in the community as well as monitor harvests," Mr. Appi explained.

Regarding the island flora, the survey

recorded severe loss in plant life caused by industrial activity.

"Most of the plant species are found along the coastal areas. Unfortunately, due to years of mining we have deforested a lot of places. However, the Nauru Rehabilitation Corporation (NRC) is trying its best to recover the lands," he revealed.

Mr. Appi added that the government of Nauru is working closely with the NRC and the fisheries department to identify key biodiversity areas and discuss conservation and protected areas. The fisheries department further collaborated with marine scientists to conduct a comprehensive survey on the fish biodiversity.