



VATU-I-RA COMMUNITY BULLETIN



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

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WAILEVU COMMUNITIES UNITE

Communities in Wailevu came together in April to finalise plans promoting sustainable use and conservation of their natural resources. Consisting of 30 villages and significant settlements, it is geographically the largest district in Fiji. Well known for farming dalo and yaqona, the district is also home to Waisali Forest Reserve, the Mount Kasi gold mine, an established pearl farm and a range of community eco-tourism sites.

Building on the success of Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) in neighbouring Kubulau, WCS Fiji is supporting Wailevu communities to develop a plan through which to protect local habitats, promote sustainable resource management and enhance quality of life. The plan will be implemented and monitored by a Resource Management Committee in Wailevu West and another in the East of the district. "It is good to see such strong support from all the villages. With the backing of our Chiefs, we have been working together to identify *tabu* areas and management rules that will preserve

our resources for future generations" stated Timoci Rokosuli, Chairman of the Wailevu West Resource Management Committee.

A range of stakeholders have been involved in developing the plans. Jone Vakamino from the Cakaudrove Yaubula Management Support Team said he had attended several workshops in the past six months. "The Roko Tui has seen the value of this work and the Provincial Council is actively supportive", he stated "the communities are taking responsibility to ensure a healthy environment. This can also benefit them economically, with potential for ecotourism projects like the one that is growing in Bagata".

EBM fuses scientific principles with local and traditional ecological knowledge to promote sustainable management of terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine, coastal and marine habitats. It aims to maintain healthy, productive and resilient ecosystems that can overcome pressure from population growth and climate change to meet the needs of future generations.

KEY EBM MESSAGES:

Preservation of functional integrity of Fiji's ecoscapes through community based management.

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



Above: A view over the beautiful landscape behind Nabalebale village, Wailevu East.

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FIJI WATERS: A SANCTUARY FOR SHARKS?

The Department of Fisheries held a public consultation in Suva on 2 May to discuss shark protection in the waters surrounding Fiji. Around 100 people attended, representing interests from the tourism industry, nature conservation, and the commercial tuna industry, as well as students, traditional leaders and other concerned Fijian citizens. The purpose of the public consultation was for the government to present their findings from the first round of public consultations held in February 2012, and to provide stakeholders with another opportunity to comment.

Topics discussed included: the depleted status of many sharks as a result of overfishing and the need for a shark sanctuary; shark as a targeted fishery; shark as a bycatch fishery; and, a possible requirement, under a Fiji shark sanctuary, to release all incidentally caught sharks. Sustainable economic benefits derived from healthy shark populations through shark tourism were considered, compared to the short term income from shark fishing.

The majority of attendees supported full protection for sharks through a shark sanctuary with a minority requesting exemptions that would allow for some harvest and sale of sharks in certain situations. Consensus was not reached it is clear that sharks are important to Fiji's ecosystems and economy, and that sharks need protection to ensure they continue to be central figures in Fiji's future.



Left: A grey reef shark enjoying the strong currents of Nigali Passage off Gau Island.

NEW FISH WARDENS FOR 2012

In order to maintain sustainable resources for future generations in the Provinces of Cakaudrove and Bua, the communities of Wailevu, Wainunu, Nadi and Solevu have selected people to be trained as fish wardens. These fish wardens will be empowered to see that their resources are use in an appropriate way.

Two 3-day training sessions for the 2012 fish wardens were held: first in Natuvu, Wailevu district, and then in Navatu, Kubulau district. The training in Wailevu was officially opened by the Provincial Administrator Mr Uraia Rainima, and the Roko Tui Cakaudrove Ro Aca Mataitinihad was our chief guest who gave the certificates to the participants on the final day of the training and also officially closed the training.

There were 42 participants that attended the training in Natuvu, 30 participants were from the district of Wailevu and 12 participants were from the neighbouring districts of Somosomo, Saqani, Nakomo, Nanuca and Lekutu. WCS Fiji's Waisea Naisilisili and Sirilo Dulunaqio were delighted to receive the training to become fish wardens themselves. In Navatu there were 27 participants, 15 from Kubulau and 12 from the neighbouring districts of Wainunu, Nadi and Solevu.

The Kubulau fish warden training was officially opened by Tomasi Cama; in his opening speech he addressed the importance of our connection to our environment through our totem

fish, plants and animals. The fish warden training was conducted by Joji Vakawaletabua (Fisheries Department Nasavusavu), Tomasi Cama (Fisheries Department Bua), Nanise Kuridrani Tuqiri and Epeli Tawake (Fisheries Department Labasa) and a police officer from Nasavusavu.

To end the workshop on a positive note, on the final day of the training we managed to tag a male Hawksbill turtle and the participants named it Tui Navatu. Tui Navatu was tagged and released by the two heads of the tribe (*yavusa*) in Navatu, as the participants looked on. This was a memorable day as we also celebrated the reef enrichment initiative which was launched in April. The training in Kubulau was officially closed by Joji, who reminded us that we are inter-dependent with the environment: we depend on our resources and our resources depend on us.



Above: Participants at the Wailevu fish warden training with the Roko Tui Cakaudrove.

TRAINING ON SUSTAINABLE LAND MANAGEMENT

After a request from the Kubulau Resource Management Committee, Community Educators Network (CEN) Training was held in May on the methods of building community nurseries and on Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices. Participants from each of the 10 villages of Kubulau attended the 2-day workshop in Namalata Village. This CEN Training was very informative and thoroughly enjoyed by the participants, particularly the field visits, which provided the practical knowledge on how to make theories become a reality. The workshop facilitated by WCS Fiji and the Coral Reef Alliance with collaboration from the Forestry Department and the Department of Agriculture's Land Use Planning Section.

The first part of this training focused on watershed conservation and restoration, and the theoretical and practical techniques of building a community nursery. This involved a field visit to the Naravuka Village nursery in Seaqaqa for the participants to see

first-hand how a community nursery is constructed and the benefits and challenges of having a nursery (photo below).

The Land Use Planning Section of the Department of Agriculture then explained Sustainable Land Management (SLM) practices to the participants, followed by field trips to Montfort Technical Institute to observe their integrated farming system, and to a project in Vuniyasawa Village to observe how soil erosion on hill slopes could be managed by planting vetiver grass.



BLESSING WAINUNU TABU AREAS

Communities in Wainunu will come together on 1st June to launch an Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) Plan for their district. The plan, which is the culmination of 2 years of research, consultations and planning facilitated by the Wildlife Conservation Society Fiji, outlines management rules and protected areas across the district and its customary fishing grounds. It fuses scientific principles with local and traditional ecological knowledge to promote sustainable management of terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine, coastal and marine habitats.



Tui Wainunu Ratu Orisi Baleitavea (above, with WCS Fiji Director Stacy Jupiter) said that the rules and tabu areas will be effective from 1st June. "We will go out to sea and have the church pastors bless the *qoliqoli* area and the reef" he said. "We are looking to maintain some *tabu* areas for as long as 10 years to ensure our fishing ground has an abundant supply of fish and seafood for our children and their children".

The plan will be implemented and monitored by the Wainunu Resource Management Committee (WRMC), which has representatives from all local villages and settlements as part of a collaborative management approach.

"The WRMC will work with village headmen and villagers of Wainunu to ensure the *tabu* is observed" stated Ratu Orisi Baleitavea. "We expect all those living in the *vanua* of Wainunu to respect the *tabu* and stay away from restricted areas."

The launch coincides with the start of a 2 month period of reflection, reconciliation and renewing of faith in Wainunu. "We have been doing this in June and July since 2005", explained Ratu Orisi Baleitavea. "People give up drinking *yaqona* and smoking cigarettes. We forgive each other and leave the past



behind in order to achieve a successful future. It is also the time for traditional leaders to re-examine their commitment and responsibility to members of their *matqali* and *yavusa*, and make necessary changes for the better".

Left: Children from Daria village, Wainunu—Tui Wainunu hopes their future will be brighter with the management plan in place.

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

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ONGOING AND UPCOMING EVENTS

- **June 1:** Blessing & signing ceremony for Wainunu district network of protected areas & ecosystem-based management plan
- **June 8:** World Oceans Day—how will you celebrate?
- **June 29:** First meeting of Wailevu East Resource Management Committee
- **July:** Biodiversity surveys of rivers & forests in Wailevu, Nadi & Solevu (dates TBC)
- **July-August:** Further village consultations in Nadi & Solevu districts towards developing management plans (dates TBC)

ECOTOURISM IN BAGATA

The village of Bagata is only a 30 minute drive from Savusavu town, and is sheltered by mountains and hills. The discussion of setting up a Village Eco Tour started in November 2011 and it materialised in January, 2012. The Village Eco Tour helps the tourist know and understand the whole ecosystem including human beings and their various functions, and the communities get to showcase their traditional way of living and culture.

We call this the Traditional and Cultural Fijian Living Significance and at the moment we have 2 regular customers which are the Rosie Tours of Nadi and the Namale Resort and Spa—the latter comes in every Thursday to do a Village Eco Tour.

“The women of Bagata find this an opportunity to sell their handicrafts made from all the available resources around them, and this is an alternative livelihood for them”, says Bagata’s Environment Committee Chairman, Mr Vilimone Tulevu.

Beyond the Village Eco Tour there are 3 other sites in development: Magic Waterfall, Rock Pool Bathing and Hot Spring. Also they are proposing to have an Evening Village Tour so tourists get to see what a normal Fijian village evening is like. All money collected from the Village Eco Tour goes directly to a scholarship fund that the children of Bagata will access in 2014.

Mr Tulevu says that Bagata village are having discussions with Telecom Fiji and Vodafone Fiji to set up an Information Centre which will help the students and other regular visitors (tourists). “As part of our main objective we are thinking of expanding the Village Eco Tour and tapping into other organisations or government ministries that can help with this project for the benefit of the future generation of Bagata Village”, says Mr Tulevu.



Photos from a visit to Bagata in March, clockwise from top left: Mixing kava using water from a bamboo container; handicrafts for sale; delicious afternoon tea; and a beautiful meke performance. Credit: Namale Resort & Spa.

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

TAQOMAKI NI NODA VEIKABULA



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