

# The ocean feeds us

By VERENAISI RAICOLA

**W**E need to highlight about the ocean because it is our source of food and provides opportunities to earn an income says SeaWeb Asia Pacific Program Associate Alumei Nakeke.

All of us in the Pacific have close association with the ocean as it has provided our food, money and allowed leisure activities as most of us grew near a beach or enjoyed picnics there.

Fiji is an island nation and we have a lot to be thankful for so let us honour the ocean by taking care of it.

In his opening address at the World Oceans Day panel discussion Fisheries and Forests permanent secretary Villame Naupoto, said the ocean was part of his life and was a big influence to people like him.

"It provided me with my food, money for my education as I come from Vatoa in Lau and it provided the platform for me to come to Viti Levu for further education," he told the audience.

Reflecting on his career in the Navy, Immigration and now with the Fisheries department Naupoto believes the ocean is claiming back what it had given him.

"World Oceans day gives us an opportunity to raise awareness globally with the current challenges that is faced by communities in connection with our oceans especially for Fiji that we are a maritime nation surrounded by ocean. It is our individual and collective duty to protect the marine environment and carefully manage its resources," he said.

In addressing ocean conservation experts and the media Naupoto said they had an important task as they were the voice to the world to help people make

informed decisions from the data and researches they have.

On Oceans Day, SeaWeb which is a communications organisation dedicated to creating a culture of conservation with the support of IUCN and Conservation International convened a panel discussion in which journalists and ocean conservation experts discussed the successes and challenges in working with each other to elevate the discussion of Fiji's marine resources and ensure that our country and communities remain strong. The topic was "Media and Conservation: A Love-Hate relationship that our future generations depend on".

University of the South Pacific lecturer, Professor Randy Thaman one of the panellists said most people did not know what was happening under the ocean because they could not see it and so it was the responsibility of educators to improve their knowledge and help them understand what was happening to the ocean.

"This year I have 120 students in my class and I asked how many people could swim - about a third of them and these are Pacific Islanders, how many snorkel - only 10 of them scuba dive only two and these were exchange students! So most people have not had their head under the water," he said

Panelists included Wildlife Conservation director Stacy Jupiter, Merewalesi Laveti (WWF), Mesake Draniatu (Community rep), Prof Randy Thaman (USP), Ilaitia Turagabeci (Fiji Times), Rachna Nath (Fiji TV), Edwin Nand (Fiji Broadcasting Corporation Limited). Moderator was Samisoni Pareti (Air Pacific communications adviser).



Fiji Women fishing.

Picture by Stacey Jupiter

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Dr Stacey Jupiter surveys the Solevu reef.

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A diver surveys the Solevu reef.

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# World Ocean Day

ON June 8, Fiji and the rest of the world celebrated World Oceans Day. Wildlife Conservation Society Fiji Country Program Director Dr Stacey Jupiter raised a question.

"You may ask yourself, why do the Oceans deserve a special day of their own?" Her response was, "Because most people do not see beneath the surface of the sea, they are unaware of the vast transformation taking place within our marine waters around the world."

It is indeed true marine resources, in particular fisheries are threatened globally and Fiji is no exception. But how many people know this is a question worth pondering on as we still see people by the roadside selling undersized fish and other marine stock. Dr Jupiter says it was only in the early 2000s that fisheries scientists themselves realised that global fish stocks were declining, having peaked in 1998.

While in Nagoya, Japan, at the Convention on Biological Diversity's Conference of Parties last October, there was an article she stumbled across in the English language paper that stated that Pacific fish stocks may collapse by 2035. "We know in Fiji that there has been a high level of pressure on coastal fisheries in the past few decades. "Of the 410 *qoliqoli*, at least 70 are considered overexploited while a further 250 are fully developed," Dr Jupiter said. Rising prices for fish and fishery products have contributed to declines in artisanal catches from 1996 to 2002. Meanwhile data from USP show that over 70 per cent of local catch is sold due to increasing access to markets, in Fiji and around the world.

With opportunities for financial gain, people are overfishing and over-exploiting the resources that they once took great pains to preserve. Overharvesting Fiji's fisheries will have tremendous consequences on local livelihoods and the national economy.

The 2007 value of Fiji Islands coastal commercial fisheries was estimated to be the highest among all of the Pacific Islands, even greater than the value of

...Pacific fish stocks may collapse by 2035. "We know in Fiji that there has been a high level of pressure on coastal fisheries in the past few decades. "Of the 410 *qoliqoli*, at least 70 are considered overexploited while a further 250 are fully developed,"

catch from the much larger nation of Papua New Guinea. The value of the coastal subsistence fishery was second only to PNG. A collapse of these fisheries resources, therefore, means a collapse of the food and income for most villages in Fiji and a collapse of the Fiji way of life, Dr Jupiter said.

The good news though is that today over 200 communities across Fiji have started action to preserve their marine resources through sound community-based management, as part of the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas (FLMMA) network. Many resorts have worked with local traditional fishing rights owners to establish marine protected areas offshore from their properties. If well enforced, these managed areas offer the opportunity to preserve and restore Fiji's marine resources and therefore protect Fiji's natural and cultural heritage for the future. It is up to you to make that happen so start with valuing the ocean and its role in the life of our families, our communities and our economy.

# World Ocean Day

Advertising Feature Editor: Harold Koi

E: [hkoi@fijitimes.com.fj](mailto:hkoi@fijitimes.com.fj)

P: 330 4111

F: 330 1521



Fiji spearfisher with a grouper catch.

Picture: Keith Ellenbogen

## The ocean is home

By VERENAISI RAICOLA

**W**E in the Pacific are an oceanic people. International Union for Conservation of Nature Regional Director Taholo Kami, said centuries ago, our forefathers navigated this vast Pacific Ocean in search of better opportunities to make a living and we have since depended on the ocean for our sustenance.

Spanning a 165 million square miles, the Pacific Ocean is the world's largest geographic feature. Its waves run ashore on the coastlines and beaches of 56 Pacific Island and Rim Countries and Territories.

For Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) alone, the Pacific Ocean is an intrinsic part of the lives of the people - featuring in the culture, legends and histories of all the Pacific peoples, providing a source of seafood for families and, more recently, an important source of revenue for Pacific economies. In short, the Pacific Ocean is an integral part of the unique fabric that is the Pacific Way of Life.

Once considered boundless, Pacific Ocean resources

are now under serious threat. The economic needs of our countries have led to fishing practices that are both destructive and excessive, with over-fishing of valuable species becoming more common. It is estimated that roughly 80 per cent of the world's marine fish stocks today are fully- or over-exploited.

Mr Kami said IUCN, was committed to working with partners and stakeholders in the Pacific Island and Pacific Rim region to take the ocean conservation efforts to new levels, using Pacific Ocean-wide approaches to tackle threats to our common resource.

World Oceans Day 2011 is being celebrated with a two-year theme, Youth: The next wave for change. Whether you live inland or on the coast, we are all connected to the ocean; take the time to think about how the ocean affects you, and how you affect the ocean.

This year IUCN, encourages you to reach out to young people in your community and help inspire them. The future of ocean conservation is in their hands!

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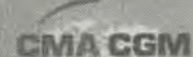
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# Daveta Tabu marked

## Totoya's sacred reef declared Marine Protected Area on World Oceans Day

By DR STACEY JUPITER

**W**e are making history today," the Roko Sau, Josefa Cinavilakeba, the chief of the Yasayasamoala Group, leaned over and said to me as we sped out to Daveta Tabu — Totoya's sacred reef.

On Monday, June 6, in honour of World Oceans Day, Roko Sau declared Daveta Tabu to be Totoya's first formal marine protected area (MPA).

The MPA will be a no-fishing zone for the entire district, encompassing approximately four square kilometres of Totoya's reef, including Daveta Tabu, the sacred passage.

"We have brought the communities together to restore our traditions and embrace the spirit of World Oceans Day," Roko Sau said.

"We want to protect this reef for our youth and their future generations."

Daveta Tabu, the sacred passage, was off-limits to fishing by chiefly decree for decades following the burial at sea of a stillborn baby to the Tongan wife of one Roko Sau, Kubunanavanua.

In the mid 1990s, the previous Roko Sau lifted the ban. However, even with the ban lifted, local fishing pressure does not appear to have made a large dent on fish populations.

Because of the remote location of Totoya and the rough conditions through the passage, our impression is that the fish populations are still in very healthy condition, with total biomass and diversity likely to exceed any other site surveyed in Fiji.

Thus, the goal of the MPA will be to preserve the fish for the future and allow them to be seed stocks for generations to come.

On the Friday June 3, Roko Sau met with the chiefs from each of the four villages of the *vanua* of Totoya at the district council meeting.

They agreed unanimously to reinstate the fishing ban and also to expand the area of the MPA which will serve the entire district.

This agreement came as a natural step building on important work by the Fiji Department of Fisheries, who



Roko Sau, Roko Josefa Cinavilakeba, demonstrates his leadership by installing the Daveta Tabu MPA marker. Picture: ROKO SAU, JOSEFA CINAVILAKEBA

held initial management planning discussions with the communities of Totoya in March of this year.

Makereta Cinavilakeba, wife of Roko Sau, confided: "On Saturday, some of the locals tried to go out fishing by Daveta Tabu. They were thrown out of the boat by a wave. It is like our ancestors are recognising the good work we are doing and helping us to protect the Sacred Reef."

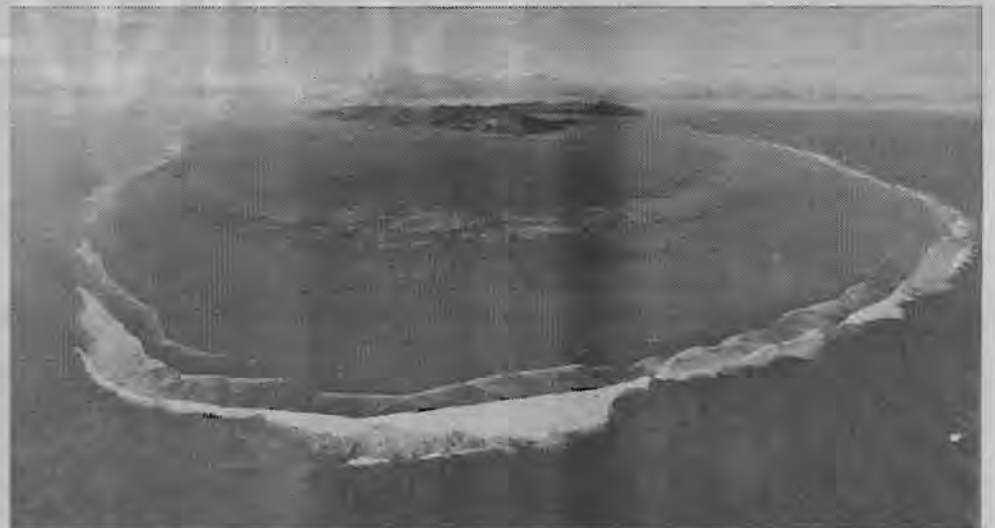
On the morning of the declaration, gale force winds that ripped through the bay overnight finally subsided and the sun shined brightly overhead.

Our teams from the Wildlife Conservation Society, Pacific Blue Foundation, Wetlands International-Oceania and the Waitt In-

stitute surfaced from our last dive surveys to see a village boat from Udu Village patiently awaiting the arrival of their high chief.

With them were two Cibi trees, a type of Fijian hardwood, which would be used to mark the eastern and western boundaries of the MPA.

Meanwhile, the village chiefs, church leaders and members of our expedition assembled in their finery and piled into boats for the ceremony on the reef. On our boat, the church minister from Tovu placed his hand inside a bucket of water drawn from the reef while he blessed the MPA and the people of Totoya for the wise stewardship of their resources. Then, to show his leader-



The Sacred Reef of Totoya Island.

Picture: ROKO SAU, JOSEFA CINAVILAKEBA



Women of Tovu Village about to perform a dance in honour of the World Oceans Day declaration. Picture: ROKO SAU, JOSEFA CINAVILAKEBA



The chiefs of the *vanua* of Totoya at the wharf at Tovu after the declaration that Daveta Tabu be a marine protected area. Picture: ROKO SAU, JOSEFA CINAVILAKEBA

ship, Roko Sau himself entered the water to place the first marker into the reef, with assistance from some of the strong young men. After the second marker was placed three kilometres to the east, there was jubilation in the air. Unable to contain their excitement, chiefs and members of the expedition alike launched themselves off the boats into the water to touch the markers to tangibly celebrate the momentous occasion. In Fiji, this action symbolises the release of individual blessings and support for the MPA.

Roko Sau and Dr Greg Mitchell, founder of Pacific Blue Foundation and organiser of the expedition, shook hands of congratulations and slight relief that all of their long hours of planning had paid off in a way that felt bigger than either could have imagined.

Roko Sau concluded: "We have declared the MPA for World Oceans Day for our future generations. But we also make this gesture to honour the ocean for its continued contribution to our Totoyan communities."

Roko Sau thanked the support and contribution by officers from the National Disaster Management Committee and the Ministry of Fisheries who went on the ground-breaking trip.

Dr Stacey Jupiter was part of the teams from the Wildlife Conservation Society, Pacific Blue Foundation, Wetlands International-Oceania and the Waitt Institutem who witnessed the declaration of the Daveta Tabu as a MPA on World Ocean Day, June 6, 2011.

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