



VATU-I-RA COMMUNITY BULLETIN



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

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KUBULAU ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP



Top Left: Group mapping work
Left: Nakorovou participants presenting their results
Above: Tui Kubulau looking at the materials
Below: The evening social activities



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

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KUBULAU ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

In July 2009, the Kubulau Bose Vanua endorsed the Kubulau Ecosystem-Based Management (EBM) Plan, Fiji's first ridge-to-reef management plan covering rules and regulations for all of the habitats in the district from forests to the sea. Two years after the endorsement of the plan, new information has become available which suggested that it would be wise to review and adapt the current Kubulau EBM plan. This information included:

- A synthesis of the current state of knowledge on potential impacts to Fiji's communities from climate hazards;
- An assessment of the effectiveness of current MPAs in the Kubulau traditional fisheries management area to increase fisheries resources;
- New data collected from Kubulau's reef habitats on factors related to reef resilience that may promote long-term persistence of Kubulau's reefs;
- New data on factors related to declines in freshwater fish species, with important implications for management; and
- Business proposal developments by the newly formed Kubulau Business Development Committee (KBDC), with input from the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL).

Between 27-28 July 2011, WCS hosted a workshop with participants from the Kubulau Resource Management Committee and representatives from Kubulau's villages to present the new information with other key stakeholders and discuss possible ways to adapt the Kubulau EBM Plan. Key stakeholders included CORAL, SeaWeb, KBDC, Department

of Fisheries, Department of Forestry, Social Empowerment and Education Program (SEEP), Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area (FLMMA) network, National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), Partners in Community Development Fiji (PCDF).

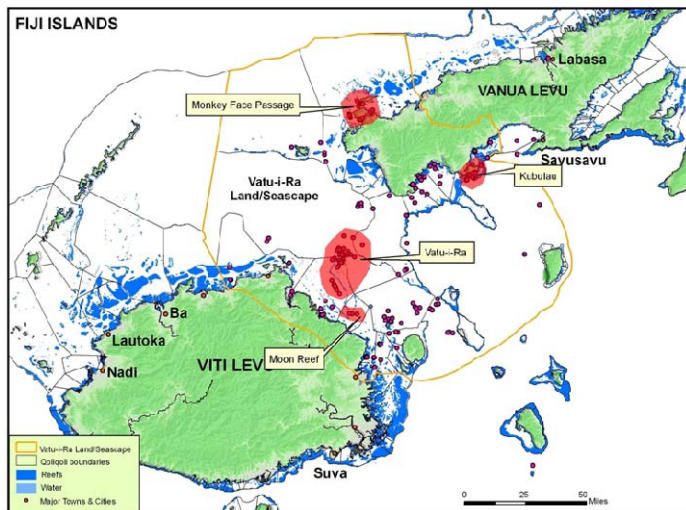
As a result of the workshop, the villages of Nakorovou, Waisa, Natokatau decided to increase the size of their existing tabu areas and Kiobo village proposed a new tabu area. In addition, the participants collectively agreed to place a 500 m no-fishing buffer zone around the existing 3 district-wide MPAs. Navatu and Nasasaivua villages will conduct follow up consultations in their respective villages to determine if they will make any changes. With respect to freshwater and terrestrial areas, 1 village (Nakorovou) has proposed to designate specific freshwater tabu areas, 3 villages (Nakorovou, Kilaka, Namalata) have proposed to protect catchment areas at the headwaters of streams, and discussions also took place on modifying the boundaries of the proposed Kilaka Forest Reserve. In addition, 2 villages (Kiobo, Nadivakarua) nominated scenic sites to be considered for management.

Over the next two months, WCS, CORAL and the KBDC will conduct follow-up consultations with Kubulau chiefs and decision-makers to finalize all proposed changes to the Kubulau EBM Plan, including incorporating new strategies for coping with climate change hazards. Once the revised plan is endorsed, pamphlets and posters will be prepared to communicate the changes to the broader community.



CETACEAN SURVEYS

Following a preliminary survey of anecdotal cetacean sighting records along the coastal villages of the Vatu-i-Ra Seascape within the provinces of Bua, Ra and Tailevu North, the WCS team identified hotspots of cetacean activity as illustrated on the map below.



Following discussions among the staff and a leading WCS cetacean researcher, Brian Smith, the area around Vatu-i-Ra Island was identified as the hottest of the cetacean hotspots. It was therefore targeted as a focus site for a one week cetacean survey by the WCS team of Margaret Fox, Waisea Naisilisili, Sirilo Dulunaqio and Brian Smith.

Boat and land based surveys around the waters of Vatu-i-Ra Island extending to the Vatu-i-Ra Channel were conducted from the 15th-20th August. Various species of cetaceans were found, including the resident spinner dolphins at Moon Reef, a lone humpback whale towards Naigani Island, a pod of bottlenose dolphins travelling in the Vatu-i-Ra channel, an enigmatic cetacean believed to be a pygmy sperm whale outside the Vatu-i-Ra barrier reef and pods of humpback whales north-east of Vatu-i-Ra Island.

Although there have been anecdotal reports of bottlenose dolphins in Fiji, there has been no scientific identification of the actual species of the bottlenose in Fiji waters. In this trip, we made a confirmed sighting of the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*) also known as the Common Bottlenose Dolphin, and the pod that were encountered comprised of 50-60 individuals.

The humpback whales that were sighted north-east of Vatu-i-Ra Island were breeding and calving and a conservative estimate of 12-18 individuals was made, though we believed there could have been more. Some of these whales had calves and the team also sighted some activities such as breaching and pectoral fin slaps.

Apart from the boat based survey, we also conducted land based surveys from the top of Vatu-i-Ra Island and whales were sighted in the distance from the look-out point. This was the same area where the large pods of humpback whales were sighted during the boat based survey. This spot at top of Vatu-i-Ra Island has been noted as a potential site for future cetacean land based surveys.

This survey identified cetaceans within the Vatu-i-Ra channel confirming that is closely reflected by the anecdotal information from local fisherman and mariners that it is truly a cetacean hotspot! And we have also confirmed that the Common Bottlenose Dolphin also resides in Fiji waters. However, more long-term based cetacean surveys need to be carried out in order to identify the various cetaceans that can be found here, their abundance and other ecological information specific to Fiji.

Top: Humpback Whale in Vatu-i-Ra passage

Middle: Bottlenose dolphin

Bottom: The WCS team on Adi Lase looking for Cetaceans



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

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ONGOING AND UPCOMING EVENTS

- Now—November 2011— Construction of options for Solevu-Nadi-Wainunu and Wailevu MPA network designs, consultation workshops with communities leading to MPA design and management plan recommendations.
- October 2011—KRMC Management support workshop and stakeholder meeting
- November 2011—Wainunu/Nadi/Solevu management planning workshops
- January 2012—Wailevu management planning workshop

COMMUNITY EDUCATORS NETWORK TRAINING— MODULE 4



Above: Photos of participants of the CEN Training working through their visioning exercises

The fourth session of the Communities Educators Network Training (CENT) was conducted in Nakorovou Village in Kubulau from the 25-26th July 2011 and was facilitated by WCS, Seaweb and the Coral Reef Alliance .

Topics covered in this session encompassed the connectivity between the freshwater, riparian, terrestrial and marine habitats and the results of the September 2010 Riparian Survey conducted in Bua and Macuata.

Discussions were also undertaken regarding the challenges faced by the facilitators and the KRMC reps in effectively disseminating the information from the CENT workshops to their target audience. Strategies were proposed to counter these challenges.

Participants of this workshop also undertook visioning exercises on how their roles as community educators coupled with the information they have acquired through the CENT workshops, could benefit their communities management of natural resources. This was an informative exercise as it empowered these participants in taking a holistic approach and taught them how their roles and responsibilities are intricately linked to Kubulau's ecosystem.

The CENT workshop identified areas that needed to be strengthened and proposed strategies in order to get information better disseminated to the communities to enhance their understanding of sustainably managing their ecosystems and improving their livelihoods.

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.