

Traditional culture is what helps define Pacific people: the fine weaving of traditional mats and kits, the adornment of Pacific jewellery, the cultural practice of tattooing, traditional costumes worn during customary dances and the ethnic foods eaten.

## CONSERVATION SERVING COMMUNITIES IN A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD

by Nanette Woonton, South Pacific Regional Environment Program

Pacific biodiversity is the one thing our traditional practices have in common which has helped sustain the Island way of life. It is the incredible diversity of plants and animals that exist, which has helped etch our Pacific identity.

Pacific islands biodiversity is under threat. The region has the highest rates of extinction per capita. Based on the global standard for identifying species at risk from extinction, there are approximately 858 species with a high probability of extinction in the medium-term future in the Pacific islands region. Biodiversity, an essential part of island life now needs the consideration of Pacific islanders to keep it alive, rich and diverse.

The culmination of more sophisticated and efficient tools and technology, an increase in consumption per person, along with the adoption of commercial values and new lifestyles has led to an increased environmental impact. The pace of exploitation has accelerated. The adoption of new values and lifestyles has been associated with an erosion of traditional control over land, resource use and a loss of indigenous knowledge of conservation methods.

The Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) has a mission to help protect our Island ecosystems. This operational programme is tasked with enabling Pacific islands countries and territories to manage their island resources and ocean ecosystems in a sustainable manner that supports life and livelihoods.

SPREP is coordinating the 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas in October this year. The theme is 'conservation serving communities in a rapidly changing world'. A new 5-year strategy to make sure that Pacific islands nature conservation is protected will be produced from the conference that will take place from the 22nd to the 26th of October. It will be held in Alotau, Papua New Guinea (PNG) a country that has the world's third largest block of unbroken



tropical rainforest. PNG has more orchid species than any other place on earth and is home to almost all of the world's species of birds of paradise and tree kangaroos. The Pacific island nation has acknowledged the importance of the conference, with the PNG Government committing 1 million kina towards it.

Top: Harvesting coconut crabs, Tetepare Island, Western Solomons. (Photo: S Chape)  
Above: Monitoring leatherback turtles, Tetepare Island. (Photo: Michael D'Antonio)



Above: Monitoring trochus shells. Above right and far right: Lowland rainforests, Tetepare Island. (Photo's by S. Chape)

“It’s an exciting and difficult time for conservation in the region. Communities are grappling with how to maintain their livelihoods and lifestyles.” Said Kate Brown Vitolio, Action Strategy Advisor with SPREP. “There are more organisations who are trying to help as well as those who are trying to achieve conservation outcomes. This conference will help our challenge of connecting the different groups, understanding what is being implemented and working together to determine what we need to do more of.”

The ‘conservation serving communities in a rapidly changing world’ theme recognises the integral link between biodiversity and Pacific communities. Biodiversity is what helps communities survive and with proper care it is the Pacific people that can help biodiversity survive. The reality is that the fragile web of life formed over millions of years could be undone in decades. A web which includes the highest marine diversity in the world for the Western Pacific with up to 3,000 different species found on a single reef alone.

“The theme reflects the basic philosophy of the Pacific region, that conservation is about communities and also reflects that there are growing

threats that need to be addressed.”

The Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation will celebrate a 10-year milestone. A decade ago, Pacific island countries and territories called for greater collaboration and coordination of conservation efforts in the region. Over the last decade, SPREP has played an integral role in building and supporting the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation, an ever-evolving coalition of conservation groups, donor bodies, regional bodies and individuals. The 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas presents an opportunity to reflect on the role of the Roundtable and how it can continue to serve the needs of Pacific islands.

“We look forward to the great mixing of ideas and opportunities for Pacific island people that this conference offers. This is the first time this conference has been held in Papua New Guinea and it offers many in the Pacific conservation community the opportunity to see first hand, what conservation serving communities really means.”

For further information on the 8th Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas visit <http://www.sprep.org/roundtable/>

