

# Traditional Knowledge, Community Management, and Marine Protected Areas in the Pacific



## Synopsis of the issue

Many island cultures have a long history of traditions that protect ocean resources. The most successful conservation efforts in the Pacific Islands region capitalize on these existing traditions as well as the established structure of communication and decision-making. This movement is taking place across the Pacific Islands region, with major efforts underway in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Guam and Palau.

“Rahui” in Aotorea/New Zealand, “Tabu” in Fiji and “Ra’ui” in the Cook Islands are different names for the traditional custom of placing prohibitions or restrictions on taking of natural resources until that resource is replenished. Marine protected areas provide a natural bridge between customary practices and marine conservation science. Recently, local chiefs in the Cook Islands reinstated the Ra’ui and established five marine protected areas (MPAs) within the lagoon, which account for approximately 8 percent of the total area. The process incorporated traditional ceremonies, contemporary conservation activities, public awareness campaigns, and scientific monitoring.

Scientific literature provides evidence of large increases in the size and number of organisms within the boundaries of a marine reserve. A summary of 20 years of studies showed that on average, population sizes of animals nearly double, and the animals themselves average about 30 percent larger. In many cases, the existing systems of marine tenure make it easier to establish marine protected areas in the Pacific Islands. After communities hear about the positive impacts of these areas in a neighbor’s fishing spot, they often work quickly through the local leaders to establish a marine protected area in other areas.

Traditional ecological and cultural knowledge that previously passed through communities via oral traditions often exceeds current scientific understanding. This knowledge can inform and improve ocean conservation management. Fishers often know the timing and location of important, and especially vulnerable, life history events such as migratory and spawning aggregations, recruitment and nursery areas, or the locations of rare or endangered species (Johannes). It is important for the young, formally educated students who will ultimately determine overall future conservation and development strategies, to document and study this essential traditional knowledge.

Many efforts are working to align community and national interpretations of sea tenure and regulations. Sea tenure is the partitioning of marine resources among and between local communities. There is a growing emphasis in regional conservation programs to work within the structure of local ownership and rules making, an established and respected system. However, sometimes government rules and delineation of resource ownership are in conflict with community allocations.

To allow citizens to retain ownership over their marine resources in the face of international bioprospectors, national governments should recognize indigenous ownership over land and marine resources. Recognition allows indigenous communities the ability to negotiate benefits with pharmaceutical companies. In Fiji, for example, a pharmaceutical company is paying the community for the right to remove and test ocean organisms. The agreement stipulates that the community will share in the profits if any compounds result in commercial products.

# Traditional Knowledge, Community Management, and Marine Protected Areas in the Pacific



## Traditional Knowledge and MPA Experts

Name	Organization	Country
Bill Aalbersberg	University of South Pacific	Fiji
Moses Amos	Director of Fisheries	Vanuatu
Bill Ballantine	University of Auckland Marine Laboratory	New Zealand
Gerry Davis	Department of Commerce	USA (Guam)
Francis Hickey	Vanuatu Cultural Center	Vanuatu
Noah Idechong	National Congress	Palau
Nelson Kile	National Legislature	Solomon Islands
Willy Kostka	Conservation Society of Ponepei	Federated States of Micronesia
Gerald McCormack	Cook Islands Natural Heritage Project	Cook Islands
Norman Quinn	Discovery Bay Marine Lab	Jamaica/PNG
John Parks	International Marine Life Alliance	USA
Dorice Reid	Koutu-Nui of the Cook Islands	Cook Islands
Wanna Sivoi	Women in Fisheries	Fiji
Alifereti Tawake	University of the South Pacific	Fiji
Randy Thaman	University of the South Pacific	Fiji
Anna Tiraa	Taporoporoanga Ipukarea Society (TIS)	Cook Islands
Joelli Veitayaki	University of South Pacific	Fiji
Lisette Wilson	World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)	Fiji

## Selected Links and Publications

MPA News <http://depts.washington.edu/mpanews/>

No-Take Marine Reserves (New Zealand) <http://www.marine-reserves.org.nz/>

Scientific Consensus Statement on the Scientific Theory of Marine Reserves

<http://www.nceas.ucsb.edu/fmt/doc/?frames.html>

Statement signed by 161 Ph.D. level marine scientists summarizing current scientific understanding of marine reserves.

Traditional Marine Resource Management and Knowledge Information Bulletin

<http://www.spc.int/coastfish/News/trad/trad.htm>

University of Guam Marine Laboratory Marine Protected Areas Research Group

<http://www.uog.edu/marinelab/mpa/index.html>

Contains information on Guam's marine preserve system.

World Conservation Monitoring Centre Protected Areas of the Pacific Islands

[http://www.wcmc.org.uk:80/protected\\_areas/data/pacific/home.html](http://www.wcmc.org.uk:80/protected_areas/data/pacific/home.html)

Contains maps and a searchable database of information on marine protected areas categorized by country.

WWF Marine Protected Areas

<http://www.wwpacific.org/fj/fiji.htm#ono>

Contains facts about marine protected areas in Fiji.