



# South Pacific Currents

A quarterly newsletter for WWF South Pacific Programme staff and friends

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## Fiji Government lauds WWF work at FIME Visioning Workshop



Minister for Fisheries and Forests Hon. Konisi Yabaki talking to the media after opening the Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion Visioning Workshop held in Suva, Fiji in December 2003.

"The Fiji Government is appreciative of WWF's efforts in the conservation of Fiji's marine resources and environment," said Fijian Minister for Fisheries and Forests, Hon. Konisi Yabaki.

Mr. Yabaki made the comment while opening the Fiji Island Marine Ecoregion (FIME) Visioning Workshop held in Suva, Fiji in December 2003.

"The daily lives, traditions and knowledge of about 90 percent of people in Fiji who live along the coasts have always been intricately linked to their marine environment. The lifestyles and livelihood traditions of our people are a critical feature of Fiji's seascape. They are unique and valuable to future generations as the habitats and species that mark this ecoregion as an outstanding feature on the world map," said Mr. Yabaki.

He added that while crafting a vision for the future of Fiji's marine environment, the instincts, insights and needs of the communities in the Ecoregion should be valued alongside those of nature. "In promoting the conservation and management of natural resources within Fiji, all stakeholders need to be committed to the natural and human mosaic which is the Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion".

Mr. Yabaki said Government was well aware of the pressure that the Fiji Island Marine Ecoregion is facing. Forces such as natural disasters, climate change, expanding commercial interests, rapid population growth and decision making constrained by incomplete information have contributed to the diminished health and sustainability of the region.

Last year the Fiji government passed the National Biodiversity Strategy Action Plan (NBSAP) and Mr. Yabaki said the Fiji Island Marine Ecoregion vision will assist government in developing the 410 *iqoliqoli* management plans in collaboration with existing local initiatives like the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas Network.

Communities, government, NGOs, the private sector and scientists were represented at the Visioning workshop. WWF Fiji Country Manager, Etika Rupeni said WWF was aware that to promote the management of marine resources all stakeholders were to be involved.

"We in Fiji are fortunate that at a national level we have strategies and legislation that will allow us to collaborate with other parties in our conservation efforts in the Fiji Island Marine Ecoregion" said Mr. Rupeni.

## Pacific Island Climate Change booklet launched



Students take centre stage... A launching with a difference, students and a teacher of Veiuoto Primary school after they launched the Climate Change in the Pacific booklet in October 2003 at the Tanoa Plaza, Suva, Fiji.

Pacific Islanders are aware of the influences of climate change such as extreme weather events, degradation of natural resources and the loss of species, however there is little awareness of the concept of climate change in the Pacific.

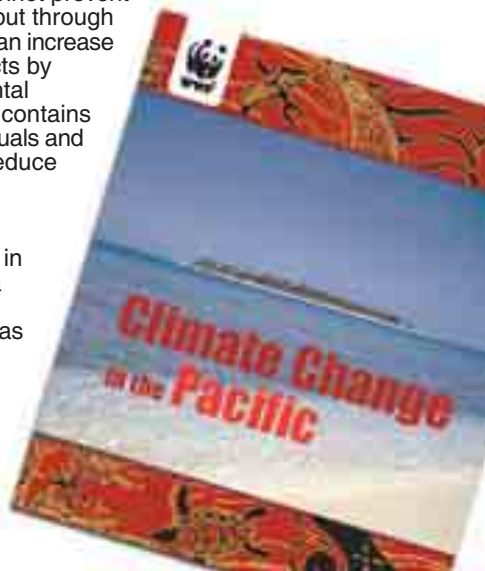
Climate change is a relatively new issue and there is very little information on climate change from a Pacific Islands perspective. Last year, WWF produced a booklet, 'Climate Change in the Pacific' which looks at climate change a Pacific perspective.

The booklet contains information on the impacts of climate change and how it affects Pacific Island freshwater, agriculture, forests, biodiversity, health, coastal and marine resources and the economy.

Diane McFadzien, the Climate and Energy Policy Officer at WWF SP explained that climate change is not only an environment issue but also a development issue.

"Pacific island countries cannot prevent climate change occurring but through development policies they can increase their resilience to its impacts by reducing other environmental stresses. The booklet also contains practical options that individuals and communities can take to reduce our vulnerability to climate change," she added.

The booklet was launched in October 2003 at the Tanoa Plaza in Suva. It was a launching with a difference as 13 year old students from Veiuoto Primary School students. They were chosen to emphasise above all else for adults to leave them a living Pacific.



Climate Change

# Film Festival



Attentive students of Kavanagasau Secondary school in Sigatoka during the WWF TVE Film Festival held in October 2003.

For many students in Fiji, there is a general perception that climate change is not an issue that will affect them or their families for a variety of reasons such as "it is a first world problem" or "we are not a small coral atoll that will disappear under the waves".

Against this backdrop WWF in conjunction with Television Trust for Environment (TVE) held a traveling film festival for schools in the south west and western regions of Viti Levu. The objective of the week-long festival was to raise awareness of climate change and its effects on the Pacific Islands by showing the 'Voices from the Waves' video.

The 30 minute video produced by WWF SP and TVE highlights the effects of climate change from the perspective of a i-Kiribati and Fijian student. The video was produced by WWF and TVE

This was no 'ordinary' film festival, "It was interactive, we decided to compliment the video with a presentation on climate change and getting the students to break up in groups to discuss what climate change is, how it affects them and how they can combat it," said Ashvini Fernando, WWF Climate Change Communications Officer.

The feedback was interesting, "There were a few misconceptions, but one which stood out was that ozone depletion caused climate change and a few other misconceptions which we were able to straighten out," she added.

Climate change is a topic in the national school syllabus and teachers who viewed the video were appreciative of the resources provided by WWF. Each school visited was given a copy of the video and copies of the recently launched 'Climate Change in the Pacific' publication.

The film festival was held at seven schools, while tapes and books were distributed to ten schools, a teachers' college, an agricultural research station and a village.

For copies of WWF South Pacific climate change resources contact [dmcfadzien@wwfpacific.org.fj](mailto:dmcfadzien@wwfpacific.org.fj)

# Artwork

on Climate Change from  
Veiuoto Primary School Students of Suva, Fiji



# Climate Witness Project

Imagine hearing the personal stories of how a changing climate has altered the lives of an Australian farmer, a Fijian chief and an Inuit shaman. Until now these stories are largely untold, hidden tales of immense emotion and power that bring home to the public climate change issues in a personal way.

WWF wants to help collect and record these stories in people's own words and make these stories public. This oral history of local knowledge is waiting to be captured with credible methodology such that the information has both scientific and communications value when reaching out to these Climate Witnesses around the globe.

WWF also wants to build a connection with people around the world who are concerned about climate change and we hope this project will provide a vehicle to connect with people and get them talking about this issue.

Linked with strategic communications on how people can help stop these changes from happening, these witnesses will become active campaigners for climate change action across the globe.

WWF South Pacific will begin work in 2004 on Climate Witness. Working with other WWF Country Programmes in the Pacific to collect information from Pacific Island communities on how climate change is impacting on their livelihoods and to share information on actions that can be taken by local communities to address both current and potential impacts of climate change.

For more information contact: Diane McFadzien, Climate Policy Officer, email: [dmcfadzien@wwfpacific.org.fj](mailto:dmcfadzien@wwfpacific.org.fj) or Ashvini Fernando, Climate Change Communications Officer, email: [afernando@wwfpacific.org.fj](mailto:afernando@wwfpacific.org.fj), WWF South Pacific Programme.

## Strengthening the Capacity of Pacific Island Countries to Negotiate and Implement the International Biodiversity and Climate Change Instruments



Official workshop opening, by (from Left to Right): Asterio Takesy, Director of SPREP; Minister for Local Government, Housing, Squatter Settlement and Environment, Hon. Mr. Mataiasa Vave Ragiagia; Secretary General of Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, Mr Noel Levi; and Japanese Ambassador to Fiji, His Excellency Ambassador Kenro Iino.

At the World Summit for Sustainable Development, in 2002, WWF South Pacific signed a memorandum of understanding with the Foundation for International Law and Development (FIELD) and the South Pacific Environment Programme (SPREP), to work in partnership over a three year programme to build the capacity of Pacific Island governments and civil society and to negotiate and implement the International Biodiversity and climate change instruments.

As a result of this partnership, two workshops were held, the first in April 2003 in Samoa where 22 participants from 12 islands, including government and NGO representatives, received training on international negotiations for climate change and biodiversity.

The second held in Fiji in November was a follow-up to the Samoa workshop. Participants shared information on the developments in climate change and biodiversity conventions, as well as continued to build upon their own negotiation skills.

Speaking to participants at the workshop, outgoing Forum Secretariat Secretary Noel Levi said the workshop is another pillar, to improving education on the science, policy, and peoples' skills, "It is you, the state negotiators, who hold the key to success or failure. As you contribute actively to finding solutions to these issues that have far reaching and life-threatening consequences for our people".

He reminded participants that for Pacific islanders, there is perhaps no other environmental issue that is closely linked with human security than climate change.

Also present at the workshops were New Zealand and Australian government representatives who presented their government positions in climate change negotiations.



◀ Samoan delegate, playing the role of Saudi Arabia at negotiation training sessions during the workshop.

Telling it like it is...

# A Plea from the Pacific



Imogen Pua Ingram (Te Pa Mataipo) of Rarotonga, Cook Islands.

WWF, Greenpeace Pacific, and the Climate Action Network (CAN) sponsored Ms. Imogen Ingram to attend the 9th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held, in Milan Italy in December. The following is a speech she delivered at the Plenary 1 meeting.

"My sponsors WWF, Greenpeace and Climate Action have enabled me to travel from the other side of the world to this conference, and I am honoured to address you today on behalf of Pacific Islanders.

The effect of climate change brought about by global warming on Pacific Island Country climates is being felt now in every aspect of our lives. The Western Pacific is becoming progressively drier while the Eastern Pacific is becoming increasingly wetter. Severe weather events like hurricanes are happening more frequently.

Our fresh water supplies are threatened. Where once we had steady rainfall throughout the year, with some increases over the wetter months, we increasingly suffer droughts, followed by extremely heavy rainfall over several days, resulting in floods.

Because of storm surges and sea level rise, saltwater contaminates our groundwater and makes it unusable for irrigation. In many Pacific Island countries, changes in habitat have decreased the mangroves which provide natural protection against storm surge and a breeding place for fish. The change in sea temperatures, combined with increased sedimentation due to floods, means that aquatic pathogens multiply, so our lagoon fish is not safe to eat. Temperature changes have affected ocean currents, changing the migration corridors of our deep-sea fish, and making it more difficult to catch our staple food.

The drought and flood cycles regularly ruin our food crops, and hurricanes leave us without local crops for three months at least. Warmer temperatures favour invasive alien plant species and disease-bearing insects. Vector-borne disease is on the rise again, and dengue fever has become common. Water-borne disease has increased because of flooding and warmer groundwater temperatures.

The forests of Papua-New Guinea constitute the third largest block of unbroken tropical forest in the world. They are adversely affected by drought and wildfires, flooding and cyclone damage. Warmer sea temperatures are destroying coral reefs, which form a natural breakwater for many islands.

The cost of drought alleviation reduces the capital available for sustainable development. The failure of crops means importing more food, or reliance on aid relief. Many insurance companies do not offer insurance against hurricanes or cyclones, which means that damage cannot be repaired promptly. Tourism, which earns significant revenue in many Pacific Island countries, is always affected by reports of cyclones. We have significant black pearl farms that bring us good revenue, but these are threatened by warming sea temperatures and sedimentation.

We in the Pacific have been among the first to suffer the effects of procrastination over climate change, even though we produce insignificant amounts of greenhouse gas ourselves. Even if by some miracle the Kyoto Protocol were signed and implemented tomorrow, there would be a time lag in the benefits from the subsequent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions produced by our neighbours. But the situation IS still reversible. We feel we have had enough assessments or reports about the likely effects of climate change on our vulnerable populations.

We urgently need implementation of renewable energy projects based on existing, proven technology, in order to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels. It is true that solar and wind power are expensive, but then so are fossil fuels.

We urgently need implementation of adaptation projects that will make the difference between our survival and our becoming refugees. We ask you to work with us and combine our intimate knowledge of our region with the expertise of more developed countries. Examples of useful adaptation projects that would directly benefit Pacific people would be those that result in the following: the design and implementation of proper drainage and watersheds, provision of seeds for drought-resistant crops, assistance with water tanks to capture rainfall, reduction in use of pesticides and fertilizers, encouragement of reforestation where appropriate. These types of projects are not revolutionary, but they would definitely help.

During my short visit here, I have seen much posturing and game-playing especially by the larger countries. I think it would benefit the ordinary people of all member countries if the Kyoto protocol were adopted. We ask you to direct your considerable energies towards the more positive goal of action rather than negative words."

# Cook Islands

NGOs form Climate Change network



Cook Islands Prime Minister, Hon. Dr. Robert Woonton with Liam Salter WWF Asia Pacific Climate and Energy Programme Coordinator at the Preventing Dangerous Climate Change Workshop, held in the Cooks last year.

Cook Island NGOs have formed a national network to address climate change issues in the country. The network was an outcome of the "Preventing Dangerous Climate Change" workshop held by WWF and the Cook Island Environment Services in Rarotonga last October.

WWF Climate Change Policy Officer, Diane McFadzien said participants agreed that a network be formed, to work together to address issues of concern. "One of the main priorities was raising awareness for those communities most at risk, including the remote atolls of the Northern Cook Islands".

She added the NGO network will develop an action plan and present a draft position paper to government, highlighting how NGO's could work together with existing government programmes in the preparation of national policies and negotiating positions related to climate change.

WWF South Pacific's climate change programme will continue to work closely with the newly formed network, to provide policy advice and support, where possible.

WWF SP sponsored Imogen Ingram, the President of Taporoporo Ipukarea Society to attend a workshop on 'Strengthening the Capacity of Pacific Island Countries to Negotiate and Implement the International Biodiversity and Climate Change Instruments' held in Nadi, in November".

"Ms Ingram presented a paper on lessons learnt in Rarotonga, including the formation of the network, their work programme, and how NGOs can participate in climate change programmes in the future" said Ms. Mc Fadzien.

WWF, Greenpeace Pacific, and the Climate Action Network (CAN) sponsored Ms. Ingram to attend the 9th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held, in Milan Italy in December.

Ms Ingram met other NGO representatives who form part of an international Climate Action Network to put together a draft strategy for mobilizing NGOs from other Pacific Island countries to establish a Pacific Island node of CAN.

The network consists of the Taporoporo Ipukarea Society (a national NGO that works on conservation issues), PAN, Punanga Tauturu, National Council of Women, Cook Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (CIANGO) and WWF Cook Islands. Support for the network has also been received from the Koutu Nui (traditional leaders) and Cook Islands Red Cross.

For other NGO's interested working on climate change issues, contact Ms Imogen Ingram, President, Taporoporo Ipukarea Society, Rarotonga, Cook Islands, at [tis2@oyster.net.ki](mailto:tis2@oyster.net.ki)

# FIME Visioning Workshop

In December 2003, a group of scientists, socio-economists and community representatives gathered at a three-day visioning workshop to study the ecoregions biodiversity and to demarcate areas of high biodiversity. The result highlighted 35 outstanding areas in terms of marine biodiversity in Fiji, five of which are of global significance.

- ① **Cakaulevu or the Great Sea Reef**- off the northern coast of Vanua Levu. Cakaulevu is one of the largest (in terms of size and complexity) barrier reefs in the world with lagoon mangrove systems, an exceptional level of endemism and intact systems
- ② **Vatu-i-ira Passage**- in Bligh waters between Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, a channel that has been identified as a corridor for cetacean migration, its waters are known for their high nutrient flow. The channel also has a high level of endemism and its physical features protect it from cyclones.
- ③ **Namena Barrier Reef**- off the southern coast of Vanua Levu. It is in the vicinity of Namena Island and a significant turtle nesting site.
- ④ **Southern Lau**- an area known for its high biomass diversity, an island with a fully enclosed saline lake, its whale migratory routes and breeding areas between Kabara and Vuaqava islands, nesting sites for Green and Hawksbill turtles and endemic giant clam (*Tridacna tevoroa*\*) clam found in Vatoa and Ono-i-Lau, endemic shellfish (*Kekewa*) and sea eel (*koya*) on Vuaqava Island in Kabara
- ⑤ **Rotuma Island**- to the far north of the Fiji group, where blue coral and blue algae are found.

\*Some scientists think this species is *Tridacna balavuensis*



WWF Fiji Country Programme Manager Etika Rupeni during a group discussion at the FIME Visioning workshop.

## Recommendations of FIME workshop

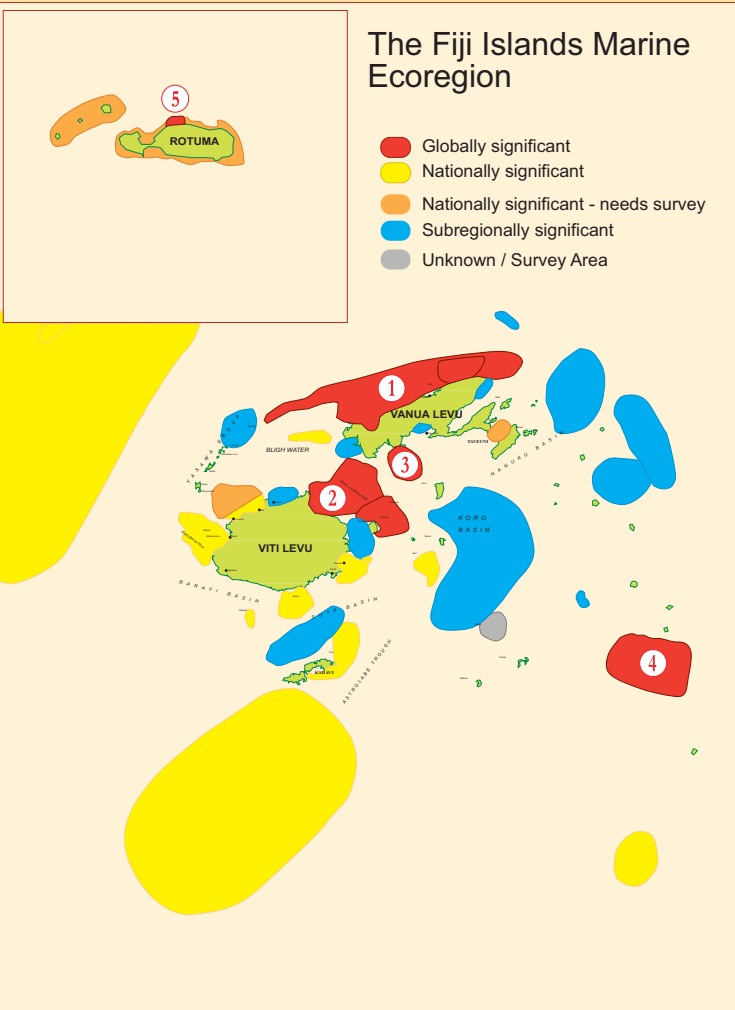
After three days of deliberations, participants identified 35 areas of global, national and subregional significance, nationally significant but in need of research, as well as unknown areas that needed further research.

The following actions were identified by the participants for the FIME team to consider undertaking:

1. Scientific Research Agenda: Endorsement of an action plan to undertake further research on scientific information for the management of the identified priority biological areas.
2. Policy Engagement:
  - a) The presentation of the Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion biodiversity map to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) Steering Group, Department of Fisheries, Rural Landuse Section and Town Country Planning department.
  - b) The biodiversity map to form the basis for developing *Iqoliqoli* Management Plans.
  - c) The biodiversity map to form the basis for tourism development practices to ensure these marine ecosystems are maintained.
3. Inshore Fisheries Management: the identified biodiversity priority areas to form the basis of Inshore Fisheries Management.
4. Tourism and Development: the biodiversity map to form a basis for partnership among tourism stakeholders. There were recommendations to use the map to support the formation of Fiji's Tourism Development Plan and the biodiversity areas and database in the promotion and marketing for our tourism industry.



Ghislaine Llewellyn (back to camera) facilitating a group discussion during the FIME Visioning Workshop.



For more information contact: Veena Nair, Fiji Islands Marine Ecoregion Coordinator. WWF Fiji Country Programme.  
Email: vnair@wwfpacific.org.fj

# Saving the Pig-Nosed Turtle

The closest most Papua New Guineans will get to a Pig-nosed turtle or *Piku* is on a five toea coin. And if the trade in turtle meat and eggs continues at its current rate, chances are the five toea coin will be all that is left to remind the nation of this unique animal.

The discovery of the Pig-nosed turtle in Papua New Guinea in the late 1800s was rather unfortunate for the species as the first turtle caught was captured and eaten by Australian explorers.

Remains of the turtle were sent to the Australian Museum in Sydney for verification. The turtle was identified as the sole surviving member of a once large family of turtles, the *Carettochelydidae*. Fossil evidence suggests that species from the family inhabited Asia, North America and Europe approximately 40 million years ago.

The Pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*) is unique in many ways; a freshwater turtle, it can also live in a marine environment. Its prominent features include the flipper-like front limbs (similar to marine turtles), a distinctive pig-nose like trunk, and a leather shell. The turtle can grow up to 64.5 centimeters in length and weigh 25 kilogrammes.

Today the Pig-nosed turtle can only be found in a few scattered rivers of southern New Guinea and a number of the major rivers in Australia's Northern Territory.

The pet and turtle meat industry are the greatest threats to the Pig-nosed turtle. The turtle population has dwindled in the past 20 years due to increases in harvest efficiency and consumption of turtle meat and eggs by local communities within the Western and Gulf Provinces of PNG. Furthermore, growing demand of exotic turtles for pets and the turtle meat trade in Asia is fuelling an expanding illegal trade of the species across the West Papuan border to markets throughout Asia.

It is not all doom and gloom for the rare Pig-nosed turtle, in view of its restricted range and its importance to the subsistence economy there have been calls from various government and non-government authorities as well as international research institutions over the past decades for the Pig-nosed turtle to be given high priority in conservation funding.

Hope for the species has come in the form of investigative surveys carried out in the Kikori region by a research team comprising of the WWF Kikori Integrated Conservation and Development Project team, AusAID and Australian Youth Ambassador for Development.

"Very little work has been undertaken to investigate Pig-nosed turtles in Papua New Guinea and hopefully our current efforts are not too late to save them" says Ted Mamu, Conservation Science Coordinator of the WWF's Kikori Project.

The local communities in the Kikori Basin have been instrumental in locating and mapping the distribution of the species within the region. Evidence collected suggests that villages along the rivers have experienced a gradual decline in turtle numbers over the past few decades.

"This is cause for concern for the communities especially about the future of subsistence harvesting of the species. They have also told us of outsiders harvesting turtles from their traditional hunting areas," says Matthew Pauza, an ecologist on the research team.



Survey data indicates that around 90% of nests laid by the Pig-nosed turtle are being harvested for local consumption and trade at the local market, "Breeding female turtles are being harvested for meat and trade and this could directly affect the viability of breeding animals within the population," he adds.

On a bright note, the team has located a variety of nesting habitats within the Kikori Basin, most of which will form the basis of the harvest assessment and monitoring program over the coming months.

"We are hopeful that fewer eggs and turtles are harvested in these remote and inaccessible areas of the Kikori Basin. The team is gathering detailed baseline information on the status of Pig-nosed turtle nesting activity and harvest rates in these remote areas," says Mamu.

The survey of subsistence harvesting practises in the Kikori region has identified the urgent need to assess the status of harvest and trade activities in the Western Province so as to gain a better understanding of the variety and scale of threats facing the species on a national level.

Says Mamu, "The surveys we are carrying out coupled with raising awareness on harvesting are foundations of working towards sustainable management of the species. In a nutshell, the Pig-nosed turtle is an identified symbol of the unique flora and fauna of this nation and to lose it will be tragic".

For more information contact: Mary Piafu, email: [mpiafu@wwfpacific.org.pg](mailto:mpiafu@wwfpacific.org.pg)



**South Pacific Programme  
Regional Office**

**address:** 4 Ma'afu Street, Suva, Fiji  
**mail:** Private Mail Bag, GPO, Suva, Fiji  
**tel:** (697) 3315 533  
**fax:** (679) 3315 410  
**email:** [infor@wwfpacific.org.fj](mailto:infor@wwfpacific.org.fj)



[www.wwfpacific.org.fj](http://www.wwfpacific.org.fj)