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# The governance of coastal resources in Fiji – An analysis of the strategic issues

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## Abbreviations

CBEP	community-based environmental planning
EMB	Environmental Management Bill
NGO	nongovernmental organisation
NLTB	Native Lands Trust Board
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme

## Glossary

<i>mataquali</i>	a group owning a particular parcel of customary land
<i>i qoliqoli</i>	fishing ground

# 1 Introduction

This is a report on research conducted by the author under funding provided by the University of Adelaide and the International Waters Project<sup>1</sup> of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme (SPREP). The focus of the research project has been to examine how existing arrangements for, and approaches to, governance affect the management of coastal resources and environments in three South Pacific countries: Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands. It is not a comparative study; this report focuses on Fiji.

The guiding objective of this research has been to utilise insights from policy and institutional analysis to improve the sustainable management of coastal environments in Fiji and to understand the barriers and opportunities to achieving integrated coastal management. Integration has, in recent years, become a major focus of efforts to improve environmental management in many parts of the world. The move towards integration is based on the understanding that fragmentation of policy and implementation is a major impediment to improving the way environments are used and managed (Morrison et al. 2004). Integration is widely seen as essential to coastal management for several reasons:

1. marine, terrestrial, and estuarine environments all interact in the coastal zone;
2. coastal areas must be managed for multiple use; and
3. there are both many people and groups with claims to land or resources claims, and many government agencies, civil society groups and private sector forces involved in coastal governance (Tobey and Volk 2002).

Consequently there is a significant potential for fragmentation, duplication and competing policies and agendas.

This report examines environmental governance in Fiji and identifies the strategic issues for improving the governance of coastal environments. The analysis provided here is based on: (i) fieldwork, involving extensive interviews with government and non-government personnel, conducted by the author in Fiji in September 2004<sup>2</sup>, (ii) a review of a range of Fiji government (and non-government) policy documentation, and (iii) a review of the academic literature on integrated coastal and environmental management and governance.

## 2 Fiji – the environmental context

Fiji is an archipelago comprising 320 islands, approximately 100 of which are inhabited, and has a total land area of 18,333 square kilometres (Fig. 1). At the time of the last census (1996) Fiji had a population of over 775,000 (IMR 2003). This population, which is growing, dwells overwhelmingly on or near the coast. While urbanisation is increasing, particularly around Suva on the main island of Viti Levu, over 60% of the population lives in rural areas, and a large proportion is economically dependent on subsistence fishing and horticulture (Levett et al. 2004). More than 85% land in Fiji remains under traditional ownership. This has important implications for economic development: capital intensive economic development on native land can only occur following negotiations with customary landowners leading to a lease and permission to develop (Levett et al. 2004). The local economic market is small, there is minimal export-oriented industry and as a result the economy is vulnerable to fluctuations.

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<sup>1</sup> The International Waters Project aims to strengthen the management and conservation of marine, coastal and freshwater resources in the Pacific Islands region. It is financed through the International Waters Programme of the Global Environment Facility, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme, and executed by the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme, in conjunction with the governments of the 14 participating independent Pacific Island countries.

<sup>2</sup> A full list of interviewees is appended. Note that all interviews were conducted on the basis that attribution of particular remarks to particular officers would not be made.

Fiji has a natural resource-dependent economy. The pressures on the coastal environment (terrestrial and inshore marine) are therefore significant (IMR 2003; Levett et al. 2004). The most influential report on the state of the environment (Watling and Chape 1992) emphasises the importance of a growing population and increasing levels of urbanisation and industrialisation as major causes of environmental degradation. In the context of this study, it should be remembered that because the majority of the population dwells on and earns a living from the coast, the environmental degradation is greatest in the coastal strip, the estuarine environment and inshore marine area (IMR 2003). Further, Levett and others (2004) report that being small ecosystems, the Fiji's islands exhibit minimal ecological resilience.

Waitling and Chape (1992) suggested that the environmental threats to Fiji were manifold. Principal among these is the loss or degradation of important ecosystems, particularly mangroves and forests, due to increasing urbanisation and related infrastructure and the intensification and expansion of agriculture (particularly on steeper slopes). Pollution, too, is a problem. Chemicals and other waste by-products of the sugar industry, inadequate sewage disposal, use of pesticides and poor solid waste disposal are the major sources of pollution. Mosley and Aalbersberg (2002) report that elevated nutrient levels at several sites along the Coral Coast has led to ecological change and degradation of some coral reef areas along this coast. Waitling and Chape (1992) also note the potential environmental hazards from gold, sand and coral mining and, with others (e.g. IMR 2003; Levett et al. 2004) suggest that Fiji is particularly vulnerable to the effects of global climate change.



Figure 1: Location map

There are primary groups involved in environmental use, management and policy in Fiji. First, customary landowners, the majority of whom either directly subsist or earn cash income from the land and resources they own, enjoy resource sovereignty over much of the land and inshore marine area of the country. Second, the national government of Fiji provides a legislative and policy regime across all major natural resource sectors (see Evans 2006). Third, a robust civil society is active in the domain of environmental policy and management. A range of local and transnational nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) increasingly participate actively in policy development at a national level and are also directly involved in a range of experimental

project in environmental management. Fourth, a number of bi- and multilateral donor agencies are active in the country and network with government, civil society and customary landowners.

### 3 From government to governance – changing concepts and imperatives in environmental management

The focus of efforts to achieve sustainable use of natural resources has shifted in recent years from government-driven planning and management to governance (Gibbs et al. 2002). This reflects deeper, more fundamental socio-political shifts affecting individual countries and the world as a whole. This section briefly describes these changes before examining current thinking about how best to respond to environmental governance problems such as fragmentation and limited cooperation.

The “science” of public policy-making and planning emerged nearly a century ago at a time when the existence of a single truth and a universal good was almost unquestioned. By the 1930s, planning and policy-making had come to be understood as a “rational” discipline, the goal of which was to identify the common good and organize society to pursue it (Hall 1992). This model of planning — one based on scientific expertise and the presumption of objectivity — was dominant in policy-making for many years, and was closely paralleled by the views of natural resource managers. It assumed that central governments were better equipped and more capable of planning and controlling development than were local governments or groups (Healey 1997, 5).

This rational model of planning began to fall out of favor in the 1960s amid challenges to the belief in a single, simple "common good." Perhaps the most powerful argument was that top down policy making routinely failed to deliver on its objectives, was undemocratic and was typically accompanied by a range of unanticipated (and unmitigated) social and environmental impacts (Scott 1998). The need to recognize the importance of locality and particulars was also highlighted (Leach et al. 1999; Lane 2001), and there was a strong emphasis on citizen participation. Consultation and coordination with citizens, social movements and voluntary associations came to be seen as providing an effective means of harnessing local knowledge and energy in both planning and implementation. To make good public policy, one needed to involve the intended beneficiaries. The shift away from a top-down, rational model also reflects a new political culture, one that no longer places much faith in solutions imposed from above, increasingly relying instead on a network of decision-making relationships that link government and civil society across many scales.

In environmental management, a range of new techniques has emerged, including: collaborative environmental planning (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000), community-based environmental management (Agrawal and Gibson 1999), institutionalised participation (Ribot, 2002), and the integration agenda (Morrison et al. 2004). To understand these approaches — and their potential value in a given context — we need to recognise what they are based on: the concept of governance, rather than government. Governance is used here because in the complex arena of environmental management, government is only one player . A key challenge for government is to enable networks between the many groups and organisations involved, and to seek out new forms of cooperation so as to achieve particular policy objectives.

Governance of resources involves, at least in theory, several dimensions:

- The state (government) organized at different scales pursues a varied (and sometimes even competing) agenda.
- A diverse civil society, operating at different political levels, participates in

policy processes.

- Communities make claims to land and natural resources and are active in shaping, interpreting and even resisting government moves to impose resource regulations.

The government, civil society and citizens interact through both formal and informal institutions and influence and determine the ways in natural resources are managed (Lane et al. 2004). These interactions shape and re-fashion formal and informal institutions and agreements relating to resource management.

How can environmental policy be developed and implemented in light of these factors? Integration and decentralisation are both important in promoting "new technologies of governance."

Integration seeks respond to the problems of fragmentation, duplication and competition among the multiple parties involved in natural resource management (some of whom have claims to resources). These problems can impede development of environmental policy, and its implementation, and paralyse efforts to improve the ways in which environments are used and managed. Three kinds of integration are required:

- Integration of disciplines, in recognition of the fact that environmental policy should reflect the actual interdependence of the socioeconomic, biological and physical aspects of the environment.
- The integration of government policy and action — both vertically and horizontally — so that government acts in a coordinated manner.
- Coordination of government and non-government actors (including communities, NGOs and private corporations), leading to more coherent policy and action (Morrison et al. 2004).

Decentralisation of governance — commonly referring to the transfer of state assets or powers to subordinate (local or regional) decision-making bodies, including non-government organisations — has been widely promoted as a mechanism to promote both democratic and developmental objectives (Hutchcroft 2001). In both environmental and international development planning, decentralisation of resources and responsibilities to subordinate levels of government and non-government organisations has become a common mode of policy development and implementation. Decentralisation has been pursued widely across the developing world as a response to the failure of existing governance arrangements to achieve environmental sustainability through democratic means (Cortner and Moote 1999).

It is important to distinguish between administrative decentralisation and democratic decentralisation. Administrative decentralisation refers to the deliberate transfer of the administrative functions from the central government to (i) either regional or local central government offices, or (ii) to subordinate governments or non-state associations. Local- or regional-scale government is widely considered to be more efficient at delivering services and public goods, and is often understood as providing for more accessible, democratic government. Administrative decentralisation has been widely pursued throughout the developing world and widely promoted in the environmental management literature (Ribot 1999). The evidence for its success, however, is not so widespread. A number of major problems have been identified, including entrenching the dominance of local elites, deepening authoritarianism in governance, and even increasing intolerance toward minorities (Diamond, 1999). Recent experience suggests that unless decentralised government architecture is accompanied by the simultaneous devolution of resources (financial and human) and the deliberate development of the capacity of subordinate (regional or local) government, such efforts can fail (Ribot 2002). The recent experience of Papua New Guinea with incomplete (and less than optimal) decentralisation is a good example (Edmiston 2002).



Democratic decentralization, by contrast, is probably of greater significance in terms of environmental management. Democratic decentralization refers to the transfer of resources and power to non-state associations — including NGOs, social movements and communities — that are independent of central government (Hutchcroft 2001). This is advocated as a means of locating governance closer to the people so as to enhance democracy, involve communities and civil society, and reduce the need for regulatory intervention by the central government. Central governments are seen as often being remote and therefore insensitive to local circumstance, authoritarian, and incur high costs when seeking to implement policy (Tendler 1997, Scott 1998).

Beyond structural decentralization, some decentralized environmental management processes can also be identified. Collaborative environmental planning (Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000), community-based environmental management (Agrawal and Gibson 1999), institutionalised participation (Ribot 2002), and an enhanced role for civil society (Friedmann 1998) are common decentralised approaches to governance. All emphasise reduced state involvement, enhanced popular participation and engagement, a deliberative, participatory approach to policy formulation, and the use of local or experiential knowledge. We will briefly examine collaborative and community-based approaches to environmental planning.

### 3.1 Collaborative environmental planning

Collaborative environmental planning responds to the competing and sometimes hostile relations among multiple claimants to environmental resources. Collaborative environmental management is concerned with “the pooling of appreciations and/or tangible resources, e.g., information, money, labour, etc., by two or more stakeholders to solve a set of problems which neither can solve individually” (Gray 1985: 911). Collaboration is collective action in pursuit of a shared value or set of values. The emphasis here is on "political" resolution of competing values rather than the technical aspects of environmental management. While there have been some noteworthy successes (see, for instance, Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000), the approach has also been criticised for being ad hoc rather than systemic, promoting fragile agreements rather than achieving robust consensus, and bypassing the formal institutions of representative democracy (see, for example, McCloskey 2001).

### 3.2 Community-based environmental planning

Community-based environmental planning (CBEP) refers to giving local communities primary responsibility for environmental planning in their area. Although CBEP includes a range of practices, they share common approaches that can result in more effective planning that is sensitive to the context in which it takes place. These include: (i) decentralizing the government agencies and institutions concerned with environmental management, (ii) giving responsibility for development and implementation of environmental policies to local communities, and (iii) enabling local participation in and control of planning (Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Kellert et al. 2000).

CBEP is a major part of environmental planning in many developed and developing countries, and is based on the assumption that local communities are better able to understand and intervene in environmental problems because they are “closer” to both the problem and the solution. Supporters of CBEP suggest it offers three major benefits:

- The community-based approach can enhance sensitivity to and deployment of indigenous (or local) knowledge in planning.
- The community-based model can be more responsive to the local context, and local priorities and imperatives (Gray et al. 2001).
- The community-based model, with its emphasis on the co-management of natural resources, can more efficiently implement plans by recruiting local communities.

Unfortunately, there have been a number of problems with CBEP, including; (i) conflict over definitions of "community" and the sharing of power and resource among divergent local interests, (ii) the capacity — organisational and technical — of communities to undertake environmental planning, and (iii) the appropriateness of the local scale for responding to environmental problems that transcend the local level (Lane and McDonald 2005).

In summary, managing natural resources has become a very difficult challenge, not only because human populations are growing and finding new ways to exploit and degrade the resources and environments on they depend on. Governments and other institutions are undergoing far-reaching changes. Governments today share policy and regulatory power and must try to facilitate or enable integration and collaboration. In working to improve our approaches to environmental management, we need to bear these strategic and systemic changes in mind.

## 4 The key governance issues in Fiji

There are six critical governance issues relevant to the management of coastal environments in Fiji. There are, of course, many issues relating to the performance of government and the efficacy of systems of governance. In developing this analysis, effort has been made to identify the crucial or strategic governance issues. These are discussed in turn.

### 4.1 Integration and coordination

The departmental configuration of the Fiji national government has been structured around a series of policy issues that have been differentiated as distinct policy domains: forests, agriculture, environment, etc. In this respect, the (departmental) structure of the government reveals its colonial heritage and the thinking of the time that emphasised valuable and distinct natural "resources" (Evans 2006). The emergence of environment as a mainstream policy issue, and awareness of the interdependence of ecological systems and humans, requires that government be differently organised.

In many countries around the world a lack of coordination among government agencies, and a lack of integration — between policies, plans and their implementation — is a major problem that hampers the effectiveness of environmental policy (Morrison and Lane 2005). Fragmented policies and legislation can impair decision-making, increase conflicts, and complicates assigning control and responsibility (Warren 2001).

Environmental responsibilities in Fiji are highly fragmented among a number of departments (IMR 2003). This policy fragmentation is worsened by the fact that the legislation that underpins many of these departments (e.g. the Forest Act, the Fisheries Act) is outdated and almost solely concerned with establishing licensing regimes for extraction of particular resources (Evans 2006). These departments consequently have little ability or capacity to manage these resources in a way that recognises their interdependence with larger social and ecological systems, or to manage them together with other government departments. Thus problems of policy fragmentation in Fiji are due in part to the government's structure.

There is also a legislative dimension to policy fragmentation in Fiji. Government departments tend to define their role only in the terms of their legislation, rather than in terms of the substantive policy domain. Therefore, while there is widespread recognition of the interconnected character of most environmental issues and problems (and many personnel interviewed for this study commented on the urgent need for strategic coastal planning), government personnel largely limit their activities to areas covered by existing legislation. The human resource, financial and other organisational constraints on departmental action (a matter taken up in more detail below) are also relevant here. Many departments are simply consumed by administering basic legislative functions and unable to proactively pursue other policy problems or issues.

The prospective new legislation (notably the Fisheries Management Bill and the Environmental Management Bill) will go some way to overcome this problem of narrowly defined departmental responsibility (see Evans 2006 for elaboration). Both bring new functions to their respective departments and establish new arrangements for cross-sectoral and citizen participation. However, coordination is also needed in a number of other substantive policy areas; for example, economic development policy and planning need to be integrated with the government's desired approach to environmental management. Policy fragmentation allows important cross-sectoral policy issues to "fall between the cracks." In Fiji, a country largely dependent on coastal resources of different kinds, the best example of this is an absence of comprehensive, strategic policy thinking on the coastal environment.

There are also cultural or behavioural elements that contribute to policy fragmentation and to insufficient attention being paid to integration.<sup>3</sup> Government personnel interviewed for this study commonly lamented the absence of coordinating activities across government. They report that while some departments consult as a matter of procedure, these consultative efforts are variously under resourced, are sometimes paid lip service to by the originating department, poorly organised and not routine. Informants also suggest that some coordinating committees have been rendered dysfunctional by representatives not appreciating the need or importance of cross-sectoral coordination, conflict and/or uncompromising representatives.

Given the prominence of NGOs in environmental policy and governance in Fiji, integration and coordination between and among government agencies and NGOs is also relevant. NGOs are private organisations, usually with sector-specific objectives, and efforts at government-NGO coordination will always be somewhat strained or antagonistic; nevertheless, efforts to coordinate are essential. This study's informants suggest that NGO involvement in relevant policy debates is widespread. Government agencies collaborate with NGOs because NGOs sometimes have resources and information that government does not. On the other hand, some informants remarked that NGOs "have their own agenda", and reconciling government and NGO priorities can sometimes be difficult.

The problems of integration and coordination in environmental governance are not unique to Fiji: they exist in many countries. The current thinking on this point is to work towards producing "whole-of-government" policy and strategy. Such approaches seek to minimize redundancy (agencies performing the same task), incoherence (inconsistent policy goals) and gaps (failures to perform all necessary tasks) (Peters 1998: 296). Whole-of-government strategies can be structural and extra-structural.

A typical structural approach would be to develop an agency or taskforce that deliberately seeks to pool expertise and advice from across government to work on cross-sectoral issues currently not accounted for in the departmental structure of government. (The proposed National Council under the Environmental Management Bill might eventually fulfil this role). Such structures can be temporary or permanent. One use of this approach could be to develop a taskforce to develop an integrated coastal management strategy for Fiji, at either national or sub-national levels. Beyond producing much-needed policy and strategy, such approaches can also work to overcome cultural barriers to integration, by working across sectoral and departmental boundaries. This can in turn enable further cross-governmental cooperation, and help to overcome rigid and carefully defended fiefdoms that focus strictly on issues within their sector.

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<sup>3</sup> The political or organisational "culture" of government is a fundamental determinant of policy outcomes, political structures notwithstanding (Kavanagh and Richards 2001). As Clarke and McCool's analysis of seven natural resource agencies in the United States shows, cultural factors, such as differing levels of resources, power and influence across government agencies, are a significant determinant of how environmental policy is coordinated and implemented (Clarke and McCool 1996).

Extra-structural responses include focusing on the role of governmental processes, culture and capability. Crucial issues here appear to be information management and infrastructure, budget and accountability frameworks, maintenance of connections with non-government organisations and citizens, and management of crises and their consequences (Morrison and Lane 2005). Personal qualities and inter-personal skills (e.g. consensus building, drive, integrity) are also critical factors in contributing to success in whole-of-government work. A recent Australian study suggests that a "culture" of regular and personal (and often informal) communication was essential to producing coordinated policy outcomes (MAC 2004). In the case of Fiji, an important response would be to provide some intensive training to government personnel in the area of collaboration, consensus building and communication and to develop a protocol for intergovernmental coordination and communication.

## 4.2 Pilot projects and systemic needs

There are many interesting projects and experiments of various kinds occurring in the domain of coastal and environmental management in Fiji. NGOs and donor agencies are actively pursuing a wide range of environmental management projects, both in collaboration with government agencies and alone. Many of these projects are no doubt well designed and some might produce good environmental outcomes. However, there is often little hard data — produced from a purposive monitoring regime — that demonstrates the environmental effectiveness of these projects. Personnel in government agencies report that their involvement and collaboration with external organisations in these projects occurs because of a shared concern for the objectives of the project, and because of the information and resources likely to be made available to government because of that collaboration. However, unless the collaboration is genuine — involving reciprocity and cooperation — it is unlikely to be permanent.

The number of these projects points to two deeper issues. First, it demonstrates the extent to which environmental governance (along with other policy sectors) is not contained within formal political institutions. Instead, environmental management involves a complex network of organisations and groups. This offers risks as well as opportunities. The risks include increasing levels of policy and institutional fragmentation and an increase in the transaction costs of governance, because of the need to work inter-institutionally. The most important opportunity is that it enables broader engagement and results in knowledge and resource sharing by a wider set of groups and organisations. Reaping the rewards and minimising the costs requires a sophisticated understanding of how to govern effectively in these circumstances, however.

Second, the multitude of pilot projects and other experiments both points to and reflects the absence of a coherent policy or strategy addressing the problems of coastal environmental use and management. Despite the fundamental economic and cultural importance of coasts and coastal resources to Fiji, and the grave threats to these environments (IMR 2003; Veitayaki 2002), Fiji does not have a comprehensive coastal management strategy at either national or sub-national levels. Integrated coastal management requires a cross-sectoral governmental capability (which we have concluded is weak) and a commitment to developing system-wide responses to such problems. The absence of a coherent strategy comes despite knowledge and recognition of the need for and importance of improved coastal management, in both government and civil society in Fiji.

Two practical responses to these problems can be suggested. First, there is need for training in the area of inter-organisational networking and collaboration, and a need for protocols to inform and guide collaborative efforts. Second, there is a need to develop — in a broadly collaborative way — a series of national and sub-national coastal management strategies that can be used by government and civil society to:

1. inform and guide further project and strategy development by government, donor agencies and civil society;

2. enable new projects to be designed so as to be compatible with and responsive to national and sub-national management frameworks;
3. focus new projects by providing a national and regional strategy.

### 4.3 Centralised government

Government in Fiji is highly centralised, both geographically and administratively. Geographically, government is of course overwhelmingly located in Suva. Personnel from most of the departments interviewed commented that departmental budgets allow for very limited travel, despite the fact that Fiji includes more than 100 inhabited islands. Combined with the limited availability of communications technology, this means the national government has a limited regional presence in a geographically diverse country and, therefore a limited ability to understand and relate to local circumstances and particulars.

Administratively, the centralised character of government is reinforced because mechanisms for effective vertical governance are severely lacking. Vertical governance refers to how national government relates to subordinate (in this case municipal) government, customary landowners and the general public. An effective system of vertical governance would be characterised by:

1. clear division of powers and responsibilities between central and local government;
2. allocation of responsibility to the level of government (central or local) that most closely represents the people affected by those decisions (Ribot 2002), a principal of governance referred to as subsidiarity;
3. effective and sufficiently-resourced subordinate (local) government;
4. effective interrelations between central and local government; and
5. mechanisms and protocols for central and local government to engage with the public on policy formulation and implementation.

Vertical governance in Fiji is complicated by the system of customary land ownership. Approximately 90% of land in Fiji is owned by customary landowners (SPREP 2004). Customary land is held in communal title; the group owning a particular parcel of land is referred to as the *mataquali* (Veitaki 2002). Native landowners generally lay claim to resource sovereignty, although Evans (2006) notes that the pre-eminent natural resource legislation in fact prevails. Native lands cannot be alienated or encumbered. Furthermore, the Native Lands Trust Act empowers the Native Lands Trust Board (NLTB) to grant leases or licences for the use of native lands. A particularly important problem with current arrangements is that the NLTB lacks in-house environmental expertise with which to advise customary landowners.

Customary land ownership inhibits the regulatory power of the national government to fashion the way in which land and natural resources are used. Since Evans (2006) observes that the key natural resource legislation in fact prevails, and a statutory organisation (the NLTB) determines use of land, it would appear that the inhibition of government with respect to directly regulating natural resource use on customary land is cultural rather than legal. This creates a situation in which government is highly centralised, but the governance of environmental resources by customary landowners is highly decentralised. The organisation of these two sovereign actors — government and customary landowners — are therefore very different and deliberate efforts to create vertical coherence are required.

Another dimension of government-landowner relations relates to the role of the NLTB. The focus of the NLTB, both legislatively (Evans 2006) and organisationally, is to promote the development — understood as forestry, agriculture, tourism and other kinds of intensive commercial activities — of customary-owned lands. In doing so, the NLTB arranges and facilitates meetings between landowners and developers with a view to facilitating agreement for a lease to enable the development to proceed. Little attention is given to conservation issues

more generally. Importantly, the NLTB, being an organ of a government with an explicit policy commitment to economic development, cannot offer landowners independent advice. Additionally, the NLTB has limited environmental expertise and is unable to advise landowners on the long-term environmental consequences of development decisions.

Subordinate government has very little control, a vague mandate and very few resources with which to achieve its desired ends. The *Town Planning Act*, for instance, places significant control in the hands of central government that approves planning schemes, and minimal control in the hands of municipal government that implements the approved schemes. Municipal government lack environmentally trained staff. Evans (2006: 16) remarks also that municipal government has “[v]ery limited capacity to plan for and manage the environment...the purpose of the *Local Government Act* is to create units around which communities can be organised.” Given the constraints, noted above, on central government, local government would be ideally placed to plan for and manage the use of the natural environment and engage with customary landowners. It is not empowered — legally or financially — to do this.

A final aspect of vertical governance in Fiji relates to mechanisms for the national government to facilitate the participation of citizens in processes of policy development and implementation. Most environmental statutes in Fiji largely ignore this issue. The *Town Planning Act* is a notable example (Evans 2006). Moreover, given the geography and decentralised population of Fiji, enabling effective participation would require a substantial commitment of resources.

In sum, these vertical relations do not enable national policy effectiveness, an effective local–central dialogue or, therefore, a particularly functional system of governance. To improve this situation would require a review of the role of local government relative to central government, an improved mechanism to provide environmental and other advice to customary landowners, and improved mechanisms for public participation in policy development.

#### 4.4 Planning

Planning — including land use, economic and environmental planning — is the deliberate, coordinated effort to achieve particular objectives. It involves translating knowledge into action in the public domain for collective purposes. Planning is a crucial dimension of achieving the goals and objectives set out in policy and legislation, particularly in areas such as land use and environmental management. Here a key part of achieving policy objectives is collecting and processing information about, for example, existing land use, emerging pressures, and environmental threats; based on such information, operational responses can be designed. In other words, for some policy areas, planning is a crucial aspect of government’s ability to achieve policy objectives.

Land use and environmental planning are under utilised in Fiji, in part because of outdated legislation. In fisheries and forestry, for example, the relevant statutes provide an offence and licensing regime but do not provide for development of management plans (at various scales) (Evans 2006). Licensing for extraction is an important dimension of environmental management; but so too is the identification of the multiple values and uses of a particular resource, the collection of information about the resource and existing threats, and the formulation of plans for the active management of the resource (i.e. planning).

Another aspect of this limited use of planning relates to the resources and capacity of government. Most departments and agencies can only hope to administer existing functions and requirements; there is little capacity to engage in review, evaluation or to plan for new approaches or activities. The Department of Town and Country Planning is a good example. The Department is barely able to keep up with development proposals, which it assesses against existing zoning schemes, that it has limited ability to engage in forward-looking land use planning or in the review of those schemes. Indeed, the Department has three planners

responsible for the entire country. Once a planning scheme has been approved for a given municipal area, the relevant municipal council has responsibility for controlling development (and therefore managing land use). However, most Councils lack suitably qualified staff to undertake this work (only Suva City Council has qualified staff), and there is a distinct absence, in local government, of environmentally trained staff. As Evans (2006: 16) notes, local government “is an administrative tool, [it is] not ... for actively planning the use of an area.” This is significant, of course, because the population of Fiji is growing, urbanising and concentrated on the coast (Waitling and Chape 1992). Inadequate consideration of a range of basic town planning issues, such as appropriate development, protection of important areas, provision of sufficient waste management facilities etc., might, over time, be an important source of cumulative environmental impact for Fiji’s coasts.

In addition to the limited use of planning, the location of planning responsibilities across government is problematic. Two matters stand out. First, in relation to town planning, for example, the town planning function is ostensibly housed in the Department of Town and Country Planning. In practice, however, only the Native Lands Trust Board is undertaking forward urban planning (the Board has recently completed a draft plan for greater Suva City (NLTB 2004)). In most jurisdictions, local urban planning functions are delegated to local government from the central or provincial government. In Fiji, by contrast, municipal-level government merely administers a centrally developed zoning scheme and does not engage directly in planning (Evans 2006). Second, no mechanism exists through which government can undertake inter-sectoral planning (this relates to issues of intra-governmental coordination discussed earlier).

A more typical environmental planning system would see central government preparing policy and legislation to set out the broad objectives and targets (conservation of important species, continued economic use of resources, etc.), and require that more detailed management plans be developed (usually at nested scales — national, regional and local). The management plans are used as a means to collate all available information on environments and environmental pressures at a particular location and to formulate ways of achieving different policy objectives within a local context. Plans provide detailed operational guidance to managers of a resource so that national objectives can be met in diverse locations. Management planning has become a central dimension of environmental policy, because the management of a given resource or set of resources in a particular location almost inevitably involves wrestling with competing objectives, values and users.

The lack of management planning in Fiji has a number of consequences. First, it means that detailed operational guidance is not being developed for different sectors (e.g. town planning, forestry, fisheries). This means that environmental pressures and conflicts are not being identified and rectified in an ongoing way. Second, it means that national and institutional knowledge is not being developed through the information collection phase of planning. This means that environmental policy and management cannot hope to be adaptive; adaptiveness demands a constant flow of information. Third, limited planning activity reduces the likelihood that intersectoral issues and pressures — such as those implicated in coastal management — will be identified and reconciled.

How could these problems be rectified? Clearly there is a need for the Fijian government to improve its planning capability. The proposed new legislation governing fisheries and forestry, which provide for sectoral management planning, is an important step in the right direction. However, there is need for greater work to be undertaken in land use and urban planning, particularly on parts of the urbanising coast. These efforts are likely to succeed and last only if the institutional responsibility for urban planning within the central government is rationalised, and if local government is granted a more substantial mandate (and resources) for local area planning. Second, there is a need for greater use of intersectoral planning carried out by intergovernmental taskforces. Third, in line with the remarks above about the changing

structure of governance, there is a need for improved training of personnel in environmental management planning and collaboration.

## 4.5 Information

Policy development and implementation make very heavy demands for information. This is particularly true for environmental policy. In this area, knowledge and up-to-date data are required on topics such as water quality, wildlife, and ecological processes, as well as human impact and human-environment interactions. A large amount of information is required, covering many disciplines (social as well as biophysical). Moreover, since the emergence of policy and planning as academic disciplines and distinct professional realms, the view that policy must be rational — indeed scientific — has developed, ensuring the burden to collect and process information for policy purposes is even heavier. In addition, there is the additional more recent attempt to overcome the limitations to rational planning by incorporating other forms of knowledge, principally the ideas, experience and wisdom of local people (Berkes et al. 1998).

Current ecological thinking emphasises the unpredictable and changing character of ecosystems and the need for environmental managers to be adaptive. We know now that environmental managers must adapt to surprise events and changes, recognize that their interventions are themselves potential sources of (unpredictable) ecological change, and that their efforts are experiments in ecological intervention (Crossely 1996). Environmental policy and planning must shift from seeking to achieve long-range prescriptions with fixed objectives to a more flexible approach in which greater emphasis is placed on monitoring ecological change, and flexibility in tactics and targets (Beatley 2000).

For all of these reasons, reliable, quality information about resource use, environmental quality and the effectiveness of policies is a crucial aspect of effective environmental governance. A major frustration for environmental managers in Fiji is that the required trans-disciplinary, quality data sets are generally unavailable. This is a huge constraint on the ability of government (and others) to adapt to emerging problems or concerns and to design and implement new policies (such as ICM). It also increases the dependence of local government and groups on external NGOs and donor organisations. Government personnel from a range of departments report a frustration with lack of access to quality data. The absence of an active planning agenda in Fiji exacerbates information shortfalls: one of the benefits of environmental planning activities (including environmental impact assessment, or EIA) is the accumulation of information over time.

A good example of information shortages in Fiji is the fisheries sector. The Fisheries department is currently undertaking a survey of fish stocks in each *i qoliqoli* (fishing ground) so that it can advise communities about the extent of inshore resources. At this stage, approximately 35 such areas have been surveyed; there is, therefore, little knowledge about the inshore fishery resource for much of the country. The central issue here relates to the regulatory technique being used in fisheries (and other sectors) in Fiji. Fijian fisheries are currently regulated by a licensing scheme. Fundamental to licensing resource extraction is some knowledge of the extent of the resource so that a sustainable harvest can be licensed. Another crucial aspect is monitoring. Compliance with licensing requirements must be monitored, as must the resource over time. Licensing extraction therefore, stands or falls, on (i) knowledge of resource extent and quality at the time of permitting, and (ii) monitoring of resource stocks and permit compliance over time. On both counts, problems are evident in Fiji.

The fisheries sector is used here only as an example: such deficiencies in the information base for policy-making, and an insufficient commitment to monitoring (of both resource quality and policy effectiveness) is widespread in Fiji in relation to environmental governance.



There are a number of aspects of the proposed draft Environmental Management Bill<sup>4</sup> (EMB) that will go a long way to remedying the shortfall in quality environmental information in Fiji: the National State of the Environment Report (§21), the provision for Environmental Audits (§23), the systematisation of Environmental Impact Assessment (§25 and §29), and the Natural Resource Inventory (§52). While the EMB will have important implications for all of government, there is still a need for other government departments (e.g. fisheries, forestry and public works) to increase their efforts to monitor the quantity and quality of natural resources within their jurisdiction, and the effectiveness of existing policy and regulatory settings. Further, these monitoring activities must be used, in part, to establish environmental databases that need to be maintained over time and made available across government. The proposal in the EMB to require each government department to undertake environmental audits (§24) is an excellent one, but the present proposal does not require the audit to evaluate effectiveness of the policy or regulatory regime provided by that department. This is crucial; not for punitive purposes, but to enable institutional learning and adaptation to changing circumstances, and to discover when policy is not achieving its intended outcome.

## 4.6 Capacity

The capacity to manage environmental resources, and to network and collaborate with others, is a crucial dimension of environmental governance. To become effective managers of the environment, and to intervene effectively in environmental problems, requires considerable socio-political, organizational and ecological knowledge and capability (Cortner and Moote 1999). It also requires sufficient financial resources.

Government and non-government personnel interviewed for the purposes of this study report that the capacity of key organisations to undertake environmental management activities is limited by (i) the number of personnel available to service key functions, (ii) knowledge and training of these personnel, and (iii) the financial resources with which to conduct activities (travel, monitoring, evaluation etc). This problem is widespread and underpins all other identified problems.

Intra- and inter-organisational interaction enhances governance by facilitating cooperation, improving the knowledge base, and increasing capability through social learning. The problems with coordination described above, and the lack of mechanisms and forums requiring interaction both within and between organisations, act as a further constraint to effective environmental governance in Fiji.

To remedy these problems requires more than simply injecting additional resources, or providing more the technical training for personnel, although these are important. It also requires: (i) the creation of widely accessible databases and information sets (discussed above) to inform key players, and (ii) the establishment of mechanisms that facilitate routine and ongoing intra- and inter-organisational interaction, communication and collaboration.

## 5 Conclusion and recommendations

Achieving improved and integrated management of coastal resources and environments is complex and challenging. This research suggests that problems of governance — rather than government — should be the focus. To focus on the design, structure and operation of government, or alternatively, to focus exclusively on the activities and capabilities of communities, would be to miss a fundamental characteristic of contemporary social and political life in Fiji, where government is highly centralised, has limited capabilities, and shares sovereignty with customary land and resource owners. A focus on governance allows us to think about the relationship between government and community, between state and citizen,

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<sup>4</sup> Editor's note: The Bill was passed into law as Act 1 of 2005.

and how these relationships shape policy and mediate the use and management of natural resources.

Government in Fiji was designed to provide "command and control" policy and regulation, but the conditions simply do not exist in Fiji for this kind of government to function. Such an approach would be widely resisted; recognition of customary resource sovereignty prevents it, and political organization in Fiji, at the national and subnational level is characterised by a complex array of inter-organisational networks (operating at different scales), which the government can't steer or regulate. New models of governance need to be considered, such as the decentralisation of governance following review of centre-local relations, and the creation of mechanisms and forums for more widespread inter-organisational collaboration. This is not to suggest that there should not at the same time be a concern with government structure and function. It could certainly be improved in a range of ways, principally — in this context — by examining some of the whole-of-government practices being used elsewhere.

The key suggestions for improving environmental governance in Fiji in a strategic way, identified and considered above, are summarised below. What becomes clear in providing this summary is that, to varying degrees, differing aspects of the problem and the proposed solution are interlocking and interdependent. Overcoming, for instance, problems of insufficient environmental information with which to make policies might also facilitate enhanced capability and inter-organisational collaboration.

### *5.1 Create task forces*

Examine the creation of regional- and sector-specific taskforces concerned with pooling the expertise and advice from across government and civil society to develop environmental policy for implementation within and without government. One use of such an approach in this case might be, for instance, to develop a taskforce to develop an integrated coastal management strategy for Fiji at either national or sub-national levels. (There is at least one very promising effort of this kind already occurring in Fiji.)

Taskforces are a common means of achieving integrated governance, because (i) they have a specific focus (on a region or on a specific issue, such as coastal management), (ii) being broadly constituted enables them to work across existing departmental or institutional boundaries, and (iii) enable collaboration which can overcome cultural and organisational barrier to integration. However, unless such efforts are institutionalised, the policies and strategies that are developed are unlikely to have formal and widespread impact.

### *5.2 Improve integration and coordination*

Improving integration and coordination in Fiji is a crucial to developing more systemic responses to environmental policy problems. Three strategies are required. First, an institutional analysis of the organisation and allocation of tasks across government, leading to some reorganisation of tasks, is required to achieve improved levels of coordination. Second, some intensive training of government personnel in the area of collaboration, consensus building and communication is also required. Third, there is a need for government to develop a protocol for intergovernmental coordination and communication.

### *5.3 Develop coastal management strategies*

1. Improving the systemic treatment of key issues requires the development of a series of nested national and sub-national coastal management strategies that can be used by government and civil society to:
2. inform and guide further project and strategy development by government, donor agencies and civil society;
3. enable new projects to be designed in such a way as to articulate with national and sub-national management frameworks; and

4. focus new projects by providing a national and regional strategy.

#### *5.4 Improve vertical relations in government*

Improving the operation of vertical relations in governance requires a three-pronged approach:

1. a thorough review of the role of local government relative to central government, probably leading to a new, comprehensive mandate for local government;
2. an improved mechanism to provide environmental and other advice to customary landowners;
3. the development of protocols for use by government to engage the public effectively in policy development.

#### *5.5 Enhance planning capabilities*

The Fijian government needs to establish a more highly developed planning capability, particularly in land use and urban planning. This can only be achieved if:

1. the institutional responsibility for urban planning within the central government is rationalised, and if local government is granted a more substantial mandate (and resources for local area planning);
2. greater use is made of inter-sectoral planning carried out by inter-governmental taskforces; and
3. increased training opportunities are provided government personnel in environmental management planning and collaboration.

#### *5.6 Improve information*

There is a need to improve the extent and quality of information available for environmental governance. In particular:

1. increased effort and resourcing of monitoring natural resource stocks and quality is required across government to both understand the state of the environment and to enable government to successively fine tune its policy settings;
2. these monitoring activities must be used, in part, to establish environmental databases that must to be maintained over time and made available across government.
3. The environmental audits required under the proposed EMB should be extended to include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy or regulatory regime provided by that department - this is crucial to enable institutional learning and adaptation to changing circumstances or under-achieving policy settings.

Although additional financial resources and increased technical training of personnel could certainly improve the capacity of government, it also requires creation of widely accessible databases and information sets (discussed above), and establishment of mechanisms to facilitate routine and ongoing intra- and inter-organisational interaction, communication and collaboration. This represents a considerable challenge that will require a high degree of political support — both nationally and internationally — and internal and external financial and advisory support over a considerable period.

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