



ISSUE 05 – JUNE, 2014



I have recently returned from Washington where I attended the 'Our Ocean' Conference – a major event for ocean conservation, convened by United States Secretary of State John Kerry and attended by many senior representatives from around the world. It was very pleasing to see the Pacific region well represented with Heads of State from Palau and Kiribati giving major presentations and Ministers from many Pacific island countries and territories in attendance.

Key outcomes for our region included new commitments from Palau, Kiribati and the Cook Islands to protect their marine environments and President Barack Obama's proposal for a vast Pacific marine sanctuary to come into effect later this year.

This sense of global momentum is very encouraging for those of us who believe in the importance of protecting our oceans and marine habitats. Like many others, I'm very much looking forward to watching these developments over the coming years and ensuring SPREP plays a key role in support of our Pacific island members.

David Sheppard
Director General

LATEST NEWS



PREPARATIONS COMMENCE FOR 25TH SPREP MEETING

The Hon. Tony deBrum, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Republic of Marshall Islands, has met with the Deputy Director General of SPREP, Mr Kosi Latu, to commence preparations for the 25th SPREP Meeting which will be hosted by the island nation in September this year. This year's meeting will include several other key events to enable regional decision-making. The SPREP Meeting of Officials will be preceded by the Conference of the Parties to the Noumea Convention, the Conference of the Parties to the Waigani Convention and the Pacific Environment Forum. [Read more...](#)



SAMOA'S RIVER CLEAN-UP WITH A DIFFERENCE

Despite the driving morning rain, community members living around the Vaisigano and Mulivai rivers in Apia, Samoa joined forces with SPREP and other partners, to remove rubbish from the two major rivers which empty out into the Apia Harbour. This was a joint initiative with Samoa's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and the Japanese Technical Cooperation Project for Promotion of Regional Initiative on Solid Waste Management in Pacific Island Countries (J-PRISM). The clean-up was the first component of a wider programme aimed at keeping Apia's rivers and harbour clean for the health and enjoyment of residents and visitors alike. [Read more...](#)

Photo: C.Iacovino/SPREP



JOINT REGIONAL CLIMATE AND DISASTER RESILIENCE PLAN

Earlier this month key stakeholders and national agencies in the fields of weather, climate services, climate change and disaster risk management met in Suva, Fiji to provide final input to the newly drafted Strategy for Climate and Disaster Resilient Development in the Pacific (SRDP). This key document, four years in the making, will strengthen work happening at a regional level by bringing together strategies aimed at climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction under one guiding regional framework. [Read more...](#)



NEW SMARTPHONE APP FOR MARINE MAMMAL WATCHING

A new smartphone application enables users to identify and record marine mammals in New Caledonia and French Polynesia. Scientists have long been calling on the general public and mariners to collect and pass on information about sightings of marine mammals. Previously, any observations had to be emailed or mailed to a central point and manually recorded in a database. With the release of the MOBI (Marine Mammal Observers of Oceania by Internet) app, amateur and professional observers can provide useful data with the push of a button. [Read more...](#)



FIGHTING THE REGIONAL BATTLE TO COMBAT INVASIVE SPECIES

Serious about battling invasive species, the [Kingdom of Tonga has confirmed their financial commitment of 1.5 million US dollars](#) in the regional fight against invasive species. This follows a similar commitment made by President Tommy Remengesau Jr earlier this month to [combat invasive species in Palau](#). Invasive species are a key challenge to sustainable development in the Pacific region with severe consequences to communities, economies, resilience to climate change and threats to biological diversity. At the regional level numerous initiatives are being implemented by SPREP and partners to address this challenge.



Photo: M.Donoghue/SPREP

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF HUMPBACK WHALES IN OCEANIA

A [comprehensive assessment of humpback whales in Oceania](#) has confirmed how close the population came to extinction just 50 years ago. Research conducted by the South Pacific Whale Research Consortium has suggested that fewer than 40 mature female humpback whales survived the catastrophic programme of illegal Soviet whaling in the early 1960s. Since that time, whales in the region have increased slowly to about 5,000 – or about 37% of their pre-exploitation numbers. Given the current rate of increase, it may be another three decades before this population is fully recovered.



CLIMATE-PROOF ROAD OPENS IN KOSRAE

The Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) project in the Federated States of Micronesia has celebrated a major achievement with the official opening of a climate-proof road on the island of Kosrae. The improved coastal road is designed to withstand high tides and heavy rainfall, with worsening conditions over the next decades factored into the engineering. As well as delivering a much-needed all-weather transport route for the people of Tafunsak municipality, the project serves as a regional demonstration of how coastal infrastructure can be climate-proofed. [Read more...](#)



Photo: Courtesy GBRMPA

THE GENTLE DUGONG – LADY OF THE SEA

The dugong (*Dugong dugon*) is a treasured and unique part of Pacific marine heritage. Dugongs are the only large herbivorous mammals that are strictly aquatic and, interestingly, they are actually more closely related to elephants than they are to other marine mammals such as whales and dolphins.

Dugongs and manatees are the only living members of the biological order *Sirenia* (sea cows). The name *Sirenia*, is a reference to the mythological Greek sirens who were said to lure lonely sailors to their death. It is believed that some historical mermaid sightings may have, in fact, been creatively misinterpreted encounters with dugongs!

Myths aside, the dugong's selective diet of seagrass has restricted its geographic range to areas where this food supply is available. The fact that seagrass beds can't generally support large populations has meant that the otherwise social dugong is usually relegated to living alone, or sometimes in pairs.

Dugongs are very timid and, as a result, we know very little about their behaviour. We do know however that they communicate through chirps, whistles and other sounds that echo underwater. Notably, it's also been observed that dugong mothers are remarkably touchy-feeling – remaining in almost constant physical contact with their calves.

Dugongs face a host of threats to their survival. Many dugong populations are declining due to excessive and illegal hunting, drowning in gillnets and boat strikes. Moreover, the seagrass beds on which they depend for food are also under threat from uncontrolled coastal development, pollution and natural disasters.

Globally, dugongs are considered vulnerable to extinction. All dugong populations are listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Dugongs are also listed on Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) which means that they are considered to have an unfavourable conservation status.

To improve the conservation and management of the dugong in the Pacific, SPREP developed the 2013–2017 Dugong Action Plan in collaboration with members and partners. The plan contains priority actions endorsed by the SPREP Council for implementation across the region.

DUGONG FAST FACTS

- Dugongs are long-lived – their average lifespan is approximately 73 years.
- New Caledonia and Australia are the only two SPREP member countries with dugong populations greater than 1000.
- Commercial hunting for the dugong was primarily for oil (used in medicine, cooking and cosmetics) although their tusks, bone, hide and meat were also utilised.
- The name dugong actually derives from the Tagalog term for 'lady of the sea' – a term that echoes the species' etymological connection to mermaids and sirens.
- The impacts of climate change on dugongs are relatively unexplored, though it is believed that ocean acidification will become detrimental to the seagrass on which dugongs depend.

NEW MONEY FOR DUGONGS COULD MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

The Australian Government is a key partner in SPREP's efforts to implement the Dugong Action Plan and as such, has provided funding to implement key actions including the development of guidelines for responsible watercraft operations and engaging in the development of Environmental Impact Assessment guidelines that will consider the impact on dugongs and their habitats.

For more information you can listen to [SPREP's Threatened and Migratory Species Adviser, Michael Donoghue, talk to Radio Australia's Pacific Beat](#) about the potential impact of new funding for the dugong.

TOUCHING BASE WITH TAITO NAKALEVU

At a recent meeting in Suva, SPREP’s Media and Public Relations Officer, Nanette Woonton, caught up with Taito Nakalevu who left SPREP in February this year after a tenure of 12 years. Whilst at SPREP, Taito worked as Climate Change Adaptation Officer and then Project Manager of the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change (PACC) project.

Now at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) working as Project Manager for the Building Safety and Resilience in the Pacific project, Taito still keenly follows all the PACC news and gets a kick out of seeing the project come to fruition.

“It’s so rewarding to see all the positive outcomes happening because we had gone through so much in terms of preparing. We carried out assessments, national consultations, successful agreements on national priorities and activities for countries, sought partnerships and co-financing for critical activities,” said Taito.

“When I see all the ribbon cuttings and launching ceremonies across the Pacific now, I am so glad that I was a part of this process, being able to do this work – making a difference in the lives of Pacific people.”

In his new role at SPC, Taito is working on efforts to tackle the issue of resilience and vulnerability from a disaster management perspective. Moving from one regional organisation to another has meant a smooth transition into his new work environment - with one exception:

“The only thing that really plagues me is becoming used to the acronyms that are used here! I often need to seek help on what some terms are but otherwise it’s a very similar work environment that we had as when working under the PACC.”



As for any messages to his former colleagues and associates, Taito’s thankfulness is evident.

“I’m so glad to have been part of the PACC team and to have had the opportunity to provide support to achieve the project outcomes. It was a huge investment from all of us all – from a regional, national and community level. It has been beautiful to watch from a distance and see the project continue to flourish and impact so many people’s lives in such a positive way.”

COMING UP

29 July – 1 August: Forum Leaders’ Meeting (Palau)

1 – 4 September: UN Conference on SIDS (Samoa)

25 September: COP to the Noumea Convention (RMI)

26 September: COP to the Waigani Convention (RMI)

29 September: Pacific Environment Forum (RMI)

30 September – 2 October: SPREP Meeting of Officials (RMI)

6 – 14 October: CBD COP 12 (Korea)

4 – 9 November: CMS COP (Ecuador)

1 – 12 December: UNFCCC COP 20 (Peru)



SPREP-Tok
ISSN: 2311-861X
PO Box 240 | Apia, Samoa | +685 21929 | sprep@sprep.org | www.sprep.org

Our vision: The Pacific Environment, sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.