



ISSUE 12 – MARCH, 2015



While our friends across the region are engaged in the hard task of recovering from the devastation caused by Tropical Cyclone Pam and other severe weather events, I would like to take this opportunity to speak on behalf of SPREP to express my deepest sympathies to all those affected. We offer our sincere and profound condolences on the devastation and, in particular, the tragic loss of life that has ensued.

SPREP has joined with the Council of the Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) to offer assistance to the island countries affected. We believe that providing support through a collaborative regional response will ensure that assistance is delivered in an appropriate and coordinated manner.

These recent tragic events highlight the urgent importance of working together to protect the lives and livelihoods of Pacific island people. SPREP will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our friends in the region to build more resilient Pacific communities.

David Sheppard
Director General

LATEST NEWS



PACIFIC ISLANDS HIGHLIGHT RESILIENCE AT UN CONFERENCE

With Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Pam dominating world headlines, there was strong interest in the Pacific Islands at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai Japan. At a special Pacific Islands event 'Building Resilience to Disasters and Climate Change in the Pacific for Sustainable Development', H.E. President Anote Tong of Kiribati highlighted the devastating impacts in Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Republic of Marshall Islands, and Kiribati after Tropical Cyclone Pam. He stressed the importance of bringing climate change and disaster risk management together for the Pacific region. [Read more...](#)



SPREP BUILDS CAPACITY FOR GEF ACCREDITATION

A new SPREP project designed to strengthen the capacity of Pacific island countries to develop environment projects was signed off in Apia this week. This new project will support SPREP's efforts to obtain accreditation as a Project Agency of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – a partnership of 183 countries who work with partners to address global environment issues, providing billions of dollars to fund environmental projects. This will ensure that SPREP is better placed to support Pacific countries in accessing GEF resources on environmental programmes across the six focal areas of the GEF. [Read more...](#)



SUPPORTING YOUNG AMBASSADORS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Students from Years 7 and 8 at Vaiala Beach School took advantage of their proximity to SPREP by attending a pre-arranged visit to the campus. The 28 students visited the library and listened to presentations about the ways in which SPREP works to affect change at community, national, regional and international levels. Specific examples were given in the areas of invasive species, marine pollution, coastal erosion management and turtle conservation. Following the visit, we received very positive feedback from everyone involved. SPREP plans to host more school visits over the coming months. [Read more...](#)



PACIFIC VOICES FOR THE 2015 EUROPEAN YEAR FOR DEVELOPMENT

The European Union's contribution to an improved environment and to sustainable development, health and growth in the Pacific islands will be highlighted in an upcoming series of activities from SPREP. The Secretariat recently outlined a range of actions to support the recent launch of the 2015 European Year for Development. Known as EYD2015, the campaign will showcase the strong commitment of the European Union (EU), its Member States and key partners to eradicating poverty worldwide. [Read more...](#)



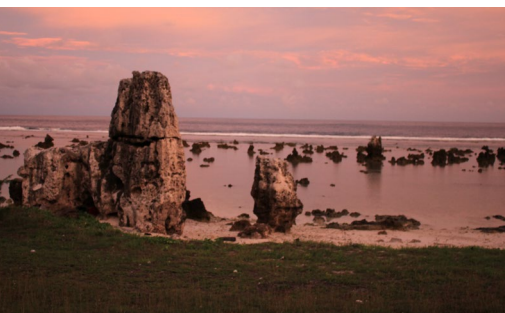
CLIMATE AND DISASTER RESILIENCE PLANS FOR COOK ISLANDS

In early March, SPREP visited the Cook Islands to help local broadcasters to keep safe and stay 'on air' during times of disasters. The Cook Islands is one of eight countries that are the focus of a project funded by the Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS). It is coordinated by SPREP in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). A range of training activities and meetings to help develop a National Broadcast and Climate Disaster Resilience Plan is underway, which will guide the preparation of organisational plans for local broadcasters. [Read more...](#)



PATHWAY TO GREATER CLIMATE ACTION

A set of seven recommendations to improve the regional response to climate change have been agreed to following a regional meeting of Pacific island nations in Samoa. The meeting, which took place at the Apia headquarters of SPREP, is one of a series of Climate Vulnerable Forum workshops currently being convened though to June 2015 in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. The Climate Vulnerable Forum regional event for the Pacific, which focused on improving response to climate change for Pacific Small Island Developing States was organised by SPREP with support from UNDP. [Read more...](#)



SPREP AND NAURU AGREE TO SUPPORT ADAPTATION ACTIVITIES

A new Letter of Agreement has been signed between SPREP and the Republic of Nauru to support urgently needed climate change adaptation activities in the country. The formal Agreement will see SPREP provide capacity development and technical advisory support to Nauru to develop proposals for submission to the Adaptation Fund Board. Urgent and immediate activities include improving water and food security and responding to accelerated sea level rise. [Read more...](#)



Photos L-R | Posa Skelton, H.Zell

IT'S A SNAIL-EAT-SNAIL WORLD: THE STORY OF THE GIANT AFRICAN LAND SNAIL

Growing to a length of 20 centimetres, the giant African land snail is a true giant of the snail kingdom. Originating in East Africa, *Achatina fulica* can now be found in many parts of the world. In the Pacific region, they can be found in American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, French Polynesia, Guam, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands and possibly other locations.

Achatina fulica is a vegetarian with a voracious appetite. The snail's fondness for devouring food crops, and the speed at which it does so, has earned it a place in the publication One Hundred of the World's Worst Invasive Alien Species which is compiled by the IUCN's Invasive Species Specialist Group. Across the globe, the giant African land snail is a serious threat to food supply and income security – it not only eats valuable crops but can be a vector for plant pathogens, causing severe damage to both agricultural crops and native plants.

In most affected countries in the Pacific, the giant African land snail was likely introduced as a result of stealth – sneaking across borders in imported soil, plant material and on shipping containers. But in some instances the snails are thought to have been deliberately introduced as a food source. While giant African land snails are edible if cooked properly, their popularity as a food source has not taken off in our region.

There have been many attempts to control the population, with varying degrees of success. In Saipan, for example, the snails were apparently controlled to some extent by the introduction of the snail-eating New Guinea flatworm, *Platydemus manokwari*. Unfortunately though, the flatworm also devoured the native land snail population, rendering many of them extinct.

A similar story unfolded in American Samoa, where the deliberate introduction of the cannibal rosy wolfsnail, *Euglandina rosea*, decimated the nation's 20 species of endemic land snails. The same culprit wrought similar havoc in French Polynesia when it developed a predilection for the native snails of Tahiti and left the giant African land snail to its own devices. In the period of one decade, the rosy wolfsnail ate 71 of the 76 endemic species of *Partula* to extinction.

Fortunately, the introduction of other species to control invasive ones is now conducted in a much more stringent manner than it was in the past. These days, biological agents need to undergo rigorous scientific testing to prove that they are safe and will not cause harm to non-target species. For many invasive species, especially invasive plants, the introduction of biological agents has proven to be the most cost-effective way to manage them.

The important lesson that this hungry gastropod teaches us, is that preventing invasive species from reaching islands in the first place is the best way to protect food security, income, health and our native biodiversity.

FAST FACTS

- The shells of giant African land snails, and indeed all snails, can coil either clockwise (dextral) or counter-clockwise (sinistral). Like humans, right-handed individuals – with dextral cones – are more common.
- The shell colour of the giant African land snail can change, depending on its diet.
- The species is a simultaneous hermaphrodite which means that each snail has testes and ovaries and is capable of producing both sperm and ova. Under population pressure, giant African land snails can harness the special ability to self-fertilise.
- The snail courtship ritual can last up to 30 minutes. Wooing tactics include rubbing their heads against each other, as though they are kissing.
- Giant African land snails grow quickly until the age of around six months. After that, growth slows but does not stop until death – which can be as long as ten years.

RECOGNISING AND CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF SPREP STAFF

On 18 March, a special ceremony was held at the SPREP campus to recognise and celebrate the outstanding achievements of all SPREP staff in 2014.

Recipients of the annual SPREP Director General's Award for Excellence were Anthony Talouli and Audrey Brown-Pereira (pictured below and to the right).



Anthony's award was presented in recognition of his outstanding work in 2014 to address marine pollution, both in the region and in Samoa. Anthony's leadership on the river debris clean-up exercise and marine litter demonstration project in Samoa, during the UN SIDS Conference, raised awareness within Samoa of the challenges of marine litter and the need for action at all levels, particularly by local communities in Samoa. In the region Anthony has played a leading role in marine pollution activities and his work in 2014 on the Pacific Port Reception Facility Programme and on completion of the Pacific Ocean Pollution Prevention Programme (PACPOL) strategy, was recognised by SPREP Members and Partners as outstanding.



Audrey's award recognised her outstanding contribution to SPREP in 2014. In particular, Audrey provided major contributions and excellent support for the SPREP Independent Corporate Review and the Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Plan in 2014. Her tireless efforts throughout these reviews made a major contribution to their positive outcomes and were acclaimed by SPREP members, partners and staff and also by the consultancy team undertaking the reviews.

A further eight staff received special commendations from the Director General for their significant performance and for their dedication to the SPREP organisational values and code of conduct. Commendations from the Director General were awarded to Easter Galuvao, Naheed Hussein, Carlo Iacovino, Meapelo Maiai, Moriana Phillip, Ainsof So'o, Amber Carvan and Amosa Tootoo.

Congratulations to all the award recipients, and indeed to all for SPREP staff. And here's to another year of positive outcomes in pursuit of our vision for a Pacific environment – sustaining our livelihoods and natural heritage in harmony with our cultures.

COMING UP

- 11 - 13 May:** Pacific Climate Change Roundtable (Samoa)
- 1 - 9 June:** Ramsar COP 12 (Uruguay)
- 20 - 23 July:** Pacific Meteorological Council and Ministerial Meeting (Tonga)
- 21 - 25 September:** 26th SPREP Meeting (Samoa)
- 30 November - 11 December:** UNFCCC COP 20 (France)



WE'D LOVE YOUR FEEDBACK ON SPREP-TOK

We're keen to make some changes to this newsletter over the coming year and would love your feedback to help us get it right. What do you enjoy most about SPREP-Tok? Is there anything you dislike? Do you have suggestions on what we could do better or differently?

Please email amberc@sprep.org with your comments and suggestions.

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