



ARNAVON COMMUNITY MARINE CONSERVATION AREA

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Protected Area Act 2010 Awareness Program at ACMCA Communities



Figure 1 David Lidimani posing in front of the sign board at Kerehikapa research station (Arnavon Islands).

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Background

The Solomon Islands comprise one of the most intact and biologically rich oceanic archipelagos on Earth. Extreme patterns of endemism and geographic differentiation among populations across its islands have attracted the attention of prominent biologists since the Museum's Whitney South Seas Expedition nearly a century ago.

With one of the fastest growing populations on the globe, and little economic alternative to escalating mining and timber industries, pressure on the diverse land and seascapes of this tropical region is immense. Land use in the Solomon Islands is determined by holders of customary rights to the land, namely individuals within local communities. This textures both threat and opportunity for biodiversity conservation. Extractive industry has exploited land-owning communities resulting in startling increases in unregulated large-scale logging. If the remarkable biodiversity of the Solomons is to survive and continue to inspire and sustain human communities, a national protected-areas strategy, including immediate land-use alternatives to large-scale foreign resource extraction, is imperative.

In most of the protected area in the country there are certain legislation that support the work on the ground. And for that matter, a new Act known as Protected Areas Act 2010 was enacted by the National Government purposely to support the work that rangers do in various local communities. In this Act, rangers are appointed and given power to carry out their duty similar to that of police officers. Hence, this is a bonus for the conservation work in very remote areas such as Arnavon Islands and also giving power to rangers rises morale to effectively do their work in this sector.

Introduction

On the 23rd to 26th August 2015 a group consist of ACMCA board members, Rangers, TNC and Rano and company legal firm conducted a community consultation meeting to Arnavon Communities in regards to PA Act 2010. This was a pre request for any conservation area or organisation who wishes to register under this new act. That, there has be community consultation and meetings with relevant stakeholders and nature resource owners before an area can be protected under it. And for the case of ACMCA, things have been in place over two decades and lesson learnt from conservation effort has been instrumental and significant in developing this act thus from Ministry's point of view that ACMCA was earmarked to test this new act.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), has been very instrumental in facilitating and support the program financially so as to make this to its past.

A great partnership and collaborative effort were displayed by these key stakeholders and the trip started from Kia (Isabel) village, Wagina and ended at Katupika (Choiseul).



Figure 2 shows a map of North East of Isabel and South East of Choiseul including Arnavon islands. The route taken by the team during the community consultation meeting.

Aim and Objectives

- To be able to consult the natural resource owners of ACMCA in regards to the review of its management plan
- To be able to aware the community of ACMCA proposal of registering under PAC Act 2010
- To raise awareness of ongoing conservation effort at Arnavons and going feedback to community.

Schedule of the meeting

Date	Community
Sunday 23 rd August 2015	Suavanao (Flight)
Monday 24 th August 2015	Kia
Tuesday 25 th August 2015	Arnavon
Wednesday 26 th August 2015	Wagina(Nikumaroro,Kukutin & Tengeangea)
Thursday 27 th August 2015	Katupika (Posarae & Boeboe)
Friday 28 th August 2015	Kagau (Return Flight)

Kia Community;

The community of Kia are well aware of the traditional history of the Arnavon islands and this place is refer to as a food bank for community in the past. During community major events or annual feast, people used to go to this very rich marine resource area to harvest sea food for such occasion.

However, after the three community agreed to protect the island of Arnavons due to decline of sea turtle population in the early 90s, this place have tremendous recovery of marine species and specifically for turtle population.

And now that, ACMCA is up and running well with success stories globally the organisation proposed to take further steps in protecting this area under the PA Act201.

During the community consultation meeting the community were invited to participate in a one day meeting with ACMCA stakeholders. The elders of the community shared their concern over the natural resources at Arnavons in regards to the growing population of the community and it seems that fishermen and women are going as far as to Pizuana to harvest marine resources and at the long term things might turn out in a way that may disturb the future conservation work at Arnavons. Hence, with the support of National Ministries and Provincial Government of Isabel including the community to work together to fully secure the area of concern under legal protection.

It was noted from the discussion that this area has been registered under the provincial ordinance under Isabel however, in the past there were several cases that were reported to the police in regards to poaching by rangers but there were no legal action taken and this has jeopardize the work on the ground.

However, with the introduction of the new act and high penalty payment for those who go against the law the community hopes that this will support the existing work that the organisation in partnership with community has done. And the other advantage of this was that rangers will be authorized by the Director to implement enforcement duty within the protected area thus the work of the rangers will be effective at site level.

The community of Kia came up with three issues that they would like to see in the future;

1. That ACMCA be registered under the PA Act 2010
2. That traditional landowners of Arnavons would like to see tangible benefits from the project.
3. More awareness on conservation to the youths and children at community level. And this will need ACMCA, TNC, IPG and National Government intervention.

Wagina Community:

On the second day of the trip (26th August 2015), the team were in Wagina village and they started the program in Nikumaroro community. The attendance was very good in a sense that many of them were youths. Also, as usual that there were community elders who attended the meeting. This particular community is much closer to the protected area and a few fishermen in this village are often caught harvesting marine resources in the protected area thus the key note message that were shared during that program was to remind all community members to respect the project and work together with the rangers, partners and board member of the organisation.

In general, comments from elders and resource people from the community were very positive and that they fully support the idea and are looking forward for the reviewed management plan that will encompass the overall operation of the project.

The next village of Wagina that the group visited were Kukutini (Kukutin & Arariki), and Tengeangea. In these two communities, the respond from the community were similar to the previous one and take away message was that youths need to engaged with this project and take ownership of it for the sustainability of it in the future.

The community of Wagina mentioned two major issues that they would like to see happen in the near future;

1. That what is the benefit of ACMCA project to the community
2. That there are a few fishermen who seems to disobey community bylaw and obviously management rule of ACMCA. Thus it is high time to get ACMCA under the PA Act 2010 let's put a stop in this habits.

Katupika Community:

The community of Katupika that were visited during the trip were as follows; Boeboe and Posarae. It was noted that majority of Katupika community are SDA and do not eat turtle however, a few community do eat turtle meat thus harvesting of this animal is crucial in regards to awareness and review of management plan.

On the other hand, the communities visited displayed continues support for the project by displaying warmth welcome for the group upon their arrival to their shore. And the board member of this community Chief Rence Zama highlighted that this is a typical welcome that guest can have at its best. And this also remind him of his people's commitment in this conservation effort.

The team, once again carryout the consultation meeting with the communities similar to the process taken from the previous communities. Mr. David Lidimani (Private layer), leded the meeting and the review of the management plan was successfully implemented and insight taught from communities were taken onboard for further improvement of the legal aspect of ACMCA operation and management.

There were three main issues that the community would like to see for the betterment of ACMCA's future;

1. That for more than 2 decades what are the benefit of this conservation effort to community.
2. That ACMCA needs to get registered under PA Act 2010 as soon as possible to address poaching issues in the protected area.
3. That community of Wagina should not occupy illegally on islands closer to the protected area assist will jeopardize the future conservation effort of ACMCA due to population increase and high demand for cash.
 - Explanation from David to explain charity arm to support community thus that was the gap.
 - For now it's all about just conservation work without making profit

GENERAL COMMENT ABOUT MPA IN ARNAVONS

Overall, there was strong support for the Arnavons' marine protected area (MPA) in all the focus group discussions and key informant interviews conducted in the Arnavons' villages. People also seemed to be very aware of the existence of the protected area even though the MPA is one hour by boat from the communities (i.e., not close by or adjacent to where the communities are located). Support for the MPA comes primarily from recognition of the importance of replenishing depleted marine resources and protecting those resources for the future. People are well aware of diminishing fish stocks: *"The conservation area is good because it allows the regeneration of already depleted marine species"*.

Some community members mentioned that the Fisheries Department at the national level said that the export of marine resources has declined, resulting in more support for marine protected areas to try and increase such exports. *"The MPA is good for the long term sustainability of livelihood and health status of people and also for preserving our marine resources and the environment"*. Support for the Arnavons' MPA is quite strong despite the fact that people perceive when asked about the impact of the MPA on their livelihoods that now they gain less income overall because of it (not fewer opportunities for earning income though) and also are more restricted to access marine resources (see below). However, a more in-depth understanding of this perception through the hours of meetings reveals a number of confounding variables.

First, fish stocks and other marine resources have been diminishing as noted by the community members themselves (e.g., smaller size, lower numbers, and more effort to catch them), and this in itself they recognize, with or without an MPA, affected income generation. People are thus having more difficulties to generate income because fishing grounds nearby have been over exploited. For the ones who have boat access, they realize that the MPA has a lot of species that people could harvest to get income but can't because it is being reserved; e.g., *"it has affected the way people harvest turtles after it was declared a turtle sanctuary because it is one of the best areas of harvesting turtles"*; but also another issue is that *"people would have to spend more money on fuel just trying to get to the Arnavons (25 litres)."*

Second, since the MPA was created, legal prohibition to harvest *bechede-mer* (sea cucumber) has also been enacted. This had far more impact on income generation than the declaration of the MPA, but it was not always clear to community members that this is not related to the MPA. (It is a decree affecting the whole of the Solomon Islands.) Nonetheless, this is a conservation initiative targeted at one species and is relevant for the analysis in this study. There are some other species like turtle, trochus shells, and mother of pearl that people perceive are more difficult to catch now because of the establishment of the MPA. (They are prohibited but there is still illegal harvesting happening.) For the people harvesting those species, they would have done so further away from the community in areas that are now part of the MPA. Also when people catch some turtle, they noted not all of them are tagged, which for them indicates that there may be an increase in the number of turtles. That is, they are aware there is a monitoring program that is tagging turtles.⁶

Two other important factors related to alternative income generation initiatives in Waghena also confound this overall initial more negative association between the MPA and income generation. The first related to the Fisheries Centre that was started as an economic enterprise in the community (as a facility to store, freeze and commercialize fish production) but collapsed for

reasons explained below. The second related to seaweed farming, because the price community members were receiving per kilo of seaweed had decreased (see below).

Nevertheless, it is recognized that both these have come to the community because of the MPA, and the community is supportive of it. Diversification of opportunities for income generation in general is perceived as having had other positive social impacts (explained below). However, even with such diversification, net income per household is still perceived to be less nowadays than years ago (i.e., because harvesting marine resources is said to be far more lucrative). After hours of conversation it was clear that the decline in marine stock in itself along with the more recent prohibition to harvest *beche-de-mer* are the main contributors to this rather than the declaration of the MPA, which because of the location of Waghena community has had less of an impact.

OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING

At the end of the community consultation meeting, three ACMCA communities were visited and at each village the team successfully implemented the aim and objective of the trip. This trip was seen as a mile stone for the organisation as it revisit its community and clarify questions and views of its people through participatory approach.

Some of the main points that were repeatedly mentioned during the cause of the consultation meeting were as follows;

- What are the benefit from the project (more than 20 years) to the community? However, the question were more cash benefit oriented.
- That there are a few fishermen who tends to disobey the manage rule within Protected Area. How can we put a stop to this behaviors?
- Is there any opportunities that children and youths can get involved by engaging with conservation activities in our communities with support from NGOs and Government?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this trip was a success and the team was able to visit the ACMCA communities and conducted a community consultation meeting that directly involved participation from the people themselves.

It was also noted that the review of the management plan was eventually made possible and the communities had a chance to put their voice into it.

At the management level, the reviewed document was seen as a milestone the ACMCA assist will help the submission of the conservation are under PA Act 2010.

Finally, the community, ACMCA management and partners eventually strengthen their partnership collaboration effort with this work again and looking forward to accomplish great things for this site of interest in the future.