

### Communicating about coral reef issues

*Source: Reef Resilience Review, August 2010 Newsletter distributed by the Global Marine Initiative for The Nature Conservancy.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Papua New Guinea: Puppets help save reefs

While much progress has been made in Kimbe Bay to protect its reefs, destructive fishing and overfishing still threaten general reef health. Much of the threat comes from humans who do not understand the negative impacts of their behaviors. However, savvy reef educators in Kimbe Bay realized their close connection with the reef, especially the connection children have, and created an outreach and education campaign that targets children. In the local tongue, children are Mahonia Na Dari, which translates as “guardians of the sea.” They are being recruited into this role by a small conservation organization that bears the same name.<sup>2</sup>



*The educational puppet show used in Kimbe Bay strengthened conservation messages on marine biodiversity in local schools and villages (Photo © A. Green).*

The message of reef health now reaches 14,000 young Papua New Guineans every year. Schools from all over the country send classes to Mahonia Na Dari’s facilities. Students are educated about the reef and then take the conservation message back to their communities.

The most effective part of Mahonia’s campaign is Leni and Niko, who are two young characters in a puppet show, which tours villages and schools. Leni and Niko’s antics raise plenty of laughs, while simultaneously addressing the serious issue of destructive fishing practices.



*Closeup of puppets (Photo © A. Green).*

The puppets were developed after teachers realized classroom style lectures were not producing the desired effect. Characters like Leni and Niko, two young boys who often cause trouble but learn valuable lessons about reefs in the end, stay in the students’ minds. When students go back to their villages they tell their friends, mothers and fathers about what they learned in school, which builds community awareness and increases reef stewardship.

In addition to the puppet shows, the awareness campaigns include marine conservation messages, videos, booklets, pamphlets and other promotional materials. Both men and women are included in the project’s activities. Youth and women’s groups are an important part of the awareness program, as well as indigenous participation. The campaign has helped strengthen the message of marine conservation through the passing on of knowledge and general increase in marine education.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nature.org/initiatives/marine/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mahonia.org/>

### Guam: Using cartoons

Guam has chosen an accessible, iconic mascot, Professor Kika Clearwater,<sup>3</sup> to represent the Guam Coral Reef Initiative (CRI) Coordinating Committee. The Guam CRI is an executive order signed by the Governor of Guam in May 1997, as a policy development mechanism to protect coral reefs. The Guam CRI Coordinating Committee consists of representatives from local and federal agencies, such as Guam Environmental Protection Agency, Guam Coastal Management Program, Department of Agriculture — Division of Forestry and Division of Aquatics and Wildlife, and the University of Guam — Marine Lab.



The CRI needed to communicate about the importance of coral reefs to the local community and beyond. They needed to educate children and adults about the five main threats to their reefs: land-based sources of pollution, recreation use and misuse, lack of awareness, coral bleaching and disease and global climate change. In 2004 they developed an outreach and education campaign that included the creation of Professor Kika Clearwater, a clownfish who is the icon of the Guam CRI. Her tagline is

“Our coasts. Our future.” and she is featured on all public outreach materials with a message that highlights the importance of natural resource management.

To target young audiences, Professor Kika Clearwater has her own page on MySpace, a social networking website. The MySpace page allows for links to international awareness campaigns about coral reefs and the environment in general. The campaign also engages community volunteers in several hands-on environmental activities throughout the island.

Public support and community involvement have been an essential component of the CRI. One of the programs focuses on increasing public awareness of coral reef ecosystems and their relationship to Guam’s watersheds through innovative environmental education and outreach efforts. The Environmental Education Committee (EEC) of the Watershed Planning Committee (WPC) serves as the coordinating body. The EEC consists of representatives from local and federal government agencies, non-governmental organizations, private businesses, educators, and concerned citizens.

In addition to their many outreach efforts, the Guam Coastal Management Program<sup>4</sup> has led efforts to implement a comprehensive public education and outreach campaign about coastal management issues. The campaign uses a variety of outreach tools to publicize messages across to various stakeholders including: a quarterly newsletter entitled “Man, Land and Sea,” radio talk shows, theater intermission and tourism ads, in-flight videos, posters, publications, and a puppet show that travels around the island to educate children about the importance of protecting Guam’s watersheds and coral reefs.

### Australia: A country becomes a steward

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) undertook the most comprehensive campaign for community involvement and participatory planning for any environmental issue in Australia’s history; including two phases of public consultation and a huge amount of ongoing public education for their re-zoning process. It was intensely stakeholder driven with different community groups being informed at each major milestone in the planning process. The methods used to communicate with these groups included:

- A series of technical information sheets that helped educate the public about the reasons behind re-zoning and key aspects of the planning program;
- The Draft Zoning Plan that was publicly released;

- The Revised Zoning Plan;
- Periodic re-zoning update brochures that were distributed throughout the planning program; and
- Background publications/papers that were released to the public on the participation process and lessons learned.

The GBRMPA also strives to keep all information transparent and accessible by constantly updating its website. GRMPA has also made efforts to capture “lessons learned” in multiple documents over the years. Some of the lessons learned are:

- There is no simple way of creating a conflict-free consultative mechanism for large complex areas.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guamiyor08.com/kika.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/mystate/guam.html>



- People needed to understand there was a problem before accepting that a solution was required.
- Due to a lack of awareness and understanding of the key issues by many stakeholders, public communication and information sharing was critical. The re-zoning process was not about managing fisheries, but rather about protecting biodiversity.
- Different messages were needed for different target audiences.
- Some elements of the community information sessions were more successful than others; for example, the format that focused on individual discussions rather than a speaker podium at which stakeholders could publically vent was more productive.
- Some people supported the proposed increase in protection but would not openly state their views because of peer pressure.
- Need to anticipate a large number of submissions/ suggestions from different user groups.

For more details about these and other lessons learned on this major community awareness strategy see pages 7–10 in the Representative Areas Program: An Ecosystem Level Approach To Biodiversity Protection Planning<sup>5</sup> and pages 4–8 in Barriers to Communication: How These Critical Aspects Were Addressed During the Public Participation for the Rezoning of The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.<sup>6</sup>

For more information on the latest outcomes and information regarding the public awareness campaign and the GBRMPA, see the “Outlook Report” for the Great Barrier Reef, which was published in 2009.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/8249/ITMEMS\\_paper\\_23\\_Mar03\\_Comp\\_lf-1.pdf](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/8249/ITMEMS_paper_23_Mar03_Comp_lf-1.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/8251/Breaking\\_through\\_the\\_barriers\\_15April0420FINAL.pdf](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/8251/Breaking_through_the_barriers_15April0420FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp\\_site/about\\_us/great\\_barrier\\_reef\\_outlook\\_report](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/corp_site/about_us/great_barrier_reef_outlook_report)