

# 5. Raising community awareness

## The need for awareness

The knowledge of island and coastal people regarding the marine environment has often been underestimated. Most coastal communities have an acute awareness of, and concern for, their marine environment.

Pacific Island fisheries have been managed within a framework of traditional knowledge which has accumulated over many hundreds of years. Many communities have had, and in some cases still have, traditional rules and regulations to protect fish stocks. These may include taboos on destructive fishing such as catching small fish and fish at particular times of the year when they are spawning. Many communities have had traditional rights to fish in adjacent coastal areas under customary marine tenure. Fishers were small in number and were mindful of customary methods of conserving fish stocks, and communities which cared for their fish stocks were highly regarded. In parts of the Fiji, for example, the word "kaiwai" is used to describe coastal or sea people who keep and use the marine environment wisely.

In many islands, however, customary rights have been eroded with increased local population sizes and a trend towards a money-based economy and commercial fishing. In centres of high population, commercial fishing to supply local markets provides an important source of employment. In some cases, fishermen now travel great distances from their home bases to catch fish in areas which were previously exploited and controlled by local communities. Younger people in villages may not hold the same conservation values as their grandparents did.

This manual is concerned with encouraging communities to take actions necessary to manage their marine resources and make fisheries sustainable. A precursor to these actions is that there must be a community awareness of the marine environment, and a concern for existing problems. The process of community involvement can be illustrated by the following sequence.

## AWARENESS >>> CONCERN >>> ACTION

In previous chapters, a case has been made that fisheries have to be managed, and that, in order for fisheries to be sustainable, regulations will have to be imposed. If the majority of fishers are aware of the need for conservation and the aims of fisheries regulations, compliance is likely to be high and fisheries management will be more effective. This chapter discusses ways of raising community awareness.

## Environmental education in schools

In the longer term, education of the young is the best way to ensure protection of the marine environment and the sustainability of fisheries resources. It is education that provides an increased awareness of environmental issues and produces future citizens who are more environmentally responsible individuals. Introducing students to environmental subjects at an early age is most important, as young people are particularly receptive to learning environmental values and behaviour. In addition, information and values communicated to the young can be a way of raising the awareness of parents and the general community.

Education gives people the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, and the ability to act on them. Such people will recognise the importance of the marine environment, have an awareness of environmental issues, and be able to discuss technical and social solutions to problems. Managing and protecting the marine environment and its resources will be more effective if environmentally aware and educated people in the community, rather than governments and scientists, take part in expressing environmental concerns and in suggesting solutions.

All relevant government and non-government agencies should be actively encouraging and assisting educational authorities to include aspects of the marine environment and conservation into

school curricula. When developing annual work plans it may be useful to include objectives such as the following.

- to encourage and assist educational authorities to include marine environmental studies in school curricula;
- to provide scientific and technical staff to give talks on marine conservation topics to classes in local schools; and
- to produce information sheets and other educational material on marine environmental issues for the use of teachers and students.

Ways of introducing studies on the marine environment into high schools are outlined in the following box. The use of public awareness raising materials, such as information sheets, is discussed later in this chapter.

## ***Information for teachers – marine environmental studies in high school curricula***

There are two ways to introduce studies on the marine environment into high school curricula. The first is a multidisciplinary approach and the second an interdisciplinary (single subject) approach.

- **Multidisciplinary approach** – aspects of marine environmental studies are introduced into subjects that students are currently studying, such as general science, social science, ecology, biology, and geography. This multidisciplinary approach may be the most convenient way to provide students with exposure to environmental topics in the short term.
- **Interdisciplinary (single subject) approach** – marine environmental studies are included in high school curricula as a separate subject. This is the better long-term choice as it provides environmental education with the status that it deserves.

Whichever approach is used to introduce environmental education, it should eventually aim to take students beyond a study of ecology, to include relationships between ecological concepts and environmental issues, as well as environmental problem solving. These sequential stages are listed below.

- 1) **Ecological concepts.** Students must be provided with a background knowledge of ecological concepts based on biological, chemical and physical properties of the environment.
- 2) **Awareness of environmental issues.** Students should be exposed to broader issues including sociology, economics and human behaviour, including personal, political and cultural activities and how these interrelate.
- 3) **Problem solving in relation to environmental issues.** Students should be encouraged to discuss community-focussed solutions to real local problems. The balance between the need for development and protection of the marine environment, for example, is of real concern in many Pacific Islands.

Details of possible curriculum design and content are included in King & King, 1996.



## Radio and television

Radio can be an effective way of increasing environmental awareness in rural communities in Pacific Islands. Radio presentations can range from brief environmental messages to talks by, or interviews with, extension officers.

Brief environmental messages are often read by a professional announcer at the radio station. However, longer talks or interviews may involve presentations by an extension officer. When preparing a talk for radio, it is best to arrange for the talk to be pre-recorded; this gives an opportunity to re-record the talk, or parts of it, if necessary. The talk should be entertaining, brief and to the point. When being interviewed, ask to discuss the questions in advance; this gives an opportunity to check facts and ensure that the answers given are correct.

Advantages of using radio as a method of raising public awareness are:

- **Low cost** – radio stations, particularly if government owned, may broadcast messages of public interest at no cost;
- **Speed** – delivers messages quickly;
- **Reaches remote areas** – in many islands, even remote villages have the use of radios;
- **Reaches a large audience** – the audience will include people who cannot read.

Disadvantages include:

- **Usually a one-off event** – programmes are not repeated unless special arrangements are made to repeat short messages.
- **Not useful for complicated messages or concepts** – broadcasted messages cannot be studied or easily questioned by the audience.

The advantages and disadvantages of using television are similar to those given for radio, except that television presentations involve audiences more closely (as sight as well as sound are involved) even though purchasing time on television is often more expensive.

With television, a talk is often more effective if it given as a “voice over” while some relevant and interesting film clips are shown (a range of film clips are often kept on file at television stations). Alternatively, an extension officer can be video-taped demonstrating or pointing out some aspects related to the message being given. As television audiences expect movement and action, long segments with the presenter talking directly to the camera, particularly in a studio, should be avoided. Some regional organisations, including SPREP and SPC, produce videos which may be used to give or support some messages.

## Printed material

Printed material, including newspaper advertisements and articles, newsletters, leaflets, information sheets and posters, are commonly used in extension and awareness-raising programmes. The advantages of printed material are listed below.

- **relative permanence** – written material can be kept, studied and referred to;
- **ability to be directed** – the distribution of written material (other than in newspapers) can often be directed to specific audiences.

The main disadvantage of printed material is often the cost, although this varies according to the medium. Colour posters, for example, are very expensive to produce, whereas some printed material, such as leaflets, can be photocopied to save printing costs.

Local newspapers are produced in many island countries, and these may be used for short advertisements, press releases, and regular columns.


Short advertisements containing simple messages (such as the one shown in Figure 5.1) can be used on a repeated basis to maximise impact. Although some newspapers will print small public-interest advertisements without charge, most will charge a fee which depends on the size of the advertisement. A short hard-hitting message in bold print with a supporting graphic is the most suitable format.

Media releases, as long as they raise topical, newsworthy and interesting items, will often be used by newspapers without charge. Editors

often like to receive photographs to illustrate a media release, but these have to be clear and high-contrast to allow printing in black and white. Writing media releases requires special writing skills, which are quite different from those required to write a report or scientific paper. An attention-grabbing headline should be used, followed by key information in the first paragraph. The least important part of a media release should be placed at the end. One technique is to write the article in the form of an interview with an authority on the subject – for example, a good fisher, a community leader, or a research worker. Checking the local newspaper will provide a guide to the preferred style.


Sometimes arrangements can be made with a newspaper to print a regular column on a single theme; for example, a weekly column on environmental facts or issues such as mangroves, destructive fishing, fish farming, and the biology of important resource species. However, a large degree of commitment is required to produce a weekly column as the preparation is time consuming, and over a long period it becomes harder to create new ideas for articles. It is best to produce a list of prospective topics and committed specialist authors. The responsibility to submit the article to the newspaper each week should rest with one person, preferably a dedicated Information Coordinator.

When you want a coconut,  
you DON'T chop down the whole tree.



So, when you want a fish to eat,  
DON'T kill the whole reef!

Say NO to people who use dynamite  
and chemicals to kill fish.  
They are destroying our reefs.  
They are also destroying our future!



**WESTERN SAMOA** -an AusAID assisted project  
**FISHERIES EXTENSION & TRAINING PROJECT**  
of the Fisheries Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, Fisheries, and Meteorology.

**Figure 5.1:** Advertisement using a cartoon character in Samoa (wording based on a poster produced by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, American Samoan Government).

Newsletters, of a single sheet or more, are suitable for targeting particular groups such as commercial fishers, members of organisations, and other interest groups. They are usually produced and distributed on a regular basis, often monthly or quarterly, and contain articles of current interest to the specific target group. Newsletters are sometimes made more interesting by the inclusion of cartoons, jokes and recipes to break up the more serious information. An example of a regional newsletter is shown in Figure 5.2, but the cost of preparing and producing a similar newsletter would be beyond the resources of most individual countries. Locally produced newsletters can be photocopied to save on printing costs, but these are likely to fade in a short time.

Leaflets and information sheets are generally directed to a wider audience than newsletters, and usually contain factual information on a single topic. They often have a longer lifespan than newsletters because the information contained in them is less likely to become outdated in the short term. Leaflets containing information on the value of mangroves, for example, may remain current for many years. Like newsletters, information sheets can be photocopied, but printing is a better option for a document designed to be used over a long period. Information sheets on marine resources and environmental topics are often sought after by students completing projects at local schools.

Posters are like leaflets but in a large format, and are effective only if they are sufficiently attractive to encourage people to display them in places such as shops, offices and markets. For this reason, posters are often large and colourful, which makes them very costly to produce and print. A poster can be designed to contain either a brief, bold message to be seen from a distance, or to contain a large amount of factual information displayed in such a way to encourage people to study them

more closely. An example of the latter is the fisheries regulations poster shown in Figure 5.2.

Colourful adhesive labels containing brief environmental messages are popular, particularly with children. Although the message may get widely distributed, its impact decreases with familiarity, and the labels are often costly to produce. The use of adhesive labels printed with warning messages is discussed in the final paragraphs of this chapter.

The use of a cartoon character, slogan or logo can enhance many of the above printed materials. The repeated use of any, or all, of these devices aids the public to recognise the type of message and the sponsor. The cartoon character in the newspaper advertisement shown in Figure 5.1 was used to promote environmental messages in Samoa. If such a cartoon character is used repeatedly with a range of similar messages, it becomes comfortably familiar to the public – in this case, as a recognisable character who provides sensible environmental advice. Similarly, a slogan, particularly if it is brief and memorable, becomes publicly familiar – the World Wildlife Fund's use of "save our seas" is an example. A logo is an emblem or a device that is used to identify the sponsor or organisation giving the message – an example of a logo that is easily recognisable in the Pacific region is the SPC logo on the front cover of this manual.

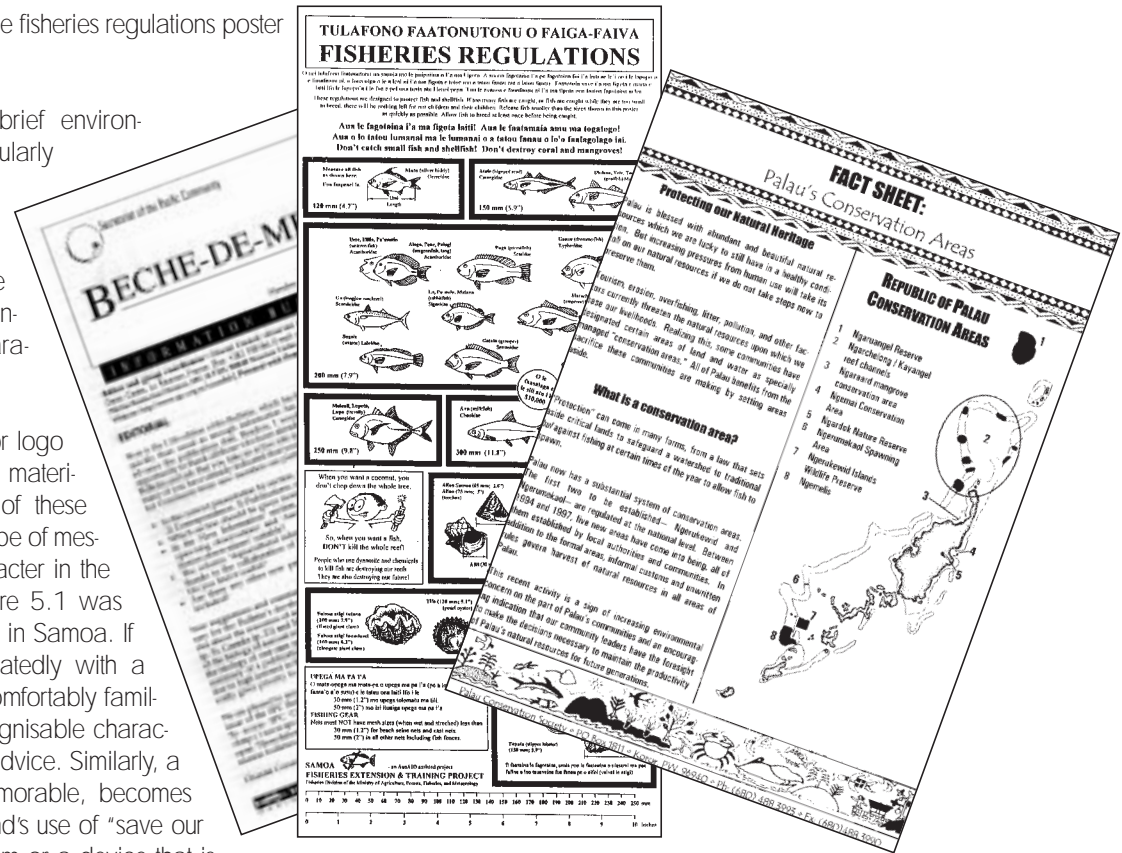


Figure 5.2: Various printed materials including (from the left) a specific-interest newsletter produced by the SPC, a Samoan poster on fish minimum size limits, and a fact sheet produced by the Palau Conservation Society on Palau's conservation areas. The originals are much larger, and in the case of the poster, printed in colour.

## Direct contact

Direct contact, face-to-face interactions with people, is part of most awareness raising programmes. This can include meetings and public talks, activities and displays. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, meetings and interactions with people in villages play a vital part in any community-based programme. For less localised issues, there are other existing forums for raising public awareness. Scheduled meetings of rural teachers, church leaders, and village mayors can be used to introduce and publicise many topics such as a community-based programme, a new fisheries development, or to give messages that counter widespread, environmentally destructive practices. Seeking the assistance of community leaders is a good way of maximising the spread of messages. Asking church leaders to include environmental messages in their church sermons, is an example. As women are often receptive to messages regarding care of the environment, there is a good case for involving women's groups at both the national and community level. Interactions with schools have been discussed previously, and may include the provision of professional people to give talks to school children.

Open days and public displays are useful to familiarise the public with the work and aims of a government or non-government agency. This may involve having an annual open day, at which the public is invited to view displays, posters, and demonstrations. An open day can be publicised by running school competitions (perhaps involving students producing a hand-painted poster with a marine environmental theme) which are scheduled to be judged at the open day. Local businesses will often agree to provide prizes for these competitions.

In some cases, public education is the only practical way to change attitudes towards overexploitation and environmentally damaging practices. An extreme example is where explosives and commercial poisons (such as bleach) are used by members of coastal communities. Fishers using such destructive fishing methods are often tolerated, and sometimes highly regarded, in the community as the catches are usually shared. Because of the isolated fishing locations, as well as lack of public sympathy, fisheries enforcement staff have difficulty in apprehending offenders. Public education may be the only method of ensuring that the use of such methods is seen as contrary to the long-term interests of the community.

## Planning an awareness-raising campaign

This chapter contains an overview of methods which can be used to publicise issues and to raise public awareness in relation to the marine environment and fisheries. However, before embarking on a publicity campaign, an annual work programme should be prepared, listing objectives, target audiences, outputs, activities and associated inputs (time and costs). This will enable the production of a directed campaign that is achievable within the budget and time constraints of the agency.

A publicity campaign should first consider its target audiences. Which people in the community is the message aimed at? How can the message be delivered in the most cost-effective way? In this respect it is worth noting that women are often very receptive to campaigns promoting conservation. Not only do they have influence on the attitudes and behaviour of members of their family, especially their children, but they are also likely to take a longer-term (inter-generational) view.

A public education campaign to counter the use of explosives and industrial chemicals for fishing, for example, could include both short-term and long-term measures. Short-term measures could include a series of talks given to community groups, and the distribution of posters emphasising the environmental dangers of using such damaging fishing methods. Actions could include asking for government regulations to enforce the inclusion of warning labels on certain chemicals sold. All bleaching agents, for instance, could include an adhesive label with a message warning against its use in fishing and emphasising the long-term damaging effects to the environment and fish production. Longer-term methods could include teachers being encouraged to discuss the issue in schools.