



SPC  
639.2099  
R44  
1996  
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SPC/Fisheries 26/Information Paper 33  
3rd August, 1996

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

## SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION

### TWENTY-SIXTH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES (Nouméa, New Caledonia, 5-9 August 1996)

### COMMUNITY MARINE CONSERVATION AND FISHERIES ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARNAVON ISLANDS, SOLOMON ISLANDS

(Paper prepared by Mr. Peter Thomas,  
Director, South Pacific Program, The Nature Conservancy)

#### BACKGROUND

1. The Arnavon Islands lie in the Manning Straits of the Solomon Islands, midway between the islands of Santa Isabel and Choiseul at approximately 7°27'S and 158°E. They support a great diversity of marine resources, including key species of commercial and subsistence value for local communities, and contain significant areas of unspoiled reef. The Arnavon Islands are also the most important rookery in the western Pacific for the endangered Hawksbill sea turtle and home to one of the world's largest nesting populations of the species. The Arnavon Islands support a high diversity of terrestrial fauna for a small island group, with 41 species of birds, six species of bats, and at least seven species of terrestrial reptiles. Eight bird species are endemic to the area. The Arnavons are also an important nesting ground for the rare Sanford's Sea Eagle, Brahmany Kites, ospreys, megapodes, two species of pigeon, and many seabird species.
2. Although the islands of the Arnavon Marine Conservation Area (AMCA) are uninhabited, there are a number of communities from Isabel and Choiseul provinces who claim traditional ownership to the islands, and are users of the resources for both subsistence and commercial purposes. From the outset of the project, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Ministry of Forests, Environment, and Conservation (MFEC) have emphasized the involvement of traditional resource owners and users in the planning, establishment, and management of the AMCA. The main groups with traditional ownership rights are the Sinagi and Volikana tribes, located in the villages of Kia (northwest Isabel) and Posarae (southwest Choiseul) respectively. While these tribes have traditional ownership rights, the Gilbertese people of Waghena, one-and-a-half hours by motor-canoe to the north of the Arnavon Islands, are the main users of the marine resources. The Gilbertese were relocated from Kiribati to Waghena by the British in the early 1960's.
3. In the project strategy, a framework is being used that views the region as consisting of a core conservation area at the Arnavon Islands where intensive resource management is being pursued, and a broader economic area that encompasses the sea and reef from Posarae community in Choiseul Province to Kia community in Isabel province where the focus is on sustainable enterprise development and environmental awareness activities. Within the conservation area, the project works through the community-represented Management

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Committee, which has drafted a management plan and regulations for the area. This plan is being implemented by community hired Conservation Officers (CO's) who reside at the Arnavon Field Station and who are responsible to the Management Committee. Activities in the broader area concentrate on building community environmental awareness focusing on the importance of sustainable levels of harvest, discouraging destructive methods of extraction, and transferring resource management methods learned in the AMCA to the broader area for the protection of resources on a regional level. A deep-water fisheries enterprise development, which incorporates these sound environmental and resource management ideas, is being explored and implemented in order to establish a foundation for sustainable economic development within the stakeholders' communities.

4. Using this strategy, the project will achieve objectives in four areas; 1) conservation area management, 2) protection of biodiversity, 3) socio-economic and sustainable enterprise development, and 4) capacity building. Objectives in these four areas enhance and support the project's central objective, to establish the first community-managed marine conservation area in the Solomon Islands to protect and sustainably manage marine resources in and around the Arnavon Islands, and to ensure the viability of the world's 2nd largest nesting ground for endangered Hawksbill turtles.

5. The focus of project activities in 1994 have been on the establishment of the AMCA. This has included establishing a Management Committee which holds primary responsibility for the management of the AMCA. At the committee's three meetings during 1994, they drafted and finalized an AMCA Management Plan, decided on a framework for community selection of CO's and hired six outstanding young men for the positions, and planned and coordinated the construction of AMCA infrastructure to support the work of the CO's. Also accomplished during this period was securing the legal status of the AMCA under Isabel Provincial by-laws, initiating the biological monitoring program, the first phase of CO training, and community consultations to strengthen community support, involvement and build conservation awareness.

6. During 1995, the AMCA officially opened on 22 August upon completion of the island infrastructure, initial monitoring, and CO training in management and biological survey techniques. 1995 also marked the beginning of significant project activity in the broader project area. It included in-depth environmental awareness work in the communities associated with the assessment of options for sustainable enterprise development. In early 1996 a more detailed review of the fisheries enterprise project was completed and its recommendations are being incorporated.

7. TNC is currently collaborating with the Management Committee and our scientific partners to implement biological and socio-economic monitoring programs to monitor the impacts of the fisheries enterprise. The biological monitoring program will:

- enable the fisheries enterprise to monitor the supply of the resources it requires; and,
- assess any changes in marine biodiversity to determine the overall impact of the project on the marine environment.

8. The direct impacts on target species will be monitored, including finfish and invertebrates, and indirect impacts on sessile benthic species and reef ecosystems. The biological monitoring will be conducted by an international team of marine experts, local Conservation Officers, and government staff.

9. The socio-economic monitoring program will focus on how the project impacts the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of community life. It will provide:

- information to the communities about the conservation project and enterprise activities;

- feedback to project partners and the Management Committee so they can better address community needs; and,

- information to evaluate the effectiveness of economic incentives in increasing local commitment to biodiversity conservation.

10. The results of the biological and socio-economic monitoring programs will be presented to the communities through a series of workshops to increase their involvement in and support for the conservation area project and fisheries enterprise.

11. At the end of the project, the primary collaborators will assume full responsibility for the project and TNC's role will be gradually phased out. As a result of the project, the community and government partners will have established and managed the first marine conservation area in the Solomon Islands, launched a successful community-managed fisheries enterprise, established a leadership role for the Management Committee, developed a strong commitment to sustainable resource management, and explored other opportunities for conservation and compatible economic development in the Solomon Islands and the South Pacific.

12. In summary, project of this scope can be expected to have significant impacts, both environmental and socio-economic. These include; the significant improvement in the biological resources both within the AMCA and hopefully in the surrounding areas, resource management techniques spreading to other areas under community control, an improvement of coastal vegetation and shoreline stability through regulation of previously unrestricted activities, an increase in the communities understanding of their environment and capacity for undertaking sustainable resource management, the long term sustainability of resource harvesting and the continued availability of subsistence and commercial marine resources for future generations, building of communication links between these three communities which have never before existed, and increased income to individuals and the communities through enterprise development activities and project employment.

13. For more information please contact: Mr Peter Thomas, Director, South Pacific Program, The Nature Conservancy, 17 Gulf View Road, Murray's Bay, Auckland 10, New Zealand; tel: (649) 478 9632; fax: (649) 479 1944; email: 103454.2322@compuserve.com

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