

Project Update: April 2017

The OceansWatch team spent 4 weeks in Gaua in June 2016 and we were able to successfully complete the marine education objectives of Reef Guardian Training, supporting the Tabu (Community Conservation Areas) and assist with producing marine management plans. Due to the unavailability of our local project liaison and other logistical issues, the coconut oil programme for sustainable livelihoods will be delivered in 2017.

Monitoring of marine resources

The conservation committee, which was established during previous visits by OceansWatch, were given refresher training on marine ecology and the Reef Guardian monitoring programme. After the training, which was delivered in Bislama, the Reef Guardians held a discussion using guidance given in the presentation on the types of indicators and factors that they thought were important to monitor (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Monitors deciding on indicators to include in the surveys.

In the water sessions were held (Figure 2). Further sessions came following a request from the monitors in the first group who wanted to show marine monitors from a neighbouring village how to carry out the new monitoring method. This local interest was very encouraging as one of our goals was to build local capacity.



Figure 2: In water session of Reef Guardian training with local marine monitors

All Reef Guardians had an individual slate and recorded what they thought they saw and experienced when swimming along the survey line. Following this they came together on the beach to discuss their findings and came to a consensus on indicator species and reef health parameters they wanted to record (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Marine monitors coming to a consensus on the beach

It was very encouraging to return after a year to find that the community was still referring to the rules and regulations of the Community Conservation Area (Tabu area). Despite the area being opened and fished for 8 months the community were keen to protect their marine resources and understand how a rising population depletes resources.

With help from the OceansWatch team, the communities on Gaua now have a map of the conservation areas (Figure 4). These maps, along with the rules and regulations of the Community Conservation Area were given to each community. With a GIS specialist now working with OceansWatch we hope to be able to provide the communities with more professional maps that can be used for conservation proposals and additional funding opportunities in the future. In connection with our ongoing projects with the Pacific Community (SPC) we hope to align this work more closely with SPC and Vanuatu Fisheries national objectives so that it may be rolled out more widely in future.

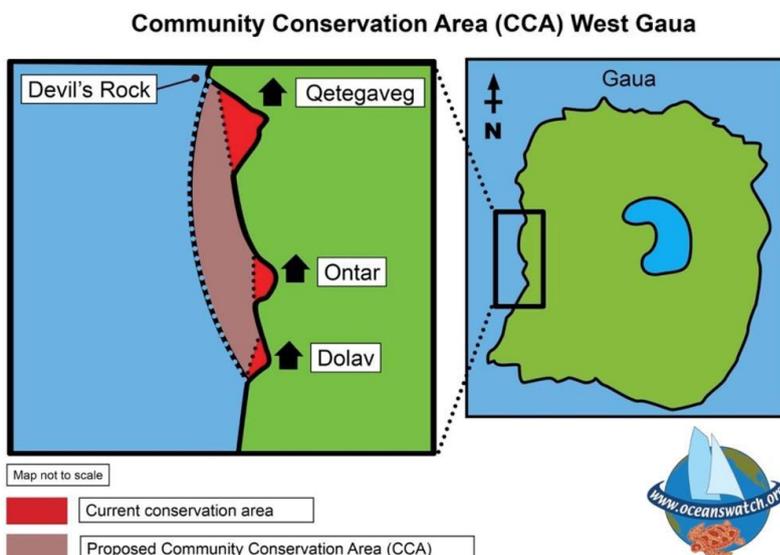


Figure 4: Poster of the Community Conservation Areas, current and proposed

Marine education.

The main theme for this year's education sessions was how people are connected to their marine environment. All 80 children from the local school were involved. Food webs were the focus and the children participated in a variety of exercises that developed their understanding of energy transfer through the food web (Figure 5). We were able to deliver this within local cultural context.



Figure 5: Children from Silver Memorial School drawing their marine organisms and placing their drawings into the food web

Locally produced conservation films were also shown to the communities in the evening, highlighting the importance of fish catch size and catch limits. Climate change films were shown along with short films in Bislama about the effects of the ongoing El Nino year.

Marine surveys

In order to ground truth local marine monitoring, a scientific survey was conducted in a section of the Community Conservation Area directly offshore from Qetegaveg village. This was in the same area surveyed in 2015. The 2017 in country visit will aim to survey the same sites to provide longer term monitoring.

The objectives of the survey were to:

- Record observations of coral cover and community composition, algae cover and major fish taxa, as a rapid assessment of reef health within the Community Conservation Area; and
- Record photographic footage of the benthic substrate for storage in the SPC database to enable future analysis.



Figure 6: An example of a photo taken of the substrate. Figure 7: Setting up the transect.