Project Update: September 2019

We are a quarter way through the elasmobranch diversity and abundance study in Rote Island. Fortunately, by redesigning the BRUV camera attachment system, we have not lost any cameras since June 2019. There have been failed drops as expected but that's just how science goes. So far, we have deployed 65 BRUV drops successfully along the west and south side of the island, and we have about 97 drops left. The weather in Rote has been really rough this season, the trade winds have been non-stop since June 2019, in which has led to cancelled field days and failed drops. We are hoping to finish all the BRUV drops before November 2019 when the season ends; otherwise we will be continuing the BRUV drops next year in March and April. We haven't fully analysed the BRUV footage, but it will start this month and continue during the field off-season in December 2019 and January 2020.

The fisheries-dependent side of the survey has given very interesting new records of species. We have hired a local Rotenese with a fisheries degree as our full-time enumerator at the Nemberala harbour. Nemberala doesn't land sharks or rays everyday, but they do give an interesting insight to what the fishermen "opportunistically" catch with a hand line from their purse seine boats. Wedgefish are occasionally landed and is the only high-priced elasmobranch to the fishermen. The body would go for US$ 20, while their three fins go up to US$ 150. The rest of the elasmobranchs are either caught for the local market or for their personal consumption. We will be conducting a forum group discussion on the historical catch data with the fishermen next month to collect more anecdotal data of what has been seen in Rote in the past. Since June 2019, our biodiversity list has gone up to 20 different species of elasmobranch, just from the western side of Rote.