

Social Assessment Plan

Project Title: Filling gaps and improving knowledge of Freshwater Fauna in Solomon and Vanuatu

Organization: Société Française d'Ichtyologie (SFI)

Application Code: 64245

Preamble

While the Ecosystem Profile for East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspots provides some useful information on the socio-economic context of the region, we have considered useful for this plan to go into more details. We have added those details in the first section below.

A key sentence in the profile that has drawn our attention is: *“Culture and custom are important throughout the East Melanesian Islands.... /... Some of the most relevant aspects of culture and custom to biodiversity conservation relate to user rights, ownership, conflict resolution, clanship, traditional leadership, initiations and ceremonies.../...The vast majority of the people still adhere to traditional culture and customs.../...Thus for practical as well as ethical reasons, all on-the-ground conservation activities in the Eastern Melanesian Islands must be implemented with the participation and consent of local communities.”* Based on CEPF feedback on the submitted LoI on our proposed project, this Social Assessment document proposes to demonstrate that the project will comply with CEPF’s Safeguard Policy on Indigenous Peoples through an initial understanding of each site’s characteristics as well as actions and behaviours that will contribute to participation and consent of local communities to our project.

1. Indigenous Peoples

Vanuatu

Vanuatu has a population of 221,506 ni-Vanuatus (2011 census). Vanuatu's population (estimated in 2008 as growing 2.4% annually) is placing increasing pressure on land and resources for agriculture, grazing, hunting, and fishing. Some 90% of Vanuatu

households fish at sea and consume fish, which has caused intense fishing pressure near coastal villages and the depletion of near-shore fish species. While well vegetated, most islands show signs of deforestation. The islands have been logged, particularly of high-value timber, subjected to wide-scale slash-and-burn agriculture, and converted to coconut plantations and cattle ranches, and now show evidence of increased soil erosion and landslides. Many upland watersheds are being deforested and degraded, and fresh water is becoming increasingly scarce for local villages. Proper waste disposal, as well as water and air pollution, are becoming troublesome issues around urban areas and large villages. Additionally, the lack of employment opportunities in industry and inaccessibility to markets have combined to lock rural families into a subsistence or self-reliance mode, putting tremendous pressure on local ecosystems.

The sites to be surveyed are located in three different provinces:

- In the North: Torba (Banks and Torres Islands incl Gaua).
- In the centre: Sheffa (incl. Laika and Tongoa)
- In the South: Tafea (incl Tanna and Aneityum).

The provinces are in turn divided into municipalities (usually consisting of an individual island) headed by a council and a mayor elected from among the members of the council.

Vanuatu may be divided into three major cultural regions. In the north, wealth is established by how much one can give away. Pigs, particularly those with rounded tusks, are considered a symbol of wealth throughout Vanuatu. In the centre, more traditional Melanesian cultural systems dominate. In the south, a system involving grants of title with associated privileges has developed.

Most islands have sacred sites. For instance Gaua has many stone relics (house bases and walls), evidence of more populous times, with also obelisks and monoliths of cultural significance. The island has a population of 2491 (in 2009), with an annual growth rate of 2.0 percent. This population is scattered in various coastal villages on the western, southern and northeastern sides of the island. The eastern side has a few hamlets with an immigrant population coming mainly from the two smaller islands Merig and Merelava, southeast of Gaua. The largest village is *Jolap*, on the west coast. Besides the language of this immigrant population (Mwerlap), there are five languages traditionally spoken on Gaua: Lakon or Vuré; Oirat; Koro; Dorig and Nume.

Laika and Tongoa belong to the Shepherd Islands a group of islands lying between the larger islands of Epi and Éfaté, in the Shefa province of Vanuatu. The aggregate land area is 88 km². At the 2009 census the population numbered 3634. Tongoa is one of the largest islands in the group. Two languages are spoken on these islands: North Éfaté, spoken on Tongoa; and Namakura, spoken on Tongoa,

Tanna is the most populous island of Tafea Province, with a population of about 29,000, and one of the most populous islands in the country. Isangel, the provincial administrative capital, is on the west coast near the island's largest town of Lénakel. Ni-Vanuatu people from Tanna follow a more traditional lifestyle than many other islands. There are three main languages spoken on Tanna: the southern language of Kwamera, the South-Western language adjacent to the slopes of Tokosmera, of which there are many dialects spoken by very small groupings, constitute two of the languages. Many people on Tanna also speak Bislama, which is one of Vanuatu's three official languages (together with English and French). To help preserve the integrity of culture as a tourism asset, only local people are permitted to act as guides.

Aneityum is the southernmost island of Vanuatu. The larger of its two villages is Anelcauhat on the south side. Aneityum had a population of 915 in 2009. The main language of Aneityum island is also called Aneityum.

Previous collaborations with the Vanuatu Department of Environment and Conservation, which has been working with us for 10 years, and who currently works with Vanuatu protected areas and communities such as Vatthe Conservation Area (Santo Island); Duviara conservation area (Ambae Island), have enabled us to approach and work with indigenous people and understand their requirements in relation to our activities. .

Solomon Islands

As of 2006, the majority of the 552,438 people in Solomon Islands are ethnically Melanesian (94.5%). Polynesian (3%) and Micronesian (1.2%) are the two other significant groups. There are a few thousand ethnic Chinese.

The number of local languages listed for Solomon Islands is important (70). On the central islands, Melanesian languages (predominantly of the Southeast Solomonian group) are spoken. On the outliers, Rennell and Bellona to the south, Tikopia, Anuta and Fatutaka to the

far east, Sikaiana to the north east, and Luaniua to the north (Ontong Java Atoll, also known as Lord Howe Atoll), Polynesian languages are spoken. The immigrant population of Gilbertese (i-Kiribati) speaks a Micronesian language. While English is the official language, only 1–2% of the population speak English; the lingua franca is Solomons Pijin.

The sites that we included in our project are located on islands belonging to two different provinces (Choiseul – Mt Maetambe-Kolombangara River and Guadalcanal – Guadalcanal watersheds). In the 2009 national census the Choiseul population was 26,372. The population of the Guadalcanal province is 93,613 (2009), not including the capital (Honiara) territory.

Mt Maetambe/Kolombangara River are located on Choiseul Island in western Solomon Islands, (native name Lauru), which is the largest island (2 971 km²) of the Choiseul Province. The Guadalcanal watersheds are on Guadalcanal. Both sites contain the best primary watersheds of some of the Solomons' largest riverine systems. Guadalcanal communities are receptive to visitors. Someone visiting a village for the first time or even returning after a long absence will be given a '*Chupu*' comprising pigs, root crops, betelnut, and so on. Likewise, those leaving after staying with a community will often give a '*Chupu*' to the community as a reciprocal gesture for the reception and hospitality. This is not mandatory but a customary obligation practiced throughout Guadalcanal.

2. Potential Impacts and Mitigation Strategies

Most of the communities that will be encountered in our surveys are village-based, subsistence farming communities. The proposed project activities have never caused challenges for communities that we have visited in both countries in the past, and we do not anticipate this project to generate anything different; mostly because our proposed activities are not initially promoting conservation management practices but rather complement essential gaps in the knowledge of freshwater biodiversity at those sites. Any recommendations that may come from our survey results will be fed through appropriate existing and relevant government/CBO/NGO-led conservation frameworks.

We identify before arrival traditional and sacred sites as well as sites that are important (exclusive) to villagers (swimming/bathing sites for instance) and are respectful of those sites.

In Vanuatu we will build our approach as per previous successful collaborations with the

Vanuatu Department of Environment and Conservation, who has been advising us for 10 years (the Department currently works with Vanuatu protected areas and communities such as Vatthe Conservation Area (Santo Island); Duviara conservation area (Ambae Island).

For the Solomon Islands our approach relies on recommendations of our partners, the NGO ‘Solomon Islands Community Conservation Partnership (SICCP)’, especially those of one of its member, David Boseto (Solomon nationality), who works on Solomon freshwater fishes and who has been working with local communities and authorities for 10 years during the prospection of rivers across the archipelago.

3. Community Participation and Consultation

Two members of our team - David Boseto and Donna Kalfatak, are indigenous people; for Solomons Islands and Vanuatu respectively. We will follow their guidance as to best approach and work with local communities where required. All our previous surveys in Vanuatu have involved Donna and all activities run with her during these surveys have been successfully implemented. Most of the communities encountered are village-based, subsistence farming communities. The type of approach used is typically that recommended by the CEPF's safeguard policy on Indigenous People: identify relevant local communities, discuss with them our proposed activities, gauge their possible level of involvement (them taking part and helping us fish in the rivers and explaining their knowledge of diversity of fish present on their river, their use, their local names etc.). In remote areas where we may stay overnight, we often, where appropriate, buy meals from those communities and share village life. David also has a broad similar experience in his home country (the Solomons) and will assist us ensuring the policies are fully abided by. The plan will in particular include the need for a monitoring report on how we complied with the CEPF Social Safeguard policies.

4. Monitoring Plan

Free, prior and informed consent with the local communities is the guiding principle of our project implementation. We will jointly conduct with our partners an inventory of villages that will be encountered by the project activities so that they can be informed in advance of our visit and planned activities. Prior to any fishing and once on site, we will use participatory methodology to gather local knowledge on freshwater fauna. We will monitor how we complied with the CEPF Social Safeguard policies during each on-the-ground

intervention. A report will be provided after each intervention where contact with local indigenous took place. However, as stated above, and because of our long experience in the region and the inclusion in our team of two also experienced indigenous people, because of the small size of our team, we do not anticipate any major social impact on local communities. We accept nevertheless that any contact generates a social impact, and based on our previous experience we expect it to be positive rather than negative. We therefore propose to report our observations in that respect, regardless. Would any unexpected grievance occur with a local community, we have detailed below how we propose to deal to it.

Grievance Mechanism

Meetings will typically be held with the local members of the community to discuss and formulate any concern associated to our proposed activity that could affect them or other members of their community. All the consultations and discussions will be held, where necessary, in their local languages, to ensure that all the indigenous people with an interest in our project, can participate in the process. This therefore requires to identify at least one member of the local community that can understand us and translate to others who can't. The consent of the community on our activity will be obtained before any surveys are implemented. Minutes of the meetings will be kept and copies of the minutes will be filed and distributed. Any actions that require the consent of the community will be clearly described in the minutes and consent will be recorded in the minutes.