



**REPORT ON THE MISSION  
TO  
EAST RENNELL WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY &  
MAROVO LAGOON, SOLOMON ISLANDS**

**30 March – 10 April 2005**



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The programme and itinerary for the mission were arranged in collaboration with Lawrence Foana'ota, Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum and member of the National Commission for UNESCO, and by our field guide Jeffrey Kaitu'u, a customary landowner in East Rennell who has a tourist lodge in Tegano Village in which we stayed while on site. The premier of the Rennell and Bellona Province, Matthew Guisaga, accompanied our visit and facilitated our meetings. We thank the Paramount Chief, Newman Tegeta, the Council of Chiefs, other chiefs and leaders of the area, and the women and the young people, for their willingness to talk with us and give us the information we required, and for their warm hospitality. We are grateful to the Government officials in Honiara with whom we met at short notice, including Andrew Nemaia, Director of Tourism, Steve-Daniel Likeaveke, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Moses Biliki, Director of Environment and Conservation. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to Ms Jan McDonald for providing us with valuable information on Marovo Lagoon. In Honiara we also had informative discussions with Julie Affleck, NZAID Manager in the New Zealand High Commission, with Jan McDonald, Environment Programme Manager, UNDP and, on tourism issues, with Wilson Maelaua, Managing Director of Tourism Solomons Ltd. We are thankful to Grant and Jill Kelly, owners of Uepi Resort, and Corey Howell of Wilderness Lodge for their facilitation in visiting villages and touring the Lagoon by boat, and providing information on conservation and logging issues in Marovo Lagoon. The mission was commissioned and funded in full by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the World Conservation Union, IUCN.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. Background**

East Rennell was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1998 as a natural property under criterion N (ii).

Since inscription the New Zealand Government, acting on behalf of World Heritage, initiated projects in ecotourism and small business development including the building of lodges, supply of canoes, motors, a vehicle, chainsaw and commencement of a bakery, restaurant, poultry and honey production. An Ecotourism Plan and an outline of a Resource Management Plan were also produced, the former also covering Marovo Lagoon. This programme was suspended in 2000, primarily because of civil unrest and governmental instability, leaving the projects uncompleted. Today, three lodges are running and another three remain incomplete. All other developments were commenced but have failed. A project funded by the Japan Funds-in-Trust of USD 20,000 to assess the cultural and cultural landscape values of Rennell Island was also cancelled in 2000 due to the civil unrest.

Since 1998, there has been essentially no communication from the State Party regarding the World Heritage Area. The WH Committee at its 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> Sessions in 2003 and 2004, respectively, addressed the requirement at the time of inscription for the SP to report within three years on the preparation of national WH legislation and the development of Resource Management Plan for the property. Additionally, the Committee requested a state of conservation report on the property. The Committee further requested the WHC and IUCN to

conduct a mission to report on the above matters. In May/June 2004, the World Heritage Centre funded the Director of the Solomon Islands National Museum to visit the property and prepare the ground for the WHC-IUCN mission, the report of which was subsequently presented to the Committee at its 28<sup>th</sup> Session. The WHC-IUCN mission took place in the period 25 March – 12 April including 7 days spent in East Rennell. Additionally, 3 days were spent in Marovo Lagoon at the request of the Museum Director to reassess the prospects for World Heritage in the area.

During their mission, the experts from the World Heritage Centre and IUCN held meetings with the chiefs and the other leaders of the customary land-owners, the women of the community and the young people. They toured the property by canoe and by foot and visited the all four villages. They were accompanied by the Premier of the Rennell and Bellona Province. Discussions were also held with the Director of the Department of Tourism and Culture, which is the World Heritage State Party Representative, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Director of the Environment and Conservation Department, and the Director of the National Museum. Additionally, they met with the New Zealand High Commission, the UNDP representative for the Solomon Islands and a private tourism consultant in Honiara.

## **2. Preparation of the National World Heritage Legislation**

There has been no attempt to further develop the draft Bill or pass the legislation. A letter, dated 12 April 2005, from the Director of Tourism to the Director of the World Heritage Centre notes that his Department is now collaborating with the Department of Conservation and Environment to develop the legislation.

## **3. Resource Management Plan for East Rennell**

The 1998 draft Resource Management Plan outline has not been further developed. The above letter from the Director of Tourism notes that work is now being undertaken to prepare the Plan. Preparation of the Plan has also recently been included in the workplan of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

## **4. State of Conservation of the Property**

### **4.a. National Administration**

The principal governmental agency responsible for World Heritage is the Department of Tourism and Culture. The resignation in 2000 and non-reappointment of the department's World Heritage project officer, and confusion over the relative responsibilities of the Tourism Department and the National Museum, has resulted in a breakdown of communication with the World Heritage Centre. The Department of Environment and Conservation has a statutory responsibility for natural resource planning. It has some capacity to contribute to management planning for East Rennell, but to date this has not been requested. The recently established National Commission for UNESCO has no representative for natural World Heritage.

### **4.b. Civil Unrest**

The outbreak of civil unrest in June 2000 had a profound impact on the administration and management of the property. The Solomon Islands' Government became dysfunctional and was unable to attend to its WH responsibilities. There was little or no contact with East Rennell and no direct assistance was provided to the customary owners. Governmental stability is slowly returning, and discussions held with officials during the mission were instrumental in bringing WH back on to the Government's agenda.

#### 4.c. Community Management

The World Heritage area is managed by the customary land-owners who occupy four villages within the property. Leadership is provided by the Paramount Chief, village chiefs and elders. The lack of Government support and the absence of any tangible World Heritage benefit to the majority of the customary owners led to disappointment and confusion, which divided the community into two groups with different management objectives. The mission became a catalyst for reconciliation of the differences in the community and the establishment of a single contact group for the customary owners of East Rennell.

#### 4.d. Management Planning

There is no management plan for the property. Consequently, there is no framework for determining the World Heritage management objectives or for developing, prioritising and implementing projects for protection and sustainable resource management.

#### 4.e. Integrity of the Site

The World Heritage natural values are intact under customary ownership. There are no immediate threats to the natural environment of the land, lake and the surrounding seas. Increased use of motorized canoes has had minimal impact on the lake water quality. There have been several cyclones, but these are natural events from which the indigenous vegetation and wildlife recover. The cyclones have had severe short-term impacts on the local communities through destruction of buildings and gardens. It may have been possible for assistance to have been provided from the World Heritage Fund or other resources in recovering from cyclone damage. There have been some suggestions of logging development, forest planting, mining and fisheries in or around the property, but none of these appears likely to occur in the near future.

#### 4.f. Ecotourism and Small Business Development

Immediately after inscription of the property, several projects funded by the New Zealand Government were initiated to develop tourism and small sustainable business enterprises. Six small lodges were constructed along with a bakery, poultry farm and honey production centres. A motorized canoe, truck and other equipment such as chain-saws were also provided. These incomplete projects were suspended after one and a half years because of the civil unrest within the country. Only three lodges were completed and all other developments have subsequently failed. Tourists access to the property is extremely difficult and is a major barrier to further tourism development.

#### 4.g. Benefits to the Community

World Heritage designation raised unrealistic expectations among members of the local community for rural development. It was anticipated that World Heritage status would bring

immediate benefits, especially cash, to all the people. It was also expected there would be substantial improvements of schools, medical centres, transport infrastructure, housing and enhanced tourism. The absence of such benefits has led to disappointment, confusion, suspicion, division and anger within the community. The mission provided an important opportunity to explain the meaning of World Heritage benefits thereby clarifying some misunderstandings and alleviating many of the concerns. The community now has a more realistic and positive attitude to future conservation and sustainable development of their environment and resources as a World Heritage Area.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE MISSION**

### **Inscription history**

East Rennell was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1998. Currently, it is the only World Heritage Area in the Pacific Sub-Region (excluding New Zealand and Australia).

### **Inscription criteria and World Heritage values**

The property was inscribed under natural criterion (ii). It is located on the south-eastern part of Rennell Island, the southernmost island of the Solomon Islands and the world's largest uplifted coral atoll. Comprising approximately 37,000 ha, the property includes the 15,500 ha Lake Tegano (Tengano), a former lagoon and the largest lake in the insular Pacific region, a limestone karst landscape rising to about 200 m asl, and the surrounding sea to 3 nm offshore. The largely unmodified forest vegetation includes 10 endemic plant species, 11 species of bats, 43 bird species four of which are endemic, 27 species of land snails and ca.731 insect species. The customary owners of the property are some 700 Polynesian people who occupy four villages and live by subsistence gardening, hunting and fishing.

### **Integrity issues raised by the IUCN evaluation report at the time of inscription**

The evaluation report noted that the conditions of integrity for the site were not fully met. The property was atypical of natural WH sites in being under customary ownership and subject to sustainable resource uses. It lacked a legal basis of protection, there was no management plan and there was a need to increase management capacity through education and training. In agreeing to list the property, the WH Committee requested that the State Party "should proceed with the preparation of the Resource Management Plan and the draft national World Heritage Protection Bill and that a mission be undertaken in three years time to assess the progress made."

### **Examination of the State of Conservation by the WH Committee**

At its 27<sup>th</sup> Session in 2003, the World Heritage Committee received an in-house State of Conservation report, which noted that since inscription of the property virtually no information on its state of conservation had been received and no official periodic report had been received from the State Party. The lack of a monitoring system, human and financial resources, and institutional co-ordination were identified, and the existence of civil unrest was noted, which among other things had led to cancellation of US\$20,000 Japan Funds in Trust for assessment of cultural and cultural landscape values of the Rennell Island. At its 28<sup>th</sup> Session in 2004, the WH Committee received a report of a visit to East Rennell by a

member of the Solomon Islands National Commission for UNESCO. It requested the World Heritage Centre and IUCN to organize a joint UNESCO-IUCN mission to the property to:

- a) assess and report on the state of conservation of East Rennell;
- b) determine the state of preparation and appropriateness of the Resource Management Plan for the property and the draft national World Heritage Protection Bill, and
- c) document and assess the effectiveness of the customary protection of the property.

### **Reasons for the mission**

The joint WHC/IUCN mission was undertaken at the request of the WH Committee as noted in the previous section. The terms of reference for the IUCN consultant are at Annex 1. Essentially this was a monitoring mission intended to evaluate threats to the site, to provide answers to questions raised by the WH Committee in relation to national legislation and management planning, and to make recommendations for future action to improve the management of the site and its conservation status. Until 2004, there had been no communication on the site for a period of about six years since its inscription and a monitoring mission to the site to report on the state of conservation was overdue. There had been earlier unsuccessful attempts to conduct a mission. In 2004 the WH Centre funded a visit to the site by Lawrence Foana'ota, the Director of the Solomons Islands National Museum and a member of the National Commission for UNESCO that prepared the ground for the WHC-IUCN mission. His report, presented to the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the WH Committee, is at Annex 2.

The joint WHC-IUCN mission was conducted by Salamat Ali Tabbasum of the WHC and Paul Dingwall on behalf of IUCN, and took place between 28 March and 5 April 2005. Five days were spent in the East Rennell WH area. Access was by a 90-minute flight from Honiara to West Rennell, via Bellona, in a STL Twin Otter aircraft landing on grass airstrips. This was followed by a four-hour overland trip by four-wheel-drive vehicle on a rough track to the lakehead and a 30-minute canoe voyage on Lake Tegano to a tourist lodge in Tegano Village, which was the base of our operations in the area. Travel in the area was by foot and by canoe, with visits made to several natural areas around the lake and to all four villages. Meetings were held with the Paramount Chief of the customary owners, with chiefs and community leaders and elders, with the women of Tegano Village and with young people. Discussions were also held with the Premier of the Rennell and Bellona Province who accompanied the field visit and facilitated the meetings.

In Honiara, meetings were held with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Director of Environment and Conservation and the Director of Tourism. Discussions were also held with the New Zealand High Commission, the UNDP representative in the Solomon Islands, the Director of the National Museum and a local tourism business operator.

## **NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY**

### **National protected area legislation**

Currently, there is no national protected area legislation in force in the Solomon Islands, and no statutory basis for establishment and management of World Heritage Areas. There is some incipient development of legislation and regulation for marine protected areas through the Fisheries Department. The Department of Environment and Conservation is assisting in the management of the Arnavon Marine Protected Area established under provincial legislation in Isabel Province, in a co-operative arrangement with the local community and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Officials of the Department, which is the Government's principal agency for protected areas, recognize the need for national legislation and expressed the hope that they can obtain the capacity to develop it in the near future. The 1998 Wildlife Protection and Management Act is not in force because of some legal technicalities. The absence of protected area laws is a fundamental gap in the country's legislative armory, which has made it very difficult to regulate resource developments such as unsustainable logging operations in Marovo Lagoon. In filling the gap, the Solomon Islands could benefit by learning from the experience of other Pacific Island countries, and from expertise in IUCN, among others.

Prior to inscription of the property, a World Heritage Protection Bill had been drafted but not enacted, and consideration was being given to replacing it with new Environmental Bill. During its evaluation, IUCN noted that customary law and the rights of the customary owners were acknowledged in the national constitution, but concluded that World Heritage legislation would reinforce these rights and impart some legal commitment for World Heritage sites at national level. Accordingly, in agreeing to list the site under the Convention, the WH Committee requested the State Party to proceed with enactment of the World Heritage Bill. Discussions with officials during our mission revealed that there has been no attempt to further develop the draft Bill or pass the legislation, but a letter given to us from the Director of Tourism to the Director, WHC reiterates the intention of the Government to proceed with this in the near future.

### **Institutional framework and capacity**

The State Party representative for World Heritage is the Department of Tourism and Culture within the Ministry of Commerce, Employment and Tourism. The Department of Environment and Conservation in the Ministry of Natural Resources has responsibility for national resource planning and development, and therefore has a role to play in preparing the management plan for the East Rennell WH Area. The Fisheries Department regulates commercial fisheries and is developing statutory provisions for marine protection, which could assist in re-enforcing protection for the marine component of the WH Area.

Our discussions revealed that, at all levels of Government, there is a view that responsibility for World Heritage in the country is not necessarily appropriately positioned. The choice of the Government's tourism agency to execute control over WH matters signals a clear



intention to promote tourism development through World Heritage. Moreover, since the country's cultural affairs are administered in the same Ministry as Tourism, there is the perception that cultural heritage rather than natural heritage is favoured by this arrangement. There is a widely held view, with which we have some sympathy, that at national level the principal governmental responsibility for the East Rennell WH Area should rest with the Department of Environment and Conservation. Whatever the institutional arrangement, it is imperative that there be a collaborative approach to WH management among all appropriate agencies of the Central Government.

Interagency collaboration is especially important because the administrative capacity for World Heritage is limited and there are insufficient numbers of officials and other staff with specialist knowledge and ability for policy and planning. The Ministry of Natural Resources is engaged in developing a strategic plan and an associated workplan with some advice from UNDP and New Zealand. There is also a pressing need to revise an outdated national tourism strategy. Completion of these would provide a much needed policy framework and strategic direction for World Heritage management. Officials indicated that they were endeavouring to recruit more qualified staff to advance this work, but lack of funding is hampering this and external aid is being sought. The WH Fund is a potential source of short-term support.

Currently there is no management plan for East Rennell. At the time of inscription a document entitled "Resource Management Objectives and Guidelines" had been prepared with assistance from the New Zealand Government. Production of this broadly based document was intended to begin the process toward completion of a management plan for the property involving the customary owners. IUCN's view that the plan should be completed was endorsed by the WH Committee. Officials confirmed for us that the plan had not been further developed. But we learned that its preparation had been signaled in the workplan of the Department of Environment and Conservation, and the State Party has now advised the WHC in writing that work on the plan will proceed imminently.

### **Management structure**

Land and freshwaters within the WH property are managed by the customary owners. They have a hierarchical leadership structure comprising a paramount chief and some 20 chiefs. Other leaders are found among school teachers and church elders, with the four villages equally divided between the South Seas Evangelical Union and the Seventh Day Adventist churches. Religion plays an important part in the life of the Rennellese people, and strongly influences their attitudes to the use and protection of natural resources.

There is no specific structural arrangement for management in the WH property. A former incipient committee structure has broken down and we found a community divided over issues of ownership and access to assets provided soon after WH listing, and with widely differing management objectives for the WH project. In our discussions with the chiefs and other community leaders we stressed the need for a unified voice on WH matters. They responded positively by holding a special meeting to try to resolve their differences, and they agreed to rest local leadership for World Heritage management in the hands of the East Rennell Environment and Conservation Trust Board (ERECTB).

Composed primarily of younger, better educated villagers, this is an incorporated society with its own constitution drafted in 2001. It exists to set standards and guidelines for environmental protection and sustainable use and development of natural resources, while facilitating income generation for the customary owners. The objectives of its members include ensuring that the people of East Rennell are fully involved in the administration, management and operation of the WH project and that they receive a fair understanding and benefits from the WH project while upholding the principles of resource protection. This group opposes the role of traditional chiefs in matters of resource management. It was formed soon after WH listing of East Rennell, partly in response to perceived inequity in the authorizing of, and sharing of benefits from, the eco-tourism and related small business development projects funded largely by the New Zealand Government (see below).

The meetings held with and among community leaders during our visit were facilitated by the Premier of the Rennell and Bellona Province. This regional level of Government has not been actively or directly involved in management of the WH property. Nor is this particularly welcomed by the customary owners who appear to wish to retain management autonomy. The premier's view expressed to us is that, in exercising its regional overview of environmental management, the provincial government's role in East Rennell is limited to indirect assistance, and mediation in any local disputes. Our view is that input from the province is essential where regional issues, such as development of tourism infrastructure, impinge on WH interests. Thus, we favour a WH administrative arrangement that involves the provincial premier or, at least, keeps his office in the communication loop.

### **Recognition of values under international treaties and programmes**

Currently the East Rennell property is listed as a WH natural property, but there is considerable interest in cultural listing also. At this stage the cultural values are not well documented and require further research. As noted above, Japanese funding was made available for assessment of the cultural values of Rennell Island but the project never eventuated. From our discussions and observations, we feel that there is undoubted merit in considering future re-nomination of the property as a mixed site or cultural landscape under the WH Convention, but conclude that this is some way off yet, pending further investigation. The WH Fund could be used to support this work, along with other potential donor agencies and countries.

There is obvious potential for considering protection of the property under the Ramsar Convention for the protection of international wetlands. Lake Tegano is an internationally significant freshwater body, rich in biodiversity and with an abundant seabird population. Amongst other conventions, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), Biosafety Protocol (Catagena), International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, Int. Plant Protection Convention, and South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) can be instrumental in protecting the property.

## **IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF ISSUES AND THREATS**

### **Management effectiveness**

Serious questions arise as to the past and current effectiveness of the Solomon Islands authorities in managing the East Rennell WH area. However, some of the reasons for this no longer exist. Moreover, we are encouraged by a professed willingness on behalf of the administering agencies to improve the situation and in particular by the optimism and commitment of the local community.

Inadequacy in past WH management cannot be understood without reference to the civil unrest that broke out in the Solomon Islands in June 2000, just two years after inscription of the East Rennell property. From that time the Government became essentially dysfunctional, and WH was dropped from its agenda. Not only was central governmental support affected, the significant amount of external aid being provided for WH management, particularly from the New Zealand Government, was also suspended and has not been resumed. Funds offered from Japanese sources for cultural WH were also suspended on account of the unstable government situation. Also contributing to loss of momentum in WH was the resignation at that time of the WH project officer from the Department of Tourism, and lack of a replacement. This largely explains the absence of reporting on WH and engagement by the State Party over the past seven years. It also accounts for the almost total lack of contact between the central Government and the customary owners since East Rennell attained WH status.

The country is now slowly returning to normality, but government administration has been badly affected and a much diminished capacity relies heavily upon external funding and support. An illustration of the difficulties faced is the lack of funds to provide an official email service for the Director of Environment and Conservation. Our discussions helped to put WH back on the agenda, but optimal self-sustained performance on the part of the central Solomon Islands Government is likely to be some years away yet. In the interim the Government requires assistance both with funding and expertise if it is to intervene more effectively in WH matters.

At the local level the property is managed by the customary owners. To date, World Heritage status has changed nothing in this management. In fact, little management intervention is required in protecting the natural values of the site, which is protected by customary practices that include a respect for the natural environment and sustainable use of its resources. The rudimentary committee structure established to manage the so-called WH project on site had fragmented in the past, but encouraging efforts have been made to ensure that there is one unified voice for site management based on consultation and agreement among all customary owners, as discussed elsewhere in this report.

### **Factors affecting the property and matters of integrity**

#### **Integrity of the Site**

The World Heritage natural values of East Rennell are intact under customary ownership. As far as we could determine on our mission, there have been no significant changes to the natural environment since inscription. There are no immediate threats to the natural environment of the land, lake and the surrounding seas. Increased use of motorized canoes has had minimal

impact on the lake water quality. Rennell Island is subject to severe cyclonic storms, with catastrophic ones occurring at intervals of about seven years. There have been several cyclones in recent years. The indigenous forest vegetation and wildlife are naturally adapted to cyclones and they recover readily. However, the cyclones have had severe short-term impacts on the local communities through destruction of buildings and gardens. One tourist lodge owner informed us that a combination of damage from cyclones and termites had destroyed his lodge. Cyclones have caused food shortages and other hardships, the amelioration of which has required external assistance. Schools and a medical clinic in East Rennell have been rebuilt with funding from Australia, New Zealand and the European Union, but remain very under-resourced. The medical clinic, with one nurse attending to 700 people, had no medical supplies at the time of our visit. It may have been possible for some initial assistance to have been provided for cyclone recovery from the World Heritage Fund and other international conservation sources.

There have been some suggestions of logging development, forest plantings for carbon sequestration purposes, mining and fisheries in or around the property, but none of these appears likely to occur in the near future. Timber species sought by loggers are not common in the property. The forest plantings are intended for West Rennell only. The potential for bauxite mining has been previously assessed as uneconomic. Fisheries, if established, would probably target lobster and sea cucumber and would be subject to national fisheries regulations.

### **Ecotourism and Small Business Development**

Whatever the messages conveyed at the time, the people of East Rennell were firmly of the opinion that attaining World Heritage status would result in immediate material benefits to the local community and increased wealth, particularly in the form of cash. This view was encouraged by the commencement, immediately after inscription, of a substantial project funded by the New Zealand Government to develop tourism and other small sustainable business enterprises. Six small lodges were constructed along with a bakery, poultry farm and honey production centres. There were also plans for construction of a visitor centre at a roadside gateway to the property and a boat landing at the lake. Motorized canoes, a truck and other equipment such as 2-way radios, chain-saws and fishing gear were provided. These incomplete projects were suspended after one and a half years because of the civil unrest within the country. Only three lodges were completed and all other developments have subsequently failed. Today there are few tourist visitors to the area. Ownership of and access to the assets from the collapsed project created major tensions and disputes within the communities, which in turn contributed to the local leadership divisions.

The reasons behind the project failure are manifold. In retrospect, it is apparent that the New Zealand initiatives, though substantial and well-intentioned, might have been better implemented in some aspects. The two New Zealand project managers, despite achieving much, became too directly involved in the local political situation, taking sides in the internal disputes and engendering feelings of favoritism in the sharing of benefits and arousing jealousies. (A lesson for the future is that such project leaders, while working closely with the local people, should retain a degree of independence and neutrality, and preferably should establish a project team incorporating local people, thereby ensuring broad community buy-

in and increasing the capacity of the people in project management. Projects should also have very clear lines of accountability and transparency in funding.) Dissatisfaction among the people was compounded by a realization that no direct benefit was being received by the majority of villagers, leading to a perception that most of the project funds were going to lodge owners or being siphoned off through corruption of community leaders and politicians, especially at national level. The latter view was accentuated by feelings among the minority Polynesian peoples of Rennell Island of racial discrimination on the part of the predominantly Melanesian national Government. In 2000, the outbreak of civil unrest in the country and collapse of the Government understandably led to suspension of the New Zealand funding mid-stream. Significantly, this cancelled the phase of the project intended to improve the capacity of the communities to conduct their business enterprises. Thus, the vitally needed marketing of ecotourism opportunities was completely neglected, for example. It also became clear to us, especially from talking with the women, that inadequate attention was able to be given to awareness-raising in the community about World Heritage and the meaning of eco-tourism.

Furthermore, suspension of the project precluded the opportunity for collaboration with the national and provincial Governments on the provision of the required infrastructure for road and air travel to allow tourists to access the property, and provide ready access to markets in Honiara for products of the small businesses. Arguably, an agreement and progress on these issues should have preceded any in-situ development of tourist facilities and small businesses. Regrettably, tourist access to the property remains extremely difficult and is a major barrier to further tourism development. There is a vital need to provide regular and reliable air travel to Rennell Island from the international airport at Honiara, and to improve the 45 km of road to the property from the West Rennell airport, which currently takes a very uncomfortable four hours to negotiate in the single vehicle available for this purpose. Alternatively, and possibly additionally, a new airstrip could be built adjacent to the property. The previously surveyed site for this is now occupied by a school, but we were informed there is a possible alternative site near Tegano Village. The feasibility of these options requires testing as soon as possible.

For many among the community of East Rennell there was an unrealistic expectation that World Heritage designation would bring substantive rural development in the form of new schools, hospitals, housing, hotel development and roading. The absence of such benefits led to disappointment, confusion, suspicion (of corruption), division and anger within the community, compounded by a virtually total lack of communication from the Solomon Islands Government or from the WHC. Our mission provided an invaluable opportunity to explain the meaning of World Heritage benefits, thereby clarifying some misunderstandings and alleviating many of the concerns. Consequently, the community now has a more realistic and positive attitude to future conservation and sustainable development of their environment and resources as a World Heritage Area.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The joint WHC-IUCN mission achieved its objectives. The East Rennell World Heritage Area was visited, extensive first-hand observations were made by canoe and on foot to assess the state of the natural environment and to visit all four villages in the area, and discussions

were held with the chiefs and leaders of the customary landowners, the women and the young people. Discussions were also held with key regional and central Government politicians and officials, with representatives of relevant donor countries and international conservation aid agencies, and with others having interests in the East Rennell area. Above all, the mission was a catalyst for re-establishing contact and communication between the World Heritage Centre and the State Party, which had lapsed over a period of some six years since the site was inscribed on the WH List. East Rennell is an important component of the global network of World Heritage natural sites, and something of a model for natural World Heritage areas among South Pacific countries. The judgement of the mission team is that there have been inadequacies in the performance of the national authorities in building local capacity, and the failure of eco-tourism and other business enterprises to deliver promised benefits to the community. This is not directly linked to customary ownership or management practices. Despite the difficulties of the past, the resilience of the local people and their desire for progress, together with a return to stable government, provide an opportunity for re-establishing an effective collaborative partnership between the Solomon Islands and the World Heritage Centre and to build on the promising start made seven years ago. The following recommendations should provide a basis for advancing the World Heritage programme for protection and sustainable management of the East Rennell World Heritage Area.

### **Recommendations**

That the World Heritage Committee:

Requests that the State Party:

- 1 establishes, through the Department of Culture and Tourism, regular communication with the World Heritage Centre;
- 2 completes the draft World Heritage Protection Bill and passes it into legislation as soon as possible;
- 3 prepares a World Heritage Management Plan for the East Rennell property as soon as possible;
- 4 collaborates actively and effectively in managing the property with other relevant central government agencies, such as the Department of Environment and Conservation; the National Commission for UNESCO; the Rennell and Bellona Provincial Government and the customary owners of East Rennell;
- 5 increases the public awareness of the World Heritage property through appropriate promotional, advocacy and educational opportunities; and
- 6 reports on progress with these actions to the World Heritage Committee within two years.

Recommends that:

- 7 a single representative body be established within the East Rennell Community for overseeing the East Rennell World Heritage Management Plan and assisting in coordinating any World Heritage projects or other related actions;

- 8 the development of the Management Plan should involve widespread consultation within the community and provide for inclusion of local people in the planning team;
- 9 the Management Plan includes provision for effective protection of the outstanding natural values of the property and for enhancing the capacity of the local community to manage the property. These should include increasing awareness, improving education and training, and providing technical assistance and information resources;
- 10 there is provision in the Management Plan for documenting traditional practices in the use and conservation of natural resources;
- 11 the Management Plan includes an ecotourism development plan and identifies potential projects for creating sustainable business enterprises compatible with World Heritage objectives. These should be intended to provide benefit to all members of the communities who live within the property;
- 12 the existing ecotourism projects be re-examined and re-instated, and ways be found to improve access to the property for tourists and other visitors, such as better roading, air travel, transport and other facilities;
- 13 the Management Plan should be endorsed and supported by the central government;
- 14 a World Heritage sub-commission be established within the National Commission for UNESCO to oversee the implementation of the Management Plan and its associated projects. This sub-commission should be representative of all relevant government stakeholders, and should develop an effective communication with the customary land-owners and the World Heritage Centre.

# **UNESCO-IUCN Mission to Marovo Lagoon**

## **Solomon Islands**

**8 – 10 April 2005**

**Salamat Ali Tabbasum (UNESCO World Heritage Centre) and Paul Dingwall (IUCN)**

### **Background**

Marovo Lagoon is widely regarded as one of the world's most significant tropical lagoon and coral reef environments, and is a world-renowned tourist destination for scuba diving. It has been proposed for World Heritage status. There are major concerns about the environmental effects of logging operations and the consequences for conservation and sustainable development of the area.

The opportunity to visit Marovo Lagoon came as an adjunct to our mission for state of conservation reporting on the East Rennell World Heritage Area. Access was via air to Seghe and our base of operations was Uepi Lodge. We undertook an extensive tour of the lagoon using boats provided by Uepi and Wilderness Lodges. We visited three villages - Chea, Matikuri, and Mbil - to discuss conservation issues with village elders. In addition to our host lodges, we visited two eco-lodges operated by indigenous owners. We observed the main logging operations from the water. In Honiara we discussed the Marovo Lagoon situation with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Director of Forestry and Conservation, and the Director of Tourism. We also talked with Wilson Maelaau, Managing Director of Tourism Solomon Ltd., Jan McDonald, UNDP Environment Programme Manager and Kenneth Bulehite, co-ordinator of the International Waters Project Solomon Islands.

### **The World Heritage Marovo eco-lodges project**

*“During the 1990s, Marovo Lagoon received substantial funding from the New Zealand Government, acting on behalf of World Heritage, in anticipation that the area would qualify for World Heritage listing (nomination of the area never proceeded). The New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) funded at least six lodges (Kajoro, Lagoon, Ropiko, Rogosakena, Tibara and Horena). In addition, WWF funded Vanua Rapita Lodge on Miche Island. All of the lodges marketed themselves as “eco-lodges” (the Lonely Planet Guide refers to them as “World Heritage–ecolodges”). They offered minimum levels of facility. All were traditional leaf-house style. Most had kitchen facilities but meals could also be ordered. A “running sheet” of what was done before a guest arrived included cleaning the area of rubbish, making the beds, providing towels, etc. Bookings could be made by radio through Solomon Islands Visitors Bureau (SIVB). None of the lodges provided the primary income of the owners”. (Taken from Ms Jan McDonald, UNDP representative in Honiara, Solomon Islands).*

The New Zealand Government suspended its project in 2000 primarily because of the civil unrest in the country. This meant that training, marketing, employment of local stakeholders in management and on-going support were given only passing consideration or ignored. During the civil tensions virtually no tourists came (the guest books show maybe two visitors



per year for these years), and the absence of an adequate Government-supported tourism infrastructure or reliable air travel also counted against successful tourism operations. The result was a poor tourism product, few visitors and little of the promised income for the local operators and communities. Many operators gave up. Of the seven lodges established, only Kajoro, Ropiko and Tibara are still operating. It is understood that Rogosakena is undergoing renovations. Horena and Vanua Rapita have closed completely. Other lodges continue to operate, but they were privately funded. Most lodges have reduced the number of people they can accommodate, having failed to maintain some of the sleeping houses. In many cases, the ablution buildings are either roofless or wall-less, or both.

### **Logging operations and the oil palm project**

In the absence of the expected financial benefits from tourism, some operators turned to loggers for income. Logging companies, predominantly Malaysian Chinese, have been operating in Marovo Lagoon since the mid-1990s, and an estimated one million cubic metres of high grade tropical hardwoods have been extracted (*pers. comm.* Corey Howell, Wilderness Lodge). Timber is extracted by clear-felling of the worst kind, with consequent accelerated soil erosion, flooding and sediment loading of streams and destruction of nearshore coral beds from excessive siltation. We observed camps, roading, temporary reclamation and wharf construction and stacks of round logs ready for loading. The logging ships are also known to carry illegal cargoes of native animals and birds, so there are substantial but unmeasured consequences for biodiversity conservation both on land and in the lagoon. The logging is localised, but short term and totally unsustainable. Corruption is commonplace at all levels of government and business. The amount of money derived from round-log export is unknown, but essentially none of it is used to benefit the great majority of the local people. The social impacts of the logging operations are wide-ranging in the local communities, and one of the former eco-lodges is being used by the loggers (see below). The sole alternative economic development project to date is the Vangunu Oil Palm project, which was begun about a decade ago but so far little planting has occurred. The terrain is too steep for oil palm plantations, and they contribute to accelerated soil erosion and pollution from pesticide and herbicide use. The project is universally recognised by government, donors and the Marovo community alike as a logging company tax/duty scam.

### **Conservation and research**

The Marovo area is primarily under customary ownership. There are no Government-administered protected areas. The GEF/UNDP/SPREP International Waters Programme (IWP) Solomon Islands is currently establishing three locally-managed marine protected areas (MPAs) in Maorovo Lagoon. It also includes marine education in schools, capacity building and awareness, community engagement and alternative income generating activities. According to the recent fisheries baseline survey in Marovo Lagoon by IWP, it appears that there is considerably less fish abundance and diversity in the inner lagoon compared to the outer. Heavy exploitation has probably led to the virtual disappearance of the larger of the giant clam species. IWP stressed the need for management of marine resources in Marovo as soon as possible to prevent further extinction of marine species. In addition, World Wide Fund for Nature and The Nature Conservancy are currently implementing conservation projects in Marovo, but we were unable to examine these in the limited time available. Corey Howell informed us that the Queensland University is implementing an environmental

research and management project, funded by the McArthur Foundation, on a transect that includes some of the logged over land and oil palm project area and an IWP-established marine reserve.

The community elders are keen to have more MPAs because of the support they provide for sustainable living. They expressed their concern over the damaging impacts of unregulated logging including siltation (which is becoming a major problem within Marovo Lagoon), pollution, and oil-spillage by logging ships. Also it was noted that loggers have been hunting birds and shipping them away. Logging has adversely affected tourism. One lodge owner has sold out to the loggers and allowed them access beside his lodge, while several others are suffering visual and amenity impacts from logging operations. Some communities have been resisting logging activities in Marovo area. But others have been won over by the logging companies who offered significant amount of cash and other gifts to land-owners and other influential people in the communities. A sudden flow of cash into the communities has created many problems such as conflicts among families, drug addiction, alcoholism and other social crimes.

Conservation and sustainable development of Marovo Lagoon, and its potential for World Heritage status, are at the crossroads. Unless immediate attention is given to the damaging impacts from logging and to restoring viable ecotourism activities, the options for protection of what remains of the pristine lagoon and its watershed, and ensuring a sustainable future for the local communities, will be severely compromised. Discussions were held with Grant and Jill Kelly, owners of Uepi Resort, and Corey Howell of Wilderness Lodge concerning a proposed World Heritage stakeholders' consultation workshop in Marovo later this year. They strongly supported the proposal and suggested that up to 30 chiefs from the Marovo Area should be invited to the workshop. It was also discussed with village elders, chiefs, and the relevant central government officials who have shown their interest in attending the workshop. A draft workshop programme is attached herewith as Annex I.

#### Recommendations:

1. That a World Heritage Stakeholders' Consultation Workshop be held in Marovo Lagoon for all stakeholders, including the central government, in November 2005 or February 2006.
2. That a re-assessment of World Heritage values of Marovo Lagoon be conducted by marine experts, which can be determined during the proposed workshop.

### **Annex I**

#### **Proposed Forum on World Heritage for Marovo Lagoon**

Title: World Heritage for Marovo: prospects, issues and options

Venue: Uepi Lodge, Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands

Date: 20 – 25 November 2005 (alternative February 2006)

Conveners: UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the World Conservation Union (IUCN)

Participants: approximately 60, including ca 30 representatives of the local communities, local stakeholders, government officials and experts from international agencies.

Objectives:

1. Review the scope and condition of World Heritage values of Marovo Lagoon.
2. Examine opportunities, problems, and potential benefits of World Heritage status.
3. Identify options for recognizing and supporting the protection and conservation of Marovo Lagoon.
4. Determine a strategy and future action for protection and sustainable development of Marovo Lagoon.
5. Prepare recommendations for the Solomon Island Government and other partners.

Programme:

Day 1 (Sunday 20<sup>th</sup>)

Arrival and registration

Day 2 (Monday 21<sup>st</sup>)

a.m. Overview of World Heritage

1. What is World Heritage? (Convention, OG and WH List)
2. State of World Heritage in the Pacific Region (plans, TL, Pacific 2009 Action Plan)
3. Marine World Heritage (case studies)
4. Tourism and World Heritage (case studies)

p.m. World Heritage and Marovo Lagoon

1. Past activities, issues and lessons learnt (e.g. NZAID Ecotourism Project, WWF etc)
2. Perspectives of tourism operators and lodge-owners
3. Local community interests and expectations

Day 3 (Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup>)

a.m. Support for World Heritage

1. Government institutional support and infrastructure (e.g. responsible departments, officials, capacity and funding)
2. International support (e.g. conservation and sustainable development instruments, institutions, funding, expertise, training, education, awareness and capacity building)

p.m. Field Trip (e.g. visits to lodges and villages)

Day 4 (Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup>)

a.m Working group discussions

1. Political, institutional and management support
2. Protection (Marine and Terrestrial)
3. Tourism development and management
4. Other sustainable development activities (e.g. small business etc)

p.m Working group discussions continue

evening cultural events

Day 5 (Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>)

a.m. Plenary session for reporting the results of the working group discussions

p.m. Field Trip to logging sites and protected sites

Day 6 (Friday 25<sup>th</sup>)

a.m. Development of strategy, action plan and recommendations

p.m. continue above

evening closing party

Day 7 (Saturday 26<sup>th</sup>)

Dispersal

Estimated Budget: USD 40-50,000