

## Press Release

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### **WWF South Pacific Programme and Fiji National University Sign MOU to Build Capacity**

The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) South Pacific Programme and the Fiji National University (FNU) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) last week to collaborate on freshwater and river biodiversity research supported by the Ausaid funded **‘Building Resilience - strengthening community adaptation measures to effects of climate change in Fiji’** project led by the WWF South Pacific Programme and partners Department of Land Use and Planning, Environment with Learn and Learn Environment Education

The project which aims to proactively reduce the vulnerabilities and exposure of our communities to the effects of climate change, through a strengthened, coordinated, integrated approach to better land use planning and care towards our rivers, mangroves plus other adjacent coastal habitat. Building resilience at grass root level within a national climate change policy and strategy framework, to safeguard and improve coastal ecosystem services and protection, and the long-term food security, livelihoods and wellbeing of Fijian communities.

The vehicle of research aspired to be undertaken by FNU graduate students involved in the field surveys of mangroves and freshwater systems at the 2 provincial sites of Macuata and Ba will provide a learning and practical opportunity for FNU students and WWF’s role in enhancing local capacity building

As part of the MoU, FNU agrees to assist the WWF South Pacific Programme in the provision of environmental graduate research students to conduct freshwater/wetland field work in the implementation of the project activities.

Students will be able to participate in project activities such as the national summit for practitioners, scientists, community leaders and civil society organisations (CSO) on the impacts of climate change in Fiji and the media campaign to highlight the importance of mangroves in coastal adaptation and need for local-national legal protection.

“Building local capacity is one of the key outcomes of the AusAID Building Resilience project,” says Kesaia Tabunakawai, WWF South Pacific Programme Representative.

“This partnership with the Fiji National University is an ideal way to build capacity of students who are the environmental practitioners of tomorrow and duplicate WWF’s efforts as we will exchange information and tools with students who go into the field with us, ensuring a greater impact within our society” she added.

Dr. Surendra Prasad, Dean of the College of Engineering, Science & Technology at FNU says the signing of the MoU with WWF South Pacific is both important and historic.



“The Fiji National University has various programmes where environmental science is a strong component. We believe that research is the vehicle to engage students with such project activities and we will do our very best with the students to do what is right for the world by assisting WWF in the field,” added Dr. Prasad.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Acting Head of School for Applied Science, Dhiraj Deo Ram, who stressed that such a partnership will greatly benefit students who will get exposure to the field work and increase their knowledge of the practical on the ground work – and area which NGO’s like WWF are close to.

Ilaitia Finau, Lecturer in Freshwater Ecology and Environmental Science at the School of Applied Science said this was an ideal opportunity for students to go into the field and do practical work based on the theory they are learning in the classrooms.

“FNU has a very practical style of teaching, giving our students an edge when entering the work force. Forming partnerships as this with WWF is the perfect platform to build capacity of our students and assist the conservation efforts of respectable environmental organisations like WWF on the ground.”

Principal lecturer for the Bachelor in Applied Science Programme Mr Lepani Kolinisau further added that there is a lot of demand for their students and engaging in such partnerships will only further enhance the students capacity.

The MoU provides the opportunity for WWF South Pacific Programme and FNU to undertake further activities in freshwater and wetlands field work expanding to other WWF project sites in Fiji.

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#### **Editors Note:**

WWF with its project partners in the Department of Environment (DoE), Land Use and Planning and Live and Learn Environment Education, is sharing lessons from a previously funded GEF medium sized grant assessing coastal resilience-building in high biodiversity tropical mangrove areas and its associated coral reef, sea grass and upland ecosystems.

The AusAID funded national Building Resilience project intends to define adaptation strategies in its planning and vulnerability assessment process at village, district, municipal and provincial level plans, consequently aligning them to national adaptation policies. The AusAID funded Building Resilience project hopes that it can build local capacity, enhance awareness, integrate its lessons into policy and support community-based adaptation.

With two of the largest river deltas and associated mangrove forests in the country, Ba and Macuata have been identified as key provinces for the project’s river-related adaptation activities. As Fiji’s second-largest province, Ba - with its population of 231,760, thriving agricultural communities and large municipalities (Nadi, Lautoka, Ba) - is seen as an ideal region for the project’s work. Likewise, Macuata province boasts a resident



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population of 72,441 within its 12 districts, a quarter of who live in Labasa – the largest municipality on Vanua Levu. Macuata province also borders the globally significant Great Sea Reef.

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