



FACTSHEET

2013

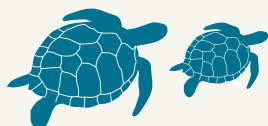
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BIODIVERSITY: WWF-South Pacific

Marine Species Programme

Protecting our Cultural Icon



**OF THE WORLD'S SEVEN
MARINE TURTLE
SPECIES, SIX ARE
FOUND IN THE
PACIFIC OCEAN**

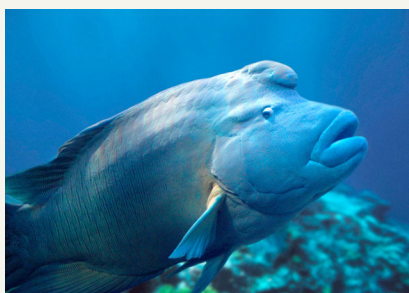
Six of the world's 7 marine turtle species and about half of the world's 83 known species of whales and dolphins (also known as cetaceans) swim in Pacific Island waters. These unique marine species have varying associations for Pacific Island communities – in particular that of cultural icons; for example turtles or whale teeth in Fiji and dolphin teeth in the Solomon Islands have traditionally been presented at ceremonies to denote respect and honour.

Additionally these species have been a critical source of protein, particularly for isolated communities in the vast archipelagos that make up the region. The populations of these key marine species are now declining as:

- They continue to be hunted for food, trade and ceremonial purposes;
- They continue to be bycatch in both offshore and inshore fisheries activities;
- Their feeding and breeding grounds are lost to poorly informed coastal development; and
- They are impacted by the effects of pollution and climate change.

WWF's Marine Species Programme focuses its efforts on addressing these key threats to populations of marine turtles, cetaceans and exploited fish such as the humphead parrotfish, humphead wrasse and sharks through research, policy engagement, awareness and fund raising. The Marine Species Programme supports community aspirations to continue meeting cultural and livelihood obligations while ensuring that these species remain within the ecosystem into the future.

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Humphead wrasse

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Hawkesbill turtle

Working across boundaries

This programme works to conserve animals that recognise no political boundaries, exhibiting migrations that span ocean basins as well as traditional fishing grounds in Pacific Island countries. As such, the programme works to build and strengthen relationships with partners including; policy makers; the fishing industry; communities; research institutions; corporate bodies; the media; and other non-governmental organisations.

Acting together to conserve marine species

Working closely with key stakeholders has enabled the programme to achieve the following conservation results:

- WWF lead the first ever satellite tagging of a hawksbill turtle in Fiji (Marama ni Yadua) in 2008 with subsequent active roles in other tagging operations, including that of a green turtle named Lady Nakalou. Satellite tagging provides important data regarding the movements of turtles
- The programme confirmed the presence of loggerhead turtles in Fiji in 2010. This led to the first ever satellite tagging of loggerheads in Yadua. Preliminary results indicate that the four loggerhead turtles tagged may be residents as they continue to navigate the waters of Yadua
- With partners, we established the first network of community based turtle monitors (locally known as the Dau ni Vonu) operating in 10 sites across Vanua Levu and the Great Sea Reef in Fiji. The monitors are observing nesting beaches and feeding grounds while also providing regular updates on successful hatchings
- WWF spearheaded the development of the Fiji Sea Turtle Recovery Plan – a document collectively designed by numerous stakeholders across Fiji with a common vision to seeing the recovery of this cultural icon
- Actively lobbied government to extend the moratorium protecting sea turtles in Fiji – one which was successfully endorsed by Cabinet for 2009 – 2018
- Released a four year market survey report that illustrates the trends in the sale of turtle shells and their derivatives – a trend that has declined over the years of the survey and is largely attributed to the continued profiling of turtles in the media by WWF
- Successfully hosted three Turtle Benefit Ball events to raise funds and awareness on the plight of sea turtles. The funds have significantly supported the successful satellite tagging incidences and the work of the Dau ni Vonu
- Being a key partner in the survey of humpback whales and other cetaceans in Levuka/Makogai



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Call to Action

The Pacific Islands region is one whose cultures are intricately woven into the natural environment and the loss of these marine species would mean a significant change to the normal ways of life. In order to continue delivering on our goals we need your support. Our plight to save turtles requires approximately FJD200,000 a year. Any contributions from you or your organisations towards protecting our cultural icon is greatly welcomed and appreciated! Additionally, you can report any interactions you may have or observe with turtles and be a part of a solution towards the recovery of sea turtle populations.



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

www.wwfpacific.org.fj

For more information

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