



WWF

FACTSHEET

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## WWF Priority Places- Southwest Pacific

# Ono-i-Lau Island-Fiji

### Conservation Focus

The Ono-i-Lau island cluster is amongst the most isolated areas in Fiji, located at its southern-eastern most border with Tonga. Currently listed as an area of national significance in regard to marine biodiversity as determined by local and international marine experts and scientists in 2003, this was due to the areas isolation and oceanic conditions conducive toward a distinct range of habitats, species composition and a wide array of marine ecosystems such as mangroves, mudflats, sea grass meadows and coral reef systems such as barrier, fringing and lagoon patch reefs and is considered to be ecologically significant for its high concentration in species and numbers of giant clams. The giant clam, *Tridacna derasa*, is an endemic is delimited to an area within the Lau and western bounds of Tongan waters, Ono-i-Lau being a primary seeding area. The area is also frequented as a foraging site by three turtle species due to the areas expansive and lush sea grass meadows and its beaches are dominated by the green turtle (*Chelodonia mydas*) as a nesting site. The Ono-i-Lau waters support a multitude of unique coral assemblages, invertebrate and fish species and due to its isolation in the extreme south, greater scientific research is still needed to ascertain the extent of this uniqueness, in terms of endemism and rarity. The uninhabited islands in the cluster also sustain undisturbed sizeable sea bird colonies, such as those of the red footed booby.



**ONO-I-LAU IS THE FIRST TO COMPLETE A COMPREHENSIVE DISTRICT LEVEL DEVELOPMENT PLAN IN FIJI**



Ono i Lau sustains the largest sea bird colony in Southern Fiji

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Ono i Lau is a major seeding ground for giant clams

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## Conservation- Safeguarding Nature and Community Interests

In May 2005, WWF was requested by the Lau Provincial Office (Provincial Administrative body responsible for Ono-i-Lau), to facilitate a request by the Ono-i-Lau community to develop their community marine protected area. One of the villages, Matokana had already taken the initiative in establishing their marine protected area in 2004 and was endorsed by the district council. Initially the protected area was met with opposition by some of the villagers, as they saw it as a threat to their access rights to harvesting resources, but this has slowly subsided as the community observed positive changes, such as the recruitment of fish species previously thought depleted and spillover effects outside the protected area boundary.

This positive impact encouraged the remaining four villages to consider setting up similar protected areas near their villages and resulted in WWF being engaged to discuss community needs for support to further their marine protected area initiative, of which included the need for a management plan and assistance in formulating one, capacity building for long term independent community monitoring, planning activities for developing a long term financing plan for the marine protected area committee, community awareness activities and strengthening their income generating options for supporting the marine protected area.

WWF has also worked closely with the Ono-i-Lau Community to develop their 20 year District Development Plan. The primary goal of this plan is to maintain the productivity of their natural resources for subsistence needs, income generation and development whilst at the same time not impede the perpetuation or viability of the districts islands unique biodiversity.



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Linking community conservation to culture and heritage preservation

### Site Profile

The Ono- i-Lau island cluster is made up of six remnant pieces of a volcanic arc, with a land area of under 8 km<sup>2</sup> and expansive reef systems encompassing almost 80km<sup>2</sup>. Being Fiji's most isolated maritime district, it additionally includes the islands of Vatoa to the north-east and the uninhabited Tuvana islands to the south. The five coastal villages in the district, Nukuni, Lovoni and Matokana located on the principal island, Ono Levu, with Doi and Vatoa on their respectively similar named islands. The resident population of the district is 599

## WWF Community Assisted Achievements at a Glance

- First extensive biological survey of Ono-i-Lau Island cluster reef system.
- An established district level community marine protected area.
- Establishment of five village forest nurseries, with native tree and sandalwood replanting programme
- Community youth trained in marine survey methods and monitoring.
- Ono Women trained in craft diversification and income generation through use of local resources.
- First District 20 Year Development Plan, founded on sustainable principles.

### For more information

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#### 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.

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