BIOPAMA
Biodiversity and Protected Areas Management Programme

Welcome to the first of a series of information sheets on a new initiative to enable easier access to better information about protected areas.

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Photo: Stuart Chape

Land, coastal and marine protected areas throughout the Pacific have many different names and exist under a multitude of management categories and governance arrangements. They play a fundamental role in safeguarding natural resources, livelihoods and culture. It is vital that decisions affecting protected areas are informed by the most reliable, comprehensive and up-to-date information available.

A Regional Reference Information System (RRIS) for Protected Areas

All 15 Pacific countries[1] of the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group are signatories to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). They have committed to meet goals and targets by 2020 to halt biodiversity loss and ensure sustainable and equitable use of natural resources.

However, despite having high aspirations for protecting valued natural resources, Pacific island countries remain challenged by a number of issues, one of which is the need for useful baseline data and information.

As a result, these countries have requested a common database, and associated information tools, to support the establishment and management of protected areas, and support the implementation of Program of Work on Protected Areas (POWPAs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and State of the Environment reporting.

To help improve information about protected areas, the BIOPAMA programme is establishing a Regional Reference Information System (RRIS).

The RRIS is housed within the Pacific Islands Protected Areas Portal (PIPAP). PIPAP is being developed as an important regional hub for information exchange between people working with protected areas.

The Regional Reference Information System (RRIS)

The RRIS is an online information system bringing together relevant information to support decision-making for planning, designating and managing protected areas. The RRIS displays maps and supporting information about biodiversity values, marine and terrestrial ecosystems, species and habitats, pressures and threats, and management and governance.

Together, the RRIS and the PIPAP give access to information about training opportunities, protected area management best practices, funding, project sites, lesson summaries scientific reports and expertise. They will also provide a *talanoa* forum for networking and discussions.

Importantly, the RRIS will encourage countries and other stakeholders to look at what this type of system can offer and to identify information types and tools that could be incorporated to meet their management priorities.

The RRIS is not just about presenting facts, figures and maps. It can support protected area managers, governments and communities to better use the data and information tools for improved policy and decision-making.

Main services

- unlike other wide ranging environmental databases, the RRIS is focused on protected areas and other forms of area based resource management that provide conservation outcomes in the Pacific region

- brings together a unified package of relevant open-source and other specialized information which has more impact than if accessed, viewed and used as separate information sets

- helps update and monitor progress toward national Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) commitments and reduces reporting burden

- builds quantitative and qualitative information to guide national policy, planning and decision-making for protected area networks

- highlights specific issues about management effectiveness, governance and funding

- provides a peer-to-peer discussion forum for sharing potential solutions, ideas, and experiences

User benefits

- creates a single, publicly-available, well-organized and secure database

- user-friendly software is not technically challenging, enabling access to information that is easily-located and visualized, and allowing basic analysis queries

- software allows information to be portable (eg; by USB or intra-net) to assist those with limited internet service

- respects the sensitivity of certain information types and ensures appropriate user access arrangements

- works closely with related data compilation activities and gives access to information from diverse sources

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[1] Pacific Island countries belonging to the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) are: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Timor Leste, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu

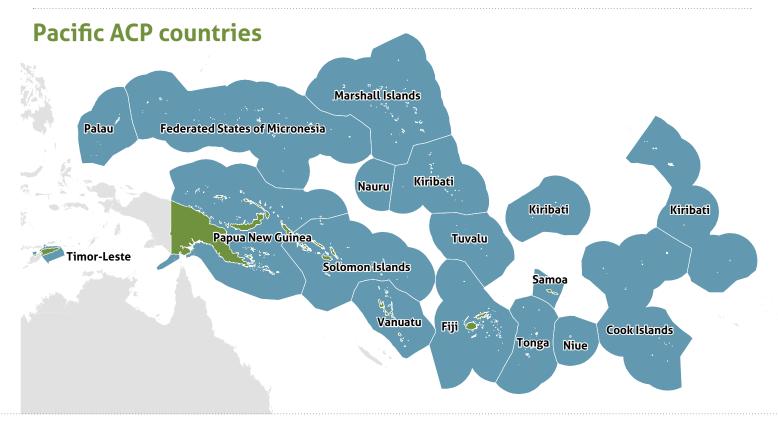## Engagement with countries and other important stakeholders

- The current RRIS is simply a foundation structure which will be progressively built up and shaped to meet specific national and regional priorities

- The strength of the RRIS will be supported by the information made available to it by data holders and its usefulness will be driven by information needs prioritised by users and decision-makers

- Building and improving the RRIS will involve a collaborative support network between national, regional, and global partners

- BIOPAMA programme staff can assist to:
  - support systematic information capture
  - create an up-to-date picture of the protected area information situation
  - identify information needs for planning and management

- The limitations of regional telecommunications services, particularly internet access and bandwidth, are recognized and other ways to make aspects of the RRIS available offline willbe found.

How to get involved

- Share with us your data management and analysis needs, and reporting requirements
- Facilitate the identification of, and access to, reliable and relevant data sources
- Collaborate in the on-going RRIS development and improvement process by joining the conversation on Yammer (www.yammer.com/biopama)

For more information please contact Anama Solofa, BIOPAMA Project Officer e: anamas@sprep.org

Pacific ACP countries

Marshall Islands

Palau

Federated States of Micronesia

Nauru

Kiribati

Kiribati

Kiribati

Tuvalu

Papua New Guinea

Timor-Leste

Solomon Islands

Samoa

Vanuatu

Fiji

Cook Islands

Tonga

Niue