

Seventh Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, 8-12 July, 2002

Pacific conference focuses on mainstreaming and the sustainable use of natural resources

Mainstreaming nature conservation is the theme of the much-anticipated Seventh Pacific Islands Conference on Nature Conservation and Protected Areas to be held in Rarotonga, Cook Islands from 8-12 July, 2002. The four-yearly conference is the pre-eminent event in the region on nature conservation.

Nature conservation is essential to the achievement of sustainable development in the region but is still perceived as peripheral to economic development planning and decision-making, hence the mainstreaming theme.

With about 250 participants expected, the Conference celebrates the significant strides made in nature conservation in the Pacific islands over the last five years. Its objectives are to review progress in the implementation of the region's *Action Strategy for Nature Conservation* and to define priorities and the region's nature conservation agenda for the next four years.

This conference is important because the Pacific islands region has more rare, endangered and threatened species per capita than anywhere else on earth.

The Pacific's marine environment is an enormous and largely unexplored resource with the most extensive and diverse reef system in the world, the largest tuna fishery, deepest oceanic trenches and the healthiest remaining populations of many globally threatened species including whales, sea turtles, dugongs and saltwater crocodiles.

There are large blocks of intact rainforests and many unique species and communities of plants found nowhere else in the world. Estimates suggest that 50 percent of the region's total biodiversity is at risk.

Past Conferences brought together policy-makers, international funding agencies, regional and global conservation NGOs, community leaders, researchers, trainers and specialists in nature conservation and protected areas. The Seventh Pacific Islands Conference has widened its appeal to attract trade specialists, economists, development planners, tourism operators and others in the more mainstreamed sectors of economic development.

The focus for the agenda is to reflect, explore and share ideas on what mainstreaming means in practice and how to enable it to happen.

The agenda includes keynote presentations on different perspectives and synergies on mainstreaming nature conservation. Working groups will explore the following areas from a mainstreaming nature conservation perspective:

- Biodiversity conservation
- Planning and governance
- Local communities
- Education and capacity building
- Financial mechanisms

Jointly organised by the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme and the Cook Islands Environment Service and Ministry of Culture, the conference promises a truly Pacific experience. A steering group consisting of members of the Pacific Islands Roundtable for Nature Conservation is providing the strategic direction for the event. A conference website has been developed and is located at: <www.pacificbiodiv.org/conference>.

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