



Bismarck Solomon Seas Ecoregion

Fact Sheet

The Vision



A region where care for the environment is based on a balance of traditional practices and management that utilises appropriate scientific knowledge. A marine environment that will serve as a resource bank for the people where a healthy and happy population can sustain its needs and fulfil its aspirations.

A region where coral reefs, mangroves and sea grass beds, dugongs, whales and the richness of the seas are present for the world to see. A region linked by the migratory paths of turtles and fish which bind together countries in partnership and commitments that will shape the future of conservation across the ecoregion.

A region where local people and scientists have the understanding and capacity needed to conserve the natural wealth of the marine environment well beyond the next 50 years. A marine environment that will live in the dreams, stories, language and songs of people for many generations to come.

The Human Dimension

There are over 880 culture and language groups within this Ecoregion and the lives, customs and knowledge of communities living here are linked inextricably with the ocean and island shores. At least 85% of communities within the BSSE live close to the sea and rely on the seas and coasts for their lifestyles and livelihood traditions and these institutions are a critical feature of this "seascape". The aspirations of the peoples of the BSSE are captured in the "Vision" presented above.

The natural wealth of the BSSE is highly valued, both by science and the communities that live within its boundaries. To realise the potential of this wealth for future generations, WWF and partners have embarked on a journey of discovery. Biodiversity has a dominant role in the livelihoods and lifestyles of diverse cultures and systems. Thus, the full scope and wonder of the region's biodiversity must be at the heart of the development and realisation of a BSSE vision.

A Journey of Discovery

Stretching from the Birdshead Peninsula of the province of Papua in Indonesia, across the Admiralty and Bismarck archipelagos of Papua New Guinea, to Makira of Solomon Islands, the Bismarck Solomon Seas Ecoregion (BSSE) is perhaps one of the last tropical marine ecoregions that remains relatively unaffected by human activity.

The BSSE is defined by biogeographic, oceanographic, geophysical and climatic boundaries. It is one of the most geologically active and physically diverse marine environments on earth - a physical setting that encourages evolution, accumulation and persistence of species. The uniqueness of biodiversity within the BSSE is exemplified by:

- ▶ An extraordinary diversity of reefs, seagrasses, mangroves, deep sea and pelagic habitats
- ▶ Global diversity centres of reef-building corals and reef fish
- ▶ The largest and most critical remaining Pacific leatherback turtle nesting sites
- ▶ The historic centre of sperm whale abundance in the tropics
- ▶ The major biogeographic transition zone between the Indonesian, Philippine, Micronesian, Coral Sea and central Pacific regions.

Geographical Location

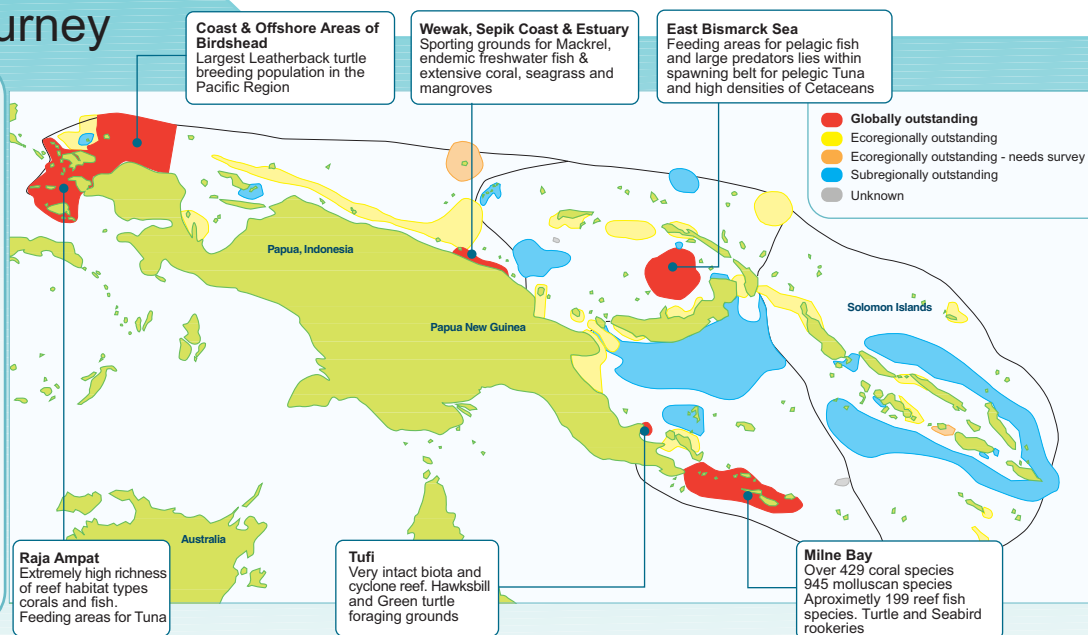


Mapping out the Journey

The global significance and value of the biodiversity of the BSSE is unquestioned. Over recent years, areas within the BSSE have been identified as being unique and amongst the world's most rich marine environments. Yet even by early 2003, the true scope of the region's biodiversity had not yet fully been explored.

With this in mind WWF brought together more than 60 scientific experts (academics, government officials, researchers, and NGO practitioners) to profile, to the best of their knowledge and experience, the biodiversity of the BSSE.

With these foundations established, we are set to embark on the next stage of the journey with governments, communities, the private sector and others. This stage will draw further on the wealth of traditional knowledge and understanding to better ground future activities focused on the health and long term sustainability of the region's nature and its people.



Challenges

Where there is no policy framework in place for marine or coastal habitat conservation, it is clear that pressures are increasing. Among the critical threats identified by experts are:

- ▶ Growing coastal populations and poorly designed coastal developments
- ▶ Unregulated fisheries (e.g. over harvesting, destructive techniques)
- ▶ Increasing market demand for marine species (sea cucumber, shark fin)
- ▶ Pollution from both land and sea sources
- ▶ Irresponsible and insensitive tourism practices
- ▶ Climate change and coral bleaching events



The leatherback turtle has been chosen as the symbol of the BSSE. A species that follows a migratory pattern across the region, the leatherback binds together the countries, aspirations and partnerships that WWF hopes will come to represent the future shape of conservation across the Ecoregion.

A Call To Action

The development of a biodiversity profile for the BSSE initiates an exciting journey of dialogue, collaboration, planning and action. To give momentum to that journey, and drawing from the full scope of experience and expertise, a series of conservation aspirations have been generated. This call to action moves beyond the biological and seeks to resonate with and sustain the relationships between the natural and human resources of the region, and the interests of communities, scientists, conservationists, governments and business within and across the three countries of the BSSE. The focus of these aspirations revolves around building support for an Ecoregion Conservation Plan that:

- ▶ Establishes representative networks of marine protected areas
- ▶ Encourages ecosystem based management for sustainable fisheries
- ▶ Initiates monitoring programmes for migratory species through the Convention of Migratory Species
- ▶ Supports cross country collaborations and information sharing.

Response To The Call

Following on from the Vision Workshop in July 2003, WWF and partners have taken the next stage in this exciting journey of discovery.

- ▶ Presentations on the process and outcomes of the Vision Workshop have been made to key stakeholders. In PNG, an outcome of these presentations has been an invitation by the Manus Provincial Government to establish a field station on Manus to encourage the implementation of conservation strategies in this ecoregional significant area.
- ▶ Addressing data gaps identified during the ecoregion process, WWF SI, The Nature Conservancy, Solomon Islands Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources and Conservation International, will undertake a rapid assessment of some of the country's most outstanding reefs and marine habitats in May 2004.
- ▶ With WWF Indonesia (Region Sahul) expertise, the first tri-national project - a rapid assessment of leatherback turtle nesting sites in the Solomon Islands will be the first step for assessing the status of this species in the BSSE. An information fact sheet showing the migratory linkages, issues and opportunities to protect this species and its habitats with relevance to sustainable livelihoods will also be produced.
- ▶ Initial planning steps are underway with the National Fisheries Authority (NFA) in PNG to pilot a Marine Stewardship Council certification of a domestic fishery (tuna) in the context of establishing an ecosystem based management framework, which will be expanded throughout the ecoregion.
- ▶ In the globally significant areas of the North Coast of Birdshead Peninsula, WWF Indonesia is advocating for the designation of protected areas for leatherback rookeries. From recent satellite tracking data important adjacent offshore areas have also been identified. At the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP7 in February 2004, the Indonesian government announced its intention to designate these areas for protection.



WWF is the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisation. It has 4.7 million supporters and a global network active in 96 countries.

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

Let's leave our children a living Pacific



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