



SUCCESS STORY

New Law Protects Resources and Rights

Government and NGOs collaborate in Milne Bay to pass a landmark environmental law



This fisherman’s livelihood will be protected when current efforts to pass an environmental law in the Wiyaloki Island area bear fruit, using the Maramatana law as a template.

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— Simon Alberic, Provincial Legal Advisor

After a decade of work, a local government in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea, has passed a law that recognizes community-based marine protected areas and makes it possible to prosecute poachers. Conservation International (CI), a partner in the six-country Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Food Security and Fisheries (CTI-CFF), worked closely with the government and communities to bring the law into being. Officials in the provincial government strongly support the landmark environmental law, adopted in 2012 by Maramatana District, and they are ready to work with other districts throughout the province to craft similar laws. “Everyone wanted this law,” said Provincial Legal Advisor Simon Alberic. “It is valuable because it involves local people in protecting the environment themselves instead of government and NGOs doing all the work. In other cases, locals are left to be bystanders in their own back yards.” The new law is a local building block supporting the goals of the CTI-CFF National Plan of Action.

The long legal drafting process involved multiple workshops and consultations with coastal and island communities and local government officials. In the end, Alberic was able to build on the work of other lawyers to draft a template law that includes language local people can understand and that other local governments can easily copy and adapt. “Other local governments are watching this closely, they want to use it in their own areas,” said Alberic.

Deputy Provincial Governor James Rabini, who is also President of Maramatana District, was another key player in the process. He explained that he and CI have been working on the law for many years, and that support from USAID’s Coral Triangle Support Program (CTSP) enabled them to take the work to the finish line. CTSP funded several different lawyers to review and refine the document, and CTSP supports ongoing CI community-level awareness programs to educate people about the value of this legal tool in protecting their natural resources.

Lindsay Alesana, the district administrator for Alotau and former area manager for Maramatana, has personally seen the deterioration of the fisheries, and he is particularly keen for marine resource protection throughout the province. “At the last gathering before we passed the law, representatives from around the province came to hear about the law, and they captured the message.”

All three men singled out the positive cooperation between government and NGOs in this effort as an important factor, countering the common perception that these two must be antagonists. “In our local government, we don’t have expertise in environment and marine resources,” said Rabini. “CI provided that. Without CI, I don’t think we’d have the law in place. We cannot do this kind of work alone.”

Conservation International (CI) is the lead implementing partner for CTSP and the USCTI Support Program in Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea.