

Mystery Island Marine Protected Area

Abel Tapisuwe, 2003

1.0 Itinerary:

| Date | Days | Place Visited | Reason |
|---------------------|----------|---|--|
| 26.07.03 – 27.07.03 | 1 | Umej | <input type="checkbox"/> To get some feedback especially on benefit sharing from the Project |
| 28.07.03 | .5 | Mystery Island and Tourist Project Office | <input type="checkbox"/> To meet the committee and explain the project and get their forms filled and returned <input type="checkbox"/> To see what is there in the marine protected area |
| 28.07.03 – 29.07.03 | .5 | Port Patrick | <input type="checkbox"/> To get some feedback especially on benefit sharing from the Project |
| 05.08.03 | 1 | Port Vila | <input type="checkbox"/> Write this report |
| Total days | 3 | VT 5,000 | VT 15,000 |

2.0 Background:

Aneityum Community (made of seven traditional areas with major villages of Port Patrick, Analcahaut and Umej) has two thriving, well-organized ventures, the Tourist Project and the Anatom Forest Timber (AFT). They have both gone through a lot of bad experiences especially in management, but are now in a better shape under the directions of Mr. Barry Nangia, who is a former Customs officer (Tourist Project) and Mr. Maurice Nasauboy (AFT). They have been able to adjust themselves from the above bad management problems and as their Councilor, Pastor Philip Shing puts it, “We are now beginning to see some light in these two projects”.

Currently they are independently managed without the direct input from any Government Departments or non- government organisations. Occasionally, visits are made to the islands by Government Officers mainly to offer technical advice.

They are in the process of building a house for a Peace Corp Volunteer to assist in their MPA (a marine biologist) and other areas in the management of the bungalows.

Both are under the Intasalep Council of Chiefs who makes major decisions on sensitive issues such as employment opportunities, benefit sharing and the approval of by laws through public meetings.

Each project has its own board of directors who makes main decisions on major activities and by laws to be undertaken. Both these Boards report to the Council of Chiefs and the Community of Aneityum through public meetings.

Whereas in the past, shipping was quite irregular, saw milling of pine trees that were planted in the late 1970s by the Forestry Department, is enabling the island to a monthly shipping that they can now control through their monthly 20 cubic meters of sawn timber contract with a Port Vila broker.

The Mystery Island receives between 15 to 20 cruise ships a year with thousands of tourists flooding the island per trip and are the main source of income for the population through landing fees and the sale of their products (mainly food and artifacts).

The Tourist Project that is directly responsible for the Mystery Island Marine Protected Area is a thriving; well-organized venture has been in operation for the last twenty years. It has had a lot of bad experiences especially in management, but it is now in a better shape under the direction of Mr. Barry Nangia, who is a former Customs officer.

The Tourist Project now operates a bungalow on the island, a market place, a boat that freely ferries people to the island, a retailing/ whole- sale shop in Analcahaut and a plot of land with a rent house at Anabouru in Port Vila. They also employ two full time workers. One is responsible for the general maintenance of the bungalows and the other is responsible for the daily feeding of fish in the Marine Protected Area. They also have a team of security to ensure that people do not remove resources from the MPA and to provide security for tourists coming especially on cruise ships.

Though the Mystery Island is one of the seven International Ports approved by Parliament (Barry), there are no Customs and Immigration officers on the island. This is a problem for tourists who come in by sailing boats, as they have to be cleared in Port Vila or on Tanna. This may be too costly for those traveling in via New Caledonian Ports and are intending to exit the country from the Northern ports.

A Policeman is permanently based at Analcahaut.

3.0 Mystery Island Marine Protected Area.

“Tourist equals environment” are the words of the Aneityum Tourist Project Manager Mr. Nangia Barry. “If we lose all our natural resources, we will lose the tourists who are currently the main source of our income”.

Mystery Island was in the 1950s made up of two islands known respectively as the islands of Navinacas and Ningec raised from very large coral base covering more than a square kilometer of reef. It is believed that was due to the closing of the Nitkanohou passage on the western side of the large reef that stopped the tide from its continuous flow between the two islets thus encouraging the sand build up which eventually bridged the two islets together.

Traditionally, the two islands and their reefs were used as a common fishing ground for the people of Aneityum Island. Parts of reefs are named for certain areas of Aneityum:

- ❑ Netjan Jap u Nudukalalau is the northern reef for people from the North of the island.
- ❑ Nijkanavan is the southern reef for the people of the south of the island

The chief of Analcahaut in the old days apart from governing the people in his “Province” was also given the role of giving offerings to the god of the fish on the Mystery Island by the two most paramount chiefs of Aneityum one based on the northern part of the Aneityum “country” and one on the southern part bridged by a king pole connecting the two areas. A young banyan tree and a traditional house on Ningec on the northern end of the existing airport mark the location site for this offering.

Due to intensive harvesting of shells and fish for home consumption and income generation, these once abundant resources became very scarce that the Project and the community decided to protect the area to replenish the resources and to attract more tourists to the area.

They intend to close the area for ten years. Already, they have closed it for over one and a half years. With the assistance from the Fisheries Department they have been able to re-introduce trochus mainly from Epi and they are also employing a full time person to feed fish that is one of the delights of tourists to actually swim among them during their feeding times.

During the visit, the manager was quite surprise to see so many juvenile trochus and clam- shells. He has only visited the reef once at the closing date about nineteen months ago.

3.1 Possible Activities to be carried out under IWP Project.

If IWP decides to assist this marine protected area, below are some of the activities that the Tourist Project would like some assistance with.

3.1.1 Assist to Upgrade the Tourist Project

This assistance will be in two basic areas:

- ❑ Assist to get some equipment.
- ❑ Assist in the capacity building of the Project staff.

In terms of equipment, because of the large area to cover in monitoring the reef especially during the night, the Tourist Project requires a light boat that does not consume too much fuel to be used by the security to patrol the reefs.

They would also want some assistance with the repairs of their glass bottom boat.

In capacity building, they would like the IWP to produce awareness posters to be placed in strategic locations around the islet and the mainland to educate the general public of the marine protected area; giving the reason for its establishment; the importance of respecting the MPA and its resources and skills training for the staff to effectively manage the MPA.

3.1.2 To Protect some Endangered Species

During the visit, we noted three different colored clams:

- ❑ Brown colored
- ❑ Greenish brown colored
- ❑ Bright blue colored

The bright blue colored is believed to be endemic to the island. They would like to protect these as well as any other shell and fish species that are endangered locally and nationally.

3.1.3 Assist the Fisheries Department with its studies

Assist the Fisheries Department with its studies especially to:

- ❑ Ensure that their work is published or documented for the information to be available to the public.
- ❑ Ensure that the Tourist Project knows to what extend the level of marine resources exist from time to time
- ❑ Ensure that when the ban is lifted, the management knows how much to harvest so that sustainability is effectively monitored

3.1.4 Assist the Community Members to have a Better Knowledge of Traditional Systems.

The Tourist Project is looking at a budget of VT1.5 million to assist the community members to have a better understanding of traditional systems that existed in the past that would generally boost the management of the reef and the fair sharing of benefits from their MPA.

There is a group of young men assisted by the Paramount Chief based at Umej who is assisting the group to better understand traditional system that existed in the past that will assist to greatly solve sensitive issues relating to the MPA usage, ownership and management.

Though some work has started, they would like to see it to be more effective to ensure that the MPA and the Tourist Project is managed effectively.

They would like the group to hold more workshops in villages so that everyone is effectively informed and have a better understanding of their traditional system that had better management and trading systems in place for the whole island.

3.1.5 Replenish Resources by Relocation to the MPA.

The Tourist Project would like to get marine resources that are available elsewhere on Aneityum and relocating them to the Mystery MPA to ensure that these are available as tourist attractions as well as for protection.

They also have a vision for a possibility of a clam- shell and coral farming.

4.0 Recommendations

On the following grounds the writer would recommend to IWP that they seriously consider this site for the following reasons:

1. After having gone through bad experiences, the Tourist Project had adjusted itself to a level where they could manage the Mystery Island MPA without much dependency on the Central Government nor the non government organisations.
2. The Tourist Project has so far managed their MPA quite well and that their community members have high respect for their MPA boundaries
3. The Aneityum Community have established a good system in place to monitor and manage the MPA through their Council of Chiefs, their Board of Directors and a good management team committee that is the Tourist Project.
4. The Tourist Project is well respected through their very close working relationship with the community.

Though these may be good points that would favor Crab Bay where there might be no management structures in place, due to the time frame of the IWP pilot project, there could be limited time to fully learn from the experiences there to replicate elsewhere in the country.