

VESS stakeholder meeting 2015 Report

VESS held its first stakeholder meeting on 23rd June at Chantilly's Hotel.

Compiled by Dr. Christina Shaw



1st stakeholder meeting for VESS

The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society held its first stakeholder meeting on 23rd June 2015 at Chantilly's Hotel. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce VESS to other stakeholders working for conservation in Vanuatu. In addition, VESS hoped to gain feedback on current projects and to investigate possibilities of future collaboration for the benefit of conservation in Vanuatu. VESS invited representatives of government departments, other NGOs and the private sector to attend the meeting. The turn out was good with 27 people taking part. Each sector was represented including staff from Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, Department of Fisheries, Department of Forestry and Department of Education, members of community conservation networks and representatives from the Scuba Association, several NGOs and private sector companies





Dr. Christina Shaw started the morning's meeting by introducing VESS and explaining the society's aims and vision. The activities that VESS has performed in the 9 months since its inception were presented including the public talks, the Nabanga Pikinini games project and VESS's involvement in National Environment Week.



Public Talk on Dugongs by Donna Kwan from CMS Dugong MoU and Maya Bankova from The Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund

List of attendees

Name	Organisation / place of work
Maurisco Batick	Vanuatu Cultural Centre
Terrence Malapa	Vanuatu Cultural Centre
Kenneth Lango	Tasivanua Environment Network
Akihiro Osada	J-Prism / JICA
Roger Tary	PVMC / JICA
Nikita Solzer	SPC-GIZ
Mori Ruben	SPC-GIZ
Jeremie Kaltavara	Vanuatu fisheries dept.
Macha Paris	Foundation Bastian
Junior Ben	USP student
Eddy Roland	USP student
Maggie Crawford	Big Blue / scuba association
Lilly Fatdal	Dept. of Environment
Sam Chanel	Dept. of Forestry
Narelyn	Student VIT
Ian Haggarty	Triangle /DEPC / VESS
Jill Horry	Live and Learn
Lian Bebe	USP student
Cynthia Bebe	USP student
Karin O'Connor	Vet clinic /Sam's animal welfare
Mark Kalotap	Contractor for DEPC
Shaun Hibgame	RecycleCorp
Hopkins Dick	Dept. Education
Olivia Joe	USP student
Roger Matu	USP student
Trinison Tari	DEPC
Russell Chilton	VESS
Christina Shaw	VESS

The aims and vision of the Vanuatu Environmental Science society

Our Aims

VESS's purpose is to promote science in the fields of conservation, environmental protection and sustainable development within Vanuatu.

There are 3 strands to our aims:

1. To collect and collate the scientific information about the environment of Vanuatu which is already in existence
2. Secondly to perform scientific studies whilst promoting and mentoring Ni-Vanuatu scientists and science students.
3. Thirdly to ensure that this scientific information we have obtained is shared as widely as possible within Vanuatu so the entire community can make informed choices which allows them to live harmoniously with their environment.

Our Vision

We have a vision of a body of home grown scientists working at a national and international level, contributing to the local and global knowledge base of natural science.

We hope to inspire the whole population to become more knowledgeable about their natural surroundings with a deeper understanding of how mother earth helps us

Why VESS believes conservation is important in Vanuatu

- Many people rely on natural resources for nutrition and livelihood.
- Vanuatu lies within the East Melanesian Hotspot for Biodiversity
- According to IUCN red list of threatened species, Vanuatu is home to 378 animals and plants that are either critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable or near threatened.
- Vanuatu is a signatory to several international and regional treaties and therefore has an obligation to conserve biodiversity

Why VESS Believes Science is important for Conservation

- The definition of Science: The intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behaviour of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment
- Science gives us knowledge to make good decisions.
- Science gives us a tool to check to see if what we are doing is working.



National Environment Week

VESS assisted the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation in organizing the weeks events

This year’s theme for World Environment Day was “Seven Billion Dreams. One Planet. Consume With Care.”

Some of the highlights of this year’s National Environment Week were as follows: The week started and ended with a planting of Sandalwood seedlings plantings. These plantings are a small part of the rebuilding of Vanuatu after cyclone Pam, as many trees

were lost. It was also part of the initiative to create a Sandalwood city in Port Vila.

On the Saturday, ‘Clean Up Your Environment Day’ VESS conducted litter survey to see what type of litter is affecting our streets. Divers also collected litter from the sea. Communities were encouraged to hold their own cleanup days throughout the week. Big Blue hosted an underwater photo

competition and some amazingly beautiful creatures living just off the seawall were captured through the lens. But these creatures are at risk from the litter on the streets that is being washed down the drains and into the sea. Tuesday was a ‘No Plastic Challenge Day’ – it is hard to live without plastics but we encouraged people to

“Seven bilian pipol. Wan planet nomo. Yumi mas lukaotem gud”

say no at least to plastic shopping bags. Kawenu School Children demonstrated that there are alternatives to plastic shopping bags and made bags out of old newspapers. One evening there was a short film night showing some confronting and inspiring short environmentally themed films.

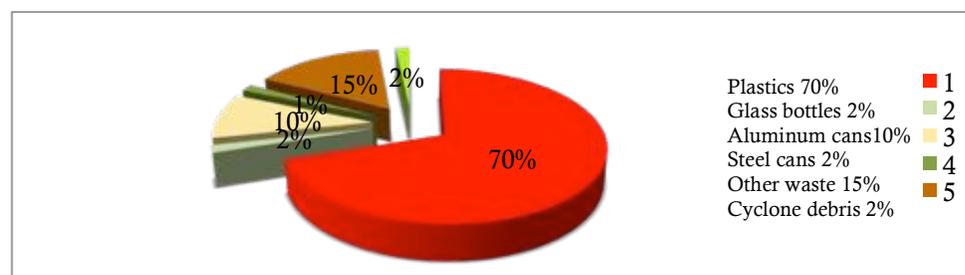
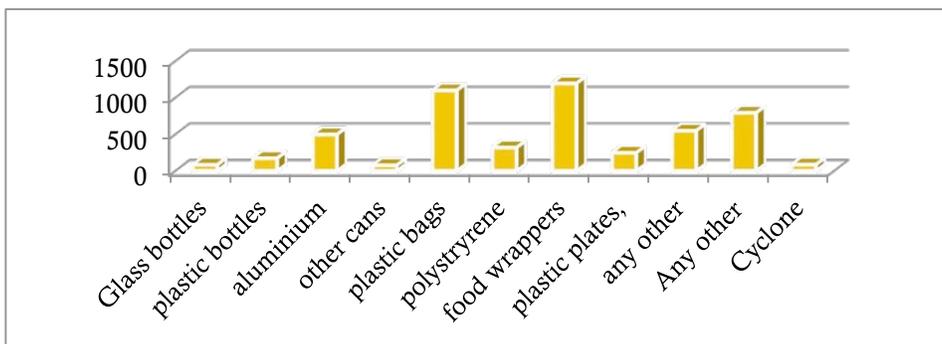


The Science part: Litter Survey

Results of the litter survey conducted by VESS during National Environment Week

We went one stage further with our litter clean up by conducting a litter surveys. We counted each piece of litter we collect and noted what type of litter each piece was. This gives us some data about what sort of litter is littering our streets and seashore. 5126 pieces of litter were collected over 4 locations. The vast majority of the rubbish was plastic bags and plastic food wrappers as well as aluminium drinks cans. It was observed, during the survey at Fatumaru Park, that the litter was most concentrated around the seating areas in the park. This data can be used to highlight the problem of plastic litter in Port Vila

Litter Item	Tally Count	Total	Litter Item	Tally Count	Total
	2	2		10	10
	2	2		2	2
	5	5		15	15
	2	2		15	15
	11	11		2	2
	4	4			
	11	11			
	4	4			
	6	6			
	2	2			



Workshop for the Dugong and Sea Grass Educational Materials Project

VESS sought input from the stakeholders for the development of the awareness materials for dugongs and seagrass. Three questions were asked during the meeting:

- What types of educational materials have worked best in Vanuatu to portray messages to the community?
- Which audience did the stakeholders feel was the most important to target for this dugong and sea grass conservation project?
- Which method of 'getting the message across' was thought to work best for this target audience?

VESS was very pleased with the amount of feedback from the audience and an extensive list of education materials and methods were suggested as effective in Vanuatu



Dr. Christina Shaw asking for input from the audience to guide the dugong and sea grass educational materials project

Suggestions for the types of materials that may work well in Vanuatu for dugong and sea grass education materials

- Fact sheets
- Books / booklets
- Workshop outlines
- Brochures
- Website page
- Bumper stickers / other stickers
- Newspaper articles
- Post to Yumi tok tok street Facebook page
- Facebook – VESS page
- Email
- Posters
- Eco-friendly Shopping bags
- Signs in coastal areas
- Bracelets
- SMS to mobile networks
- T-shirts
- Radio programs
- Banners
- Films – to show before the feature films at the cinema
- Adverts on TV / cinema
- Plays
- Dugong festival

The target audiences that were suggested as important for dugong and sea grass conservation in Vanuatu

- Communities living close to sea grass and dugong habitat
- Fishers
- School children
- General Public
- Policy makers e.g. in Government
- Tourism operators and tour guides
- Law / regulation enforcement officers e.g. police / fisheries extension officers
- Custom land owners

Workshop for the Dugong and sea grass educational materials (continued)

There are networks of government employees as well as civil society organisations and private sector organisations in existence in Vanuatu and these networks were identified as very effective at disseminating information to the wider community.

The networks in Vanuatu

- Fisheries extension officers
- WSB Vanua Tai resource monitors
- Vanuatu Cultural Centre field workers
- Chiefs
- School teachers
- Provincial secretaries
- VNYC – Vanuatu National Youth council
- Rural training centres
- VCC – Vanuatu Christian Council
- CSOs (Civil society organisations) workshops
- Private sector associations e.g.: VHRA, VTOA, VSOA, CCI

Conclusions

Once these lists had been prepared the stakeholders were asked which target audiences were priorities and which method and materials were most likely to be useful for conveying the conservation message about the importance of dugongs and sea grasses. The consensus of opinion was that subsistence fishers and tourism operators especially in the more rural communities were priorities and more visual materials such as posters, as well as workshops, were best for this target audience.

Another group identified as a priority was policy makers. This group was defined as those in central government as well as chiefs and custom landowners and factsheet and leaflets were seen as good methods for transferring information to them. The enforcers of the law, regulations and tabus, such as police officers, fisheries extension officers and custom landowners, were also highlighted as essential in efforts to conserve dugongs and sea grasses. Again leaflets and factsheets were deemed to be a good way to impart information to this group about the importance of dugongs and sea grasses and the regulations that protect them.



The last activity during the meeting was to ask the stakeholders present what they felt were priority areas on which to focus efforts.

The suggestions were:

Plastic pollution / littering

Endangered species conservation

Identifying habitats which are important for conservation in Vanuatu

Invasive species – 10 priorities have been identified for Vanuatu

Workshops for young scientists for designing studies and writing scientific papers for publication and for finding travel grants and scholarships.

VESS would like to thank the participants in our first stakeholder meeting for sharing their knowledge about conservation issues facing Vanuatu and their experience in methodology for raising awareness in this country. We feel we have received some valuable information that will assist us in our projects. We also are hopeful that the contacts we have made during this process will lead to collaboration on future projects.

