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Australia biodiversity conservation tour: building capacity of Fijian forestry ministry professionals

Major global changes or developments invariably require that countries strengthen their institutional and technical capacity at all levels. In today's knowledge economy, keeping abreast of such changes is critical to a country's ability to grow its economy. Transferring, adapting and sharing knowledge through exposure to different environments and reflection on and discussion of what can be transferred or adapted to one's own context ensures that professionals in a given field can provide answers to the world's pressing environmental, political or socioeconomic conditions and problems, such as hunger and poverty, climate change and sustainable development.

Aware of this national requirement and of the rapid growth in many of its sectors and of developments in international processes on climate change and in biodiversity conservation, the Ministry of Forestry in Fiji through the Fiji Forestry Training Centre (FTC) has taken concrete steps to increase the country's capacity in biodiversity conservation and protected areas management (BCPAM).



© FAO/Rudolf Hahn. Partnership between Queensland Park and Wildlife Service and TREAT (a Landcare community NGO for ecosystem restoration and reforestation of corridors (mainly rivers), linking the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Sites with the Barrier Reef. The Nursery is assisted by many volunteers from surrounding communities who are members of TREAT.

A comprehensive technical study tour¹ to Queensland, Australia, provided the FTC with a unique opportunity to expose its staff to an entire range of contemporary information and ideas on Australia's approach to sustainable management of natural resources, biodiversity conservation and protected areas. The knowledge garnered by participants through first-hand insights into sustainable BCPAM will contribute significantly to the Centre's training curriculum as well as the development of its new training course to increase local capacity in BCPAM.

Built around a key component of the FAO-Global Environment Facility-funded project "Forest and Protected Area Management"², to review the FTC curriculum, the study tour centred on visits to the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Services. The specific focus of the tour members – trainers, FTC trainers, principal, staff and consultants and the national project coordinator from the Fijian Department of Forest – was to gain professional technical insights into the preparation of 24 curricula modules in a course that will offer six different certificate levels.



©FAO/Rudolf Hahn. Ms Peta-Marie Standley. Operations Manager, Cape York NRM, making a presentation to the study tour group.

¹ The tour was designed and coordinated by Dr Lea Scherl, international consultant, who is also assisting with the development of a new curriculum and course programme in Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas Management within the Forest Training Center in Fiji, with the support of Mr David Cassells, Adjunct Associate Professor, James Cook University, Queensland, Australia.

² Project to conserve biodiversity in Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Niue by expanding and consolidating their networks of protected areas, building capacity for conservation management and sustainable use of biodiversity and reducing forest and land degradation. Rudolf Hahn, FAO Chief Technical Advisor, implements and coordinates this project from his office in the Department of Environment in Suva, Fiji, with the assistance of FAO National Project Coordinators based in the four countries: Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and Niue.

Meetings with key headquarters and field staff of the Queensland National Parks and Wildlife Services as well as dialogue with traditional land owners and staff of an aboriginal corporation provided new knowledge and depth of understanding of technical information, while visits to various national parks and world heritage sites such as the Wet Tropics of Queensland World Heritage Area and the Great Barrier Reef National Parks demonstrated tangible results of the Queensland authorities' success in BCPAM.



©FAO/Rudolf Hahn. Visit to Girringun Aboriginal Corporation to learn about empowerment of indigenous people and their management of national parks. Joint patrol of site as capacity building has been offered to the Fijian participants.

This interesting mix of field visits to various government institutions, NGOs and private sector offices and encounters with members of academia meant that tour participants received a practical 360-degree overview of BCPAM at the landscape level. In particular, the management of the Wet Tropics of Queensland and the Barrier Reef World Heritage areas with their various forms of governance, conservation issues, physical connectivity from ridge to reef through landscape-level corridors, eco-tourism ventures, law enforcement, and aspects of indigenous peoples rights, were the source of relevant, real-life information that staff from the FTC could assimilate and eventually tailor to their training programmes and the new modules under development.



©FAO/Rudolf Hahn. Skyrail/train excursion from Cairns to Kuranda (and back) over parts of the Tropical Rainforest World Heritage Area Guided tour with park ranger.

Key conclusions

Informative, educational, well-organized and relevant for their work were the participants' main observations about the study tour, and that it also provided them with a benchmark for real-time sustainable BCPAM and for comparisons between Australian and Fijian practices. They were enthused by the variety of activities they engaged in, which helped generate lots of new ideas. The knowledge they gained has broadened the team's technical know-how, particularly for the formulation and development of new course content and will also support the teaching of existing vocational courses.

Read more

- [Photo gallery](#): Capacity-building study tour for Fiji Forest Training Centre on biodiversity conservation and protected area management Queensland, Australia, 30 October to 10 November 2016.
- inFO news 41 [Wakatu Fiji! A call to action to reverse the decline in Fiji's lands and forests](#)
- inFO news 35 [Fiji and partners consolidating action on sustainable natural resource management](#)
- FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific news item - [Protecting Fiji's forests and environment through regulatory enforcement and training](#)
- [FAO Regional Office for the Pacific website](#)
- News articles on the Wakatu Fiji! Campaign. Fiji Times 2016: [01 June 2016](#); [22 August](#); [07 September](#); [17 October](#).

- Wakatu Fiji! Twitter <https://twitter.com/wakatufiji> and Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WakatuFiji/>



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