



WWF

FACTSHEET

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WWF Priority Places- Southwest Pacific

Sawaieke- Gau Island-Fiji

Conservation Focus

WWF's main focus with the communities of Sawaieke District has been to develop their community marine protected area. An extensive 20km barrier reef located 7km from shore protects the deep lagoon which characterizes the entire coastline with a diverse array of marine habitats ranging from extensive sea grass meadows, large mud flats and mangrove forest which line the shoreline. Much of the district and island interior landscape is still covered in with dense cloud forest, which link up to a number of rivers and streams, further adding to a diverse array of freshwater and estuarine ecosystems in the area. Slash and burn agriculture is increasingly encroaching into much of the upland virgin cloud forest and poor land management practices generally within the district has increased sedimentation into the coastal marine environment, posing reef habitat degradation and decline in fish diversity, abundance and biomass. Gau Island sustains some unique ecological features which include; its cloud forest as a breeding ground to the Fiji Petrel or Kacau ni Gau (*Pseudobulweria macgillivrayi*), Fiji's only endemic seabird, its extensive and lush sea grass meadows as feeding grounds supporting a significant population of threatened green (*Chelonia mydas*) and hawksbill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) turtles; and the outlying Nagali passage, noted for shark diversity and aggregation.



GAU ISLAND IS NOTED FOR HAVING FIJIS ONLY ENDEMIC SEABIRD, THE FIJI PETREL OR KACAU NI GAU.

Site Profile

The Sawaieke District is the largest of three on the island of Gau, the fifth largest island in Fiji and is part of the Lomaiviti or Central group of islands making up the Fiji archipelago. Gau, located 90km east of Fiji's capital Suva, has a land area of about 190km², a coastline of 66km² and an extensive encircling barrier reef. There are 16 coastal villages and eleven settlements on the island with an estimated resident population of over 3000. WWF's focus, Sawaieke District, consists of 8 villages; Sawaieke, Somosomo, Nawaikama, Nukuloa, Levuka-i-Gau, Yadua, Lovu and Vadravadra, with a collective population of 1800.



Coastal village on Gau island

© Opeti Vateirei / WWF-SPP0

Conservation- Safeguarding Nature and Community Interests

WWF's involvement with communities on Gau was initiated through an official request made by the Takala-i-Gau, or Traditional Head of the island in 2004. This request was due to the district communities growing concern with observed decline in fisheries and marine resources within their fishing grounds, and encouraged by the success stories of other local community marine protected areas improving fisheries, approached WWF to similarly assist them. With funding secured through VASS-NZAID in 2005, a marine biological baseline assessment of Tikina Sawaieke's marine resources was undertaken as a first attempt to map out marine habitat health as an initial step in information gathering toward establishing and monitoring the communities marine protected area. The Takala-i-Gau in consensus with the community and consultation with WWF established a permanent community protected area the same year.

As part of its continuing partnership with the island communities, WWF has in 2010 begun to actively implement an extension and up scaling of its original marine conservation work. Its current effort is a three year project implemented in partnership with WWF- Austria which aims to strengthen the islands coastal communities resilience against the impacts of climate change through an integrated approach through biodiversity and rural development. This island project applies the Ecosystem Based Management approach piloted through the Macuata Qoliqoli Cokovata Project in retrospect to a smaller scale island setting to determine localised examples for replication and advocacy across a wider geographical scale within the Fiji Islands Marine Eco-region.



Sea weed farming in Sawaieke, Gau, Fiji

© Opeti Vaseleli / WWF SPPC



WWF community environmental awareness in Sawaieke village, Gau island

© Alfred Ralifo / WWF SPPC

WWF Community Assisted Achievements at a Glance

- An established permanent community marine protected area
- Establishment of 4 community forest nurseries on the island, with reforestation programme
- Collation of extensive baseline data to assist community in long term conservation and development efforts
- Environment conservation awareness carried out with communities and school

For more information

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Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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