

Bat Conservation International and Rotokas Ecotourism Consultation

Location: Wakunai Station, Wakunai District, ARoB

Date: 09/02/15

Welcome:

The Terra CoE Chairman, Amos Tevaria, welcomed BCI, Bougainville Environment Bureau, Rotokas Ecotourism and the community to this consultation workshop. He stated that he has heard a lot about BCI and he is very interested to learn more about BCI's work and how BCI could work with the community here in Wakunai. The Chairman emphasised that the visitors are most welcome and the community is very interested in hearing BCI's presentation.

Opening Prayer:

Junias Repiriri (Rotokas Ecotourism) thanked God for bringing the people together today to hear BCI's message and learn more about conservation.

Introductions:

All visitors introduced themselves, including: the Bougainville Environment Bureau (Beatrix Oni) and BCI (Dave Walden). This was followed by introductions from participants attending the consultation (see attendance to list).

Presentation:

See PowerPoint presentation

Community Feedback:

Jacob Rerevate (CoE Member, Ruruvu) – In the past the environment in Bougainville was more balanced and the ecosystem was in harmony. Now there is imbalance. There is over population which is putting pressure on the land. Also the education system is taking us away from the land into the towns and making us forget about the ecosystems. As leaders we need to plan how we can conserve our environment, including bats. We would need educational messages targeting schools and the wider community.

Joel Vauiriata (CoE Member and Wakunai district E/O) – BCI needs to talk to our chiefs; our chiefs have a better idea about what kind of bats are in the bush and about our environment.

Jeremiah Dasiana (Youth leader, Kiviri Village – Our Ancestors used to stories to conduct conservation, one example is that my grandfather would say “don't kill this bat, this bat has some special power that we must respect”. It is good to have this presentation because you give us other information. My question is, were our ancestor's right to say that bats have special powers?

Dave: Bats are amazing creatures that can do very special things that humans and other creatures can't do, they use echo location to navigate, and they are very good hunters, and help pollinate plants and spread seeds. So they do have some special characteristics that other creatures don't have.

Question: What would happen if we lost all of our bats?

Jacob Rerevate (CoE Member, Ruruvu) – I really appreciate BCI coming here because it is not just about conserving our environment but this is also related to preserving our culture because our environment is such an important part of our culture. BCI can help us fight ignorance in relation to the ecosystem and help preserve our environment at the same time. It would be good if you could help with training at our schools and for our teachers to help spread the conservation message.

Amos Tevaria (CoE Chairman) – We and the people here do not understand the importance of bats so we need more education and awareness on the importance of bats. We thought they just destroyed our plants and fruits. What are the next steps for from here? How can we work together?

Alfri Poukato (CoE Member, Ibu) – We have a very big interest in this project. We the people here need more awareness and education. Rotokas Ecotourism can help with the awareness and assist with the training.

Jacob Rerevate (CoE Member, Ruruvu) – We are stewards of the environment and our lands and our chiefs need to take responsibility for this, but to do this they need training, they need to understand their roles and responsibilities. Further, you need to be aware that there are people who think you will be doing other activities – some might think you are mining for gold. On the whole we like this because it supports our culture.

Leo Reivasi (Electoral Officer) – Your visit is very timely as people don't understand the importance of bats, so we need more awareness and trainings, including training of trainers. We currently understand that there are negatives of bats around eating food but they obviously help us with other things as well.

Jeremiah Dasiana (Youth leader, Kiviri Village) – In Bougainville we have many caves owned by clans and chiefs, these people need to be targeted, as for me, I only see the bats when they're flying at dusk

Jacob Rieperi (CoE Member, Ruruvu) – There is a lot of interest here in a collaborative project, there are lots of positives like the links to tourism. But there are a number of problems. 1) Our chiefs have been indoctrinated by concepts and ideas from other cultures, 2) Globalisation is also negatively affecting our culture, 3) We need to maintain our culture, like Upe and other customs.

Leo Reivasi (Electoral Officer) – There is a general agreement that we should work together in Wakunai and then expand out.

Amos Tevaria (CoE Chairman) – Closing remarks: This proposed project isn't about Dave or BCI, it is about helping to preserve our own environment, our own culture. We know that preservation of our environment is related to our health and wellbeing so we need to start doing things to conserve our environment.

Signing of Memorandum of Agreement