

## **OceansWatch EIA re Sustainable Milling activities in Vanikoro**

### **Background**

The Island of Vanikoro is heavily wooded and was logged about 50 years ago. When that was done, some difficult areas such as very steep slopes and gullies etc were not touched, so the Island is currently covered in mainly >50 year old re-growth and some Old Growth forest.

Malaysian loggers approached Lavaka and Buma communities about 18 months ago and persuaded the community to allow logging at Lavaka, on the basis of promised financial returns, roads and school buildings etc. The decision was and still is very contentious. Recently several logging vehicles were damaged by local residents and the police have been trying to make arrests, unsuccessfully.

OceansWatch Director Chris Bone has been approached by members of the Lavaka community who have asked how to “stop the loggers” and what alternative development programs we can provide to help their sustainable economic development and thus prevent the community’s need for logging income. We have been told that the water supply to the Lavaka School has been spoilt and community members are very upset about the negative environmental impact.

### **2014 visit to Vanikoro**

OceansWatch visited Vanikoro in 2014 and observed the logging site. We observed some discoloured water in the area as we approached the log pond but were unable to take turbidity readings or check for siltation due to time constraints. OceansWatch director Chris Bone discussed the logging issue with the Buma village Chief, Chris, who claims to be Paramount Chief of all of the Vanikoro Islands. We are unclear about his exact status but are sure that he is chief of the Teanu area of Vanikoro, which includes parts of the logging site.

Chief Chris’s view is that whilst he does not want logging he believes that some community members have no other choice in order to pay school fees etc. He told us that some locally operated milling was also going on as well as the logging. He says that the community members can no longer pay school fees from harvesting marine resources, because the Green Snail have disappeared, the Trochus are increasingly hard to find and Beche de Mer harvesting has been banned by the Government. Copra is no longer financially viable due to shipping costs.

Chief Chris was very interested and supportive of our Coconut Oil program. Towards the end of our stay Chris Bone met with Chief Chris again to discuss logging and the overall program. At the end of this discussion Chief Chris agreed that he would close his Island of Tevai to all logging and milling, and close all other areas under his control to logging. He requested that the Coconut Oil program was developed in other villages in Vanikoro and that we assist them with developing a sustainable milling management plan. We agreed in principal to this request subject to the land being registered as a

Protected Area under the Solomon Islands Protected Areas Act. Prior to registration a Sustainable Management Plan, which shall include a Sustainable Milling plan has to be approved by the Solomon Islands Protected Areas Committee set up under the Protected Areas Act.

During our 2015 visit we shall: build awareness amongst all stakeholders in Buma and Lavaka villages about the Protected Areas Act and how it can protect the area against logging; complete training of the women of Buma Village in the production of coconut oil to enable them to earn a sufficient income to pay School fees etc; invite women leaders from Lavaka and other villages in Vanikoro to see the coconut oil being produced and draw up a draft Sustainable Management Plan for later submission to the Protected Areas Act committee for consideration. Protecting land in Vanikoro under the Protected Areas Act is a big decision for local stakeholders. When registered it will be one of the first areas in the Solomon Islands to have done so. We believe that the best course of action will be for the village to adopt the draft management plan in 2015 and make any required adjustments in 2016 from lessons learned before final submission in 2016. By waiting until 2016 for final submission we are very hopeful that the village of Lavaka will also wish to follow an identical program and shall be keen to register their land too. This will result in 2/3rds of Vanikoro being protected from logging and thus ensure long term protection for the habitat of the Vanikoro Flying Fox.

### **Environmental impacts 2015**

1. An end to logging on most of Vanikoro. Local communities are unlikely to renew the logging license after expiration in July 2015, due to our incentive to introduce a sustainable Virgin Coconut Oil program as an alternative.
2. An end to unmanaged milling in Teanu tribal lands. Currently some milling is happening on the main Island of Vanikoro but we have not assessed how much yet due to time and travel constraints. We have seen a few small piles of sawn timber on a beach and the Chief confirms that there is a chainsaw mill on the Island. This milling is completely unmanaged. In 2015 we shall try to ascertain the extent of current milling activities and draft a Sustainable Management plan of Teanu customary land that shall include a Sustainable Milling plan.
3. No more significant loss of habitat of the Vanikoro Flying Fox. Currently major habitat loss is occurring due to logging. See 1, above.
4. Significant reduction in watercourse pollution and siltation. The Sustainable Milling plan will include riparian strip protection to stop streamside erosion.
5. Significant reduction in marine pollution and siltation. A Sustainable Milling plan will include riparian strip protection to stop streamside erosion, thus preventing marine siltation.
6. A gradual rebuild of canopy cover is expected as re-growth covers logged areas from the 2014-15 logging. No change in canopy cover from the result of the milling is expected. During milling operations the timber is sawn on site and sawn timber carried out by hand, thus canopy is not

effected, other than at the site where the tree is felled. This is already happening during ad hoc milling, so the managed milling will not effect canopy cover.

7. Seed sources protected. A sustainable milling management plan will protect but not be limited to seed sources of the: Pacific Kauri (*Agathis macrophylla*), Sandalwood (*Santalum austrocaledonicum*), Vitex (*Vitex cofassus*), Rosewood, (*Pterocarpus indicus*) and Kwila (*Intsia bijuga*).
8. Roosting trees will be protected under the Sustainable Milling plan.
9. Forest Guardian teams trained to ascertain timber yield.

### Environmental impact 2016 and beyond

1. An end to all logging on Vanikoro.
2. A Sustainable Management plan lodged under the Solomon Islands Protected Areas Act.
3. Legal protection of Vanikoro Flying Fox habitat (time dependant on the committee of the Solomon Islands Protected Areas Act).
4. An end to watercourse pollution and siltation due to logging
5. An end to marine pollution and siltation due to logging
6. A small amount of managed sustainable milling, primarily for local requirement, as opposed to the current situation of completely unmanaged milling.
7. No overall negative environmental impact is anticipated.
8. FSC accreditation. Long term the plan will work towards FSC accreditation.
9. Forest Guardians trained to monitor and enforce the Sustainable Milling plan

### Financing.

Subject to our 2015 CEPF grant being awarded we shall have sufficient funds to undertake the work mentioned above. We have been invited to submit a funding application to USAID for Climate Change work in Vanikoro in 2016. We are very optimistic that this grant will be awarded and these funds will allow us to visit Lavaka and Buma in 2016. A further smaller grant from CEPF, to add to the USAID grant will allow completion of all work in Vanikoro for the protection of the habitat of the Vanikoro Flying Fox.

