

National Park Project builds local support in Fiji

Title

The Taveuni National Park Project has been running for six months and NatureFiji-MareqetiViti have completed the first round of consultations with all the landowners and other stakeholders. The island of Taveuni is Fiji's 3rd largest island. Since the 1980s, the National Trust and the Fiji Department of Forests have been advocating for the merger of three existing parks (the Ravilevu Nature Reserve, Taveuni Forest Reserve and the Bouma National Heritage Park) to form a single contiguous 'Taveuni National Park'. Getting the landowners involved in the Protected Area discussions is the main objective of this project. The reasons behind the Taveuni National Park proposal are now well understood and the consultation meetings are now drawing out substantive discussion said NatureFiji-MareqetiViti recently. The project received a very welcome boost this week when the Tui Cakau Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu met with Team Leader Waisale Mataitoga and NatureFiji-MareqetiViti Director Dick Watling for a briefing on project progress. The Tui Cakau expressed his appreciation for the work being undertaken by NatureFiji-MareqetiViti on Taveuni and offered the project his full support. But he laid down a clear challenge for the project - a three year timeline for achieving National Park status.

The project is currently organising a visit to Vanua Levu and Viti Levu by 2 or 3 from each of the 18 mataqali (clans) involved in the project where they will visit existing protected areas such as Waisali, Colo-i-suva, Sovi, Sigatoka Sand Dunes Protected Area and Tavuni Hill Fort. Here they will get a chance to meet landowners and learn from them about the Protected Areas. This will act as a spring board for the second round of consultations on their return when each mataqali will have discussions with the project on an individual basis. These consultations will be followed by discussions at the relevant Tikina meetings and the Provincial meeting.

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<http://www.naturefiji.org/images/news/720120618173728.JPG>



The Tui Cakau, Ratu Naiqama Lalabalavu at the MareqetiViti Taveuni office.

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