

LAU SEASCAPE CHRONICLES

CI Fiji's Community Connection

JUNE 2023

ISSUE 1

Welcome to our newsletter

We are excited to introduce the Lau Seascapes Chronicles, a brand-new newsletter created to keep you informed and engaged with the important work CI Fiji is doing in and around the Lau Seascapes. Our mission is to protect the rich biodiversity and cultural heritage of this beautiful region while promoting sustainable development for the benefit of our community.

In each quarterly issue, you can expect to find updates on our latest projects, stories of community engagement, highlights of local conservation efforts, and insights into the fascinating marine life and ecosystems unique to the Lau Seascapes. We will also share information about upcoming events, workshops, and opportunities for you to get involved and make a difference.

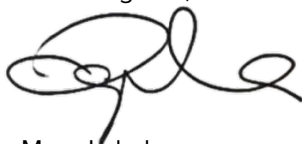
Our goal is to foster a strong sense of connection among all stakeholders, ensuring that our collective efforts lead to a healthy and thriving environment for generations to come. We believe that by working together, we can create a sustainable future for the communities

that live in Lau while fulfilling the vision, mission and objectives of the Lau Seascapes Strategy/ in an effort to sustain the incredible natural and cultural treasures in Lau.

We invite you to join us on this journey, and we encourage you to share the Lau Seascapes Chronicles with friends, and family, who are passionate about preserving the unique beauty and vitality of the far eastern islands of our beloved nation.

We extend a warm thanks to the Vanua o Lau, the Fiji Government and all our conservation partners for their continued support and collaboration to preserve the Lau Seascapes.

Warm regards,



Mere Lakeba
Senior Director, Fiji Program and
Regional Fisheries
Conservation International Fiji

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The Lau Seascapes



The Lau Seascapes, located in the South Pacific Ocean, is a unique marine ecosystem brimming with unspoiled beauty and teeming with diverse life forms. The islands host a wealth of terrestrial and marine biodiversity, offering a sanctuary to various marine species, including sea turtles, sharks, and whales. However, the unique biodiversity and the cultural heritage of the Indigenous Lau communities are under threat, pushing conservation to the forefront.



The Lau Seascapes initiative is a proactive response to environmental concerns, driven by the Lau Chiefs' deep worries over the degradation of the region's resources due to human activity and climate change. Established in 2016 through a Memorandum of Understanding with Conservation International, the initiative aims to revive traditional sustainable practices, advocate for responsible resource use, and

combat overfishing and poaching through local surveillance.

The Lau Seascapes Strategy was introduced in 2019, focusing on holistic management from ridges to reefs and oceans. Its main goals are to preserve Lau's exceptional biodiversity and promote sustainable production practices.

This collaborative conservation effort engages communities, the Fijian government, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations, all sharing a commitment to protect Lau's biodiversity, enhance climate resilience, and drive sustainable development through nature-based solutions.

The Lau Seascapes initiative serves as an inspiring testament to proactive environmental stewardship, showcasing the power of collaboration in preserving our precious seascapes.

What's a 'seascapes'?

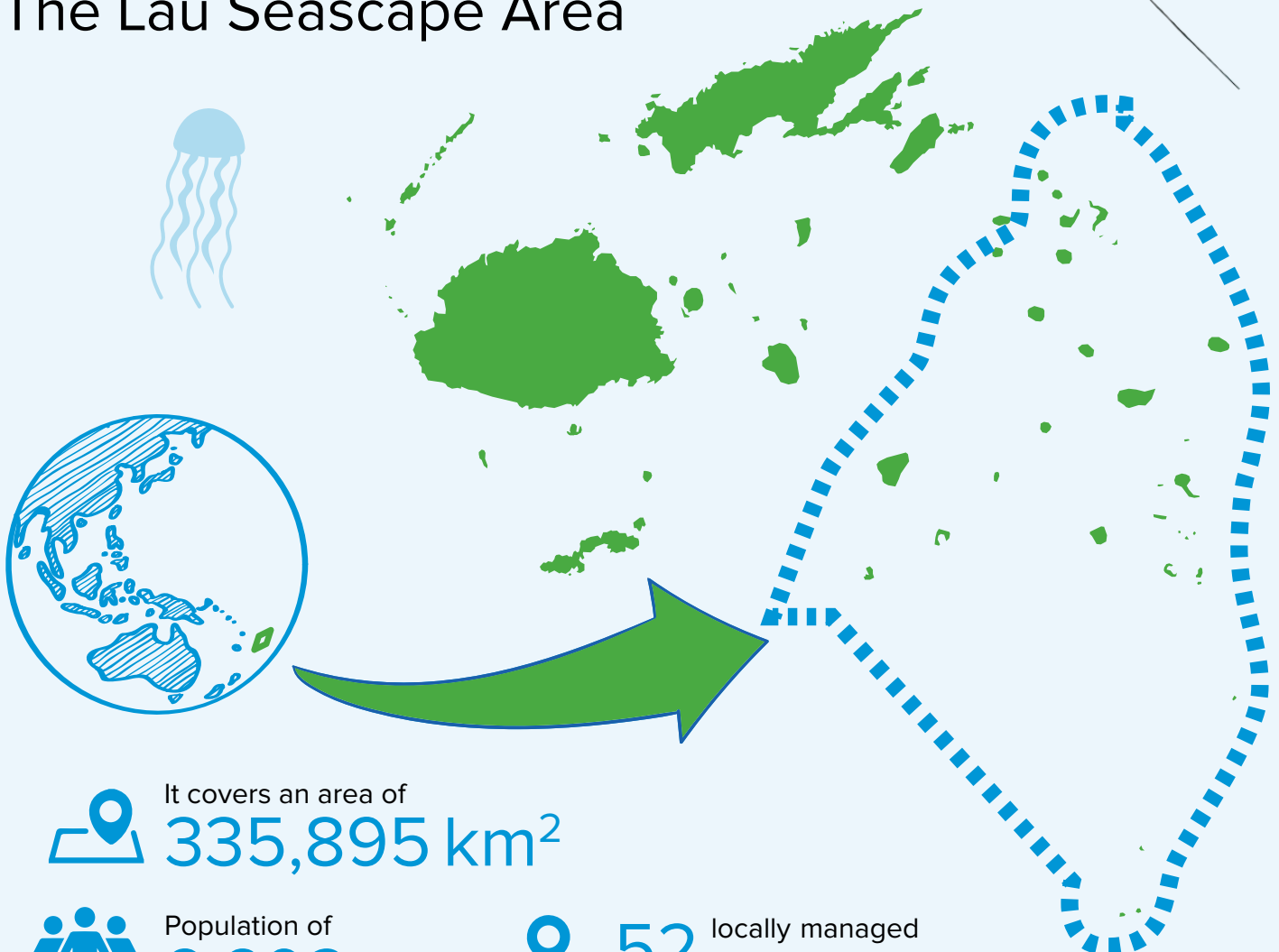
A seascape is a group of special ocean places that are protected to keep marine life diverse and plentiful. Governments, communities, private organizations, and other conservation leaders work together to take care of these areas and make sure people can enjoy the ocean while keeping it healthy



The Lau Seascapes Partners



The Lau Seascapes Area



It covers an area of **335,895 km²**

Population of **9,602**

52 locally managed marine areas

60 islands

80% live coral cover

13 inhabited islands

200+ hard coral species

527 fish species and many marine species such as sea turtles, sharks, and whales.



Fiji backs Upcoming Financing Framework for Lau Seascape Conservation



Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Hon. Vatimi Rayalu

As part of Conservation International Fiji, we're in the process of developing the Sustainable Blended Financing Framework, a fresh initiative specifically designed for the Indigenous-led Lau Seascape. Our aim is to place people at the core of sustainable development, bringing together public and private funding to boost conservation efforts and foster sustainable livelihoods.

During a workshop on the Framework held in Suva in March 2023, the Fiji government, represented by the Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Hon. Vatimi Rayalu, pledged its support for our initiative. We received commendation from the Minister for the leadership displayed by the Lau Indigenous community. The government also conveyed their wish for a comprehensive briefing on the Lau Seascape Initiative.

Our upcoming framework utilizes a "Protection and Production" approach, which balances natural resource protection with the assurance of a sustainable local economy. The Indigenous resource owners of Lau have expressed strong support for our financing framework, which not only recognizes the cultural significance of the seascape to the Indigenous communities, but also ensures their voice is reflected in conservation commitments.

Currently under development, the Financing Framework will actively collaborate with government ministries, the private sector, and the Lau community to ensure our approach is thorough, feasible, and effective.



The upcoming financing framework that is being developed recognizes the cultural importance of the seascape to the Indigenous communities and ensures that the voice of Lau is reflected in conservation commitments. We know the financing framework once fully developed will pay for the conservation efforts we are undertaking in Lau, and the benefit will and must roll over to the people in creating a sustainable livelihood – we look forward to working with the government and CI Fiji on this.

-Roko Sau, Chief of Totoya-

Lau Seascape Yaubula Planning Workshop



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Vatimi Rayalu with Vanua Lau Chiefs, community members, and Conservation International Fiji team

We hosted the Lau Seascape Yaubula Planning Workshop in Suva from 1st to 3rd March, with representatives from Lau's 13 districts in attendance. Our discussions revolved around protecting and conserving natural resources for future generations, with topics covering Marine Protected Areas, sustainable practices, economic initiatives, and women's livelihood improvement. We also recognized

the need to revive traditional knowledge and strengthen the chiefs' forum, and improve communication between village and provincial levels. Lastly, we discussed the Lau Yaubula Festival Day slated to be hosted in June 2023. The attendees are now prepared to share the knowledge gained with their districts.

Community Consultation for 30x30 Government Initiative



Provincial administrator Lau, Roko Tui Lau, Ogea community member, and CI Fiji representative.
Credit: Fiji Government

The second phase of the 30x30 Marine Protected Area consultation for the Lau province took place across 13 districts in February 2023. Led by Lau Provincial Administrator Waganidrola and Roko Tui Lau Jioji Kalounivalu, the awareness campaign was conducted in collaboration with Conservation International Fiji, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, and Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area. Fiji's 30x30 national initiative aims to protect 30% of Fiji's Exclusive Economic Zone, demonstrating how ocean

conservation can benefit local livelihoods, enhance climate change resilience, preserve biodiversity, and strengthen the economy.

The first phase of 30x30 consultations in Lau covered the islands of Vanua Balavu, Cicia, and Nayau that took place from 18th to 21st of October, 2022 while the second phase covered the rest of the Lau Group in February 2023.

The consultation received overall positive responses community wide.



Global Seascape Workshop Successfully Concluded in Fiji



Field practitioners and technical experts from CI Global at the Warwick Resort in Fiji for the Global Seascape Workshop

As Conservation International (CI) Fiji, we had the immense pleasure of hosting the annual Global Seascape Workshop in May 2023. This remarkable event, which has been a cornerstone of our efforts for an incredible 18 years, provided a vital stage for seascape practitioners and partners from CI across the world to come together, to exchange ideas, and to renew our shared dedication towards sustainable seascapes.

Our Seascape Program, renowned for its collaborative ethos, has seen 14 fruitful exchanges over the years, cultivating a fertile environment for continuous learning. This year, we saw field practitioners and technical experts come together yet again to further refine our strategies and integrate precious lessons learned. These discussions have always served as the bedrock of our adaptive management and sparked innovative ideas, all in the pursuit of protecting

and stewarding the precious seascapes of our planet. This year, we had the honor of welcoming representatives from five of our established Seascape programs, including Bird's Head Seascape from Indonesia, Verde Island Passage from the Philippines, Abrolhos Seascape from Brazil, Eastern Tropical Pacific Seascape spanning Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, and Ecuador, and the Lau Seascape from our own beautiful Fiji.

We proudly regard the workshop as a vibrant hub for learning and exchanging ideas, propelling significant progress towards sustainable marine management. Our tradition of shared commitment and collaboration within the Seascape Workshop continues to emphasize the necessity of global unity in our crucial mission to safeguard the world's seascapes.



Sneak peak

Rapid Biodiversity Study in Lau’s Northern Islands Aims to Safeguard Precious Ecosystems

At CI Fiji, we recently embarked on a swift, comprehensive assessment of the terrestrial biodiversity on Lau’s northern islands, focusing our attention keenly on the diverse array of life forms present there, with a special interest in bats and amphibians. Our primary objectives are to identify any unique or endangered species, understand their interactions, and evaluate the

current state of their habitats to determine the health status of each species. This crucial information will enable us to collaborate effectively with the local communities in Lau, finding and implementing ways to protect and preserve Lau’s remarkable wildlife, ensuring its safety and health for generations to come.



Upcoming Events

- Yaubula Festival 29th - 30th June, Suva

The upcoming Lau Yaubula Festival aims to raise awareness about the importance of preserving the natural resources of the Lau region while providing an opportunity for local communities to showcase their unique cultural heritage. This engaging event features a diverse array of exhibits, and traditional artifact displays, all aimed at educating visitors about the sustainable use and conservation of the region’s natural resources.

- Environmental DNA or eDNA training for Yaubula Management Support Team (YMST) - 21st - 22nd June, 2023.

- Lau Seascape Symposium 23rd June, 2023

