



Coral Triangle Initiative Australian Government Quarterly Newsletter

Malaysia, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste endorse secretariat agreement at latest round of CTI meetings

Malaysia, one of the six member countries (CT6) of the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI), hosted the latest round of CTI meetings from 19 to 26 November. The 8th Council of Senior Officials and a number of technical working group presentations were held in Kuala Lumpur, followed by the endorsement of outcomes at the Ministerial meeting in Putrajaya.

Representatives from all CTI member countries, as well as development partners, attended this round of meetings. In a regional platform like the CTI, development partners—including the Asian Development Bank, World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International, the United States Government and the Australian Government—each play an important role in partnering with the member countries involved and fostering positive and sustainable outcomes.

The eight-day event focused on CTI governance arrangements and the establishment and operations of the permanent secretariat. These efforts were then capped off with the signing of the 'Secretariat Agreement' by three more member countries—Malaysia, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste.



(Photo: Lydia Napitupulu)

With the signing of this agreement, Malaysia, Solomon Islands and Timor-Leste join Indonesia in the group of CTI signatory countries. Papua New Guinea and the Philippines are expected to join this group in the very near future with both countries currently engaged in their respective ratification processes.

The signed agreement, once ratified by all member countries, means the CTI will have a legally-independent regional secretariat that is governed by mutually-agreed rules and regulations for its operations.

Other key decisions endorsed by ministers during the meeting will support development of key governance and administrative arrangements for the permanent secretariat. These include:

- the development of a detailed workplan that outlines the steps required to transition from an interim to a permanent secretariat
- the adoption of criteria and processes for organisations wishing to become CTI Partners

- the initiation of a study on sustainable financing issues and options
- agreement on work plans for working groups on seascapes, marine protected areas (MPAs), fisheries, climate change adaptation and threatened species.

Overall, the latest round of CTI meetings was a success. Significant steps were made towards a legally-independent regional secretariat with capacity to take the CTI forward. Member countries and partners were also pleased with the progress made by the technical working groups whose tasks underpin many of the operational aspects of CTI. These include working groups on seascapes, fisheries, marine protected areas, climate change, monitoring and evaluation, coordination mechanisms and finance.

More detailed information on the key decisions and outcomes of the meetings will be available from the CTI website in the coming weeks—www.coraltriangleinitiative.org.

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(Photo: Lydia Napitupulu)



Participants from coral farming training (Photo: The WorldFish Center, Solomon Islands)

What are coral reefs worth?

A study into the value of corals to Solomon Islands communities

With 80 per cent of Solomon Islanders living in rural coastal areas, many of their communities rely on the resources provided by coral reefs as a source of food and income. Unfortunately, Solomon Islands reefs—like those of many other countries—are under pressure from a combination of natural and human-induced impacts such as climate change, population growth and over-harvesting.

FAST FACTS

Name of project:

Economic valuation of coral reefs

Partner NGO:

WorldFish Centre

Despite the availability of sustainable coral harvesting and farming methods, the vast majority of the harvesting of corals in Solomon Islands use wild harvest techniques which can cause degradation and destruction of reef habitat. If the harvesting of coral continues to be unsustainable, the future of the reef-related resources—that many Solomon Islands communities rely upon—will be in jeopardy.

To help the Solomon Islands Government and its coastal communities develop research-based coral reef management strategies, the Australian Government has funded a research project to look at the economic value of the Pacific island nation's coral reefs. The research project was implemented by the WorldFish Center in partnership with the Asian Development Bank Knowledge Management Project, the Solomon Islands Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, and Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology.

The research study looked at four Solomon Islands communities—two villages which are known to use reefs to extract coral products for trade, as well as two villages that mainly use the reefs to harvest food products. As part of the study, researchers interviewed members of the community—particularly those who used the reefs for food, trade or personal use—to get a better understanding of which coral reef resources Solomon Islanders rely more on, for what purpose, and how they are extracted.

The study found that Solomon Islands coral reefs sustain coastal communities in a number of ways—by providing food products (fish, invertebrates, seaweed, turtle and shark), trade products (aquarium and curio corals, coral for lime, trochus and shark fin) and construction materials (sand, rubble and coral stone). The research also found that fish ranked as having the greatest economic value of reef goods, with fish considered equally important for both consumption and as a source of income.

In contrast to fish, coral-related goods were valued more as a source of income, rather than being used for subsistence purposes. In communities which traded coral goods—for construction materials, aquarium and curio trades and the production of lime—the direct extraction of corals provided significant earnings to some members of the community.



Coral stone for construction (Photo: The WorldFish Center, Solomon Islands)

In these communities, the research found that direct extraction activities—which tend to cause damage to coral reefs—made up 8–22 per cent of the earnings made by communities trading coral goods. In comparison, earnings from the direct extraction of corals represent less than 5 per cent of the total revenue made by the villages that mainly use the reefs to harvest food products.

However, it is encouraging to note that the study found a general willingness to adopt sustainable farming and harvesting practices. As part of the research study, sustainable coral

farming training was provided to people from 12 communities that are currently involved in the wild-harvest of corals. For most participants, it was the first time they had received information and training about farming corals, and they were excited to return to their villages to test out their new knowledge.

This general sentiment was reflected in the research's finding that 81 per cent of coral harvesters in the coral trade communities were willing to change their practice from wild harvest to farming corals if they received training, knowledge and a price incentive to farm corals.

These research findings highlighted the need to review and improve legislation and enforcement controlling the harvest of corals in Solomon Islands, and to provide incentives to promote coral farming for the aquarium, curio and lime trades at the village level. The study's findings also drew attention to the critical need to increase basic knowledge and awareness of the benefits that coral reefs provide to local communities—starting with the fact that **'corals are an animal—not a stone'**—and that they have an important role to keep reefs and fisheries healthy for future generations.

Australian Government CTI support update: Mapping and assessment of coastal and marine habitats in Timor-Leste

One year on from its rollout, mapping experts from Charles Darwin University, along with their colleagues from the Timor-Leste government, have made considerable progress in mapping the marine and coastal habitats of Timor-Leste.

Funded by the Australian Government as part of its commitment to deliver CTI support in Timor-Leste, this mapping project aims to produce a national dataset for use by the Timor-Leste government, which will inform future planning and management activities. The project focuses on charting unsurveyed regions of the northwest and south coasts, including Atauro Island and the exclave of Oecussi.

The project also aims to increase the skills of officers from the Timor-Leste Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF)—particularly mapping officers from the Ministry's Agriculture and Land Use Geographic Information System (ALGIS) area.

Since it was first featured in the December 2011 issue of this newsletter, the project has reached a number of significant milestones.

After first being introduced to the theoretical and practical aspects of remote sensing at a workshop conducted in Dili by Charles Darwin University in March this year, ALGIS mapping officers proceeded to conduct fieldwork in Beacou (Bobonaro district), Suai (Kova Lima district), and Tibar (Liquicia district). The data collection was completed in June 2012 during a joint survey involving staff from Charles Darwin University, ALGIS and MAF.

The joint survey team collected field data through reef and beach walks, snorkelling and marine surveys from boats that would be used to validate habitat maps that are created using Landsat satellite imagery and remote sensing techniques. The surveys focussed on the three sites due to their high degree of habitat variety, which includes coral reef, seagrass and mangrove areas. Throughout the three surveys, ALGIS and MAF officers mastered field survey techniques that will help them carry out future mapping activities. Training in remote sensing was also completed. Participants learnt how to use digital images to obtain information about an object, area, or phenomenon, without being in direct contact with the feature under investigation.

FAST FACTS

Name of project:

Mapping of coastal and marine habitats in Timor-Leste

Partner NGO:

Charles Darwin University

The Timorese Government officers and local community (Suco) members were integral during the field surveys. They helped the data collecting team to gain access to areas, helped set up the survey equipment, and discussed their knowledge of habitats and local conditions—including areas too dangerous to survey due to crocodiles.

The next stage of the project is to finalise the habitat maps and assess their accuracy using the field data that was collected during these surveys, before submitting the products to the government of Timor-Leste in January 2013.



Beacou, situated on the northwest coast of Timor-Leste, features habitats including Eucalypt woodland, Mangrove forest, dense seagrass meadows, and coral reef. (Photo: Ian Leiper, CDU)



New CTI team members (L-R): Anne Radimin, Giles West and Fiona Salmon (Photo: DSEWPac)

Meet the newest members of the CTI team

The Australian Government is providing financial, technical or administrative assistance as part of our commitment to a phased multi-year program of support to the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) that meets the immediate and emerging needs of the Coral Triangle countries.

This commitment recognises that there are strong connections between Australia's marine ecosystems and those of its neighbours. It also highlights the importance of maintaining the health of coastal and marine ecosystems that many of Australia's northern neighbours rely on for their food security and livelihoods.

These important support services are delivered through the Australian Government, with the help of its key partners in the broader Australian community, which include: state and territory government agencies, research and academic institutions, and non-government organisations.

The main areas of support include applied research, training and education, assistance for community based management, and strengthening

the CTI Regional Secretariat. The task of managing this innovative program rests with the CTI team—a group of dedicated professionals from within the Australian Government Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

The Prime Minister of Australia recently announced a further \$8 million investment into the Initiative which moves Australia to the next phase of CTI support. Along with Travis Bover, the newest members of the Australian CTI Team are now in the early stages of designing the next phase of the support program. The team is collaborating with member countries to ensure the program remains responsive to country needs, as well as other partners to identify projects that could gain benefit from joint support.

Giles West

Giles brings a wealth of knowledge to the CTI team with over 20 years working—both nationally and internationally—on a range of capacity-building and development projects, and eight years delivering natural resource management programs across Australia.

Giles' credentials are further enriched by his experience of working extended periods in the CTI member countries—the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines.

For Giles, the highlights of working in the CTI team include meeting government representatives from CTI member and partner countries, and gaining an insight into their priorities.

“Meeting people from partner countries face-to-face is always a great experience. I'm just back from the Coral Triangle Initiative Senior Officials Meeting in Kuala Lumpur, and I can confirm the importance of developing networks and relationships to further the development of the initiative,” Giles said.

In the future, Giles looks forward to seeing some of the CTI projects implemented and helping develop fresh and new initiatives.

Fiona Salmon

Since completing her studies majoring in marine biology and geography, Fiona has immersed herself in projects and research that have given her a strong foundation for the work she's involved in as part of the Australian CTI Team. A highlight in achieving her degree was participating in research on Heron Island in the Great Barrier Reef.

Fiona's international experience, to date, includes: conducting field studies in regional sustainability in South Africa, assisting with sea turtle conservation in Costa Rica, and working on both local and federal government programs.

When asked about the highlights of working as part of the CTI Team, Fiona pointed to the contagious passion that each individual brings to the team.

“Working with a diverse range of people that are so enthusiastic goes a long way to ensuring that the Coral Triangle’s diverse marine environment remains healthy, productive and resilient for the benefit of current and future generations,” she said.

Fiona is most looking forward to seeing how CTI projects make a positive and lasting difference to people's lives and the coastal environment. Fiona hopes to one day visit some of the countries involved in the CTI, to see the work on the ground first-hand and meet the people that have benefited from the initiative.



Kimbe Bay, DSEWPaC

Anne Radimin

Before joining the Australian Public Service, Anne spent the last several years developing her experience across a range of industries, including the building industry—where she was able to put her Bachelor of Applied Science in Architecture and Masters of Liberal Arts to good use.

Since then, Anne has worked in a number of areas across the department, including the Rio+20 team. Anne credits that experience for sparking her interest in international affairs—something of great importance to the work of the CTI team.

“Being able to help establish strong links with our international neighbours to ensure the positive future of our marine areas is the ultimate highlight,” according to Anne.

“Learning something new every day about the importance of our coastal and marine environments is so important,” she added.

While seeing positive change to marine and coastal environments is what Anne's most looking forward to, having the opportunity to see how the initiative changes lives first-hand is what she's most excited about.

Australia and the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security

The CTI is a partnership—between Indonesia, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Solomon Islands and Timor Leste—focused on improving marine conservation and management, and through this, sustainable livelihoods, food security and economic development. Australia is a strong supporter of the CTI and is one of six formal partners. Australian Government support for the CTI is outlined in a series of documents that can be found online at environment.gov.au/cti



Kimbe Bay, DSEWPaC

CONTACT US

Any questions,
thoughts,
suggestions

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CTIAUSFocalPoint@environment.gov.au