
Fiji programme to be South Pacific model

07 MAR 2009

A Fiji community conservation programme introduced in one of the remote areas of Fiji is anticipated to become a model for the protection of forests in the South Pacific, it has been revealed.

The Birdlife International community conservation programme introduced in the Natewa Peninsula in 2005 has now become a demonstration project that is hoped to be a model for forest conservation.

Birdlife International's senior technical advisor for the Pacific region James Millet said the programme was introduced to 40 participants from Fiji, French Polynesia and New Caledonia at a two-day workshop held in the village of Navetau, Natewa recently.

He said the purpose of the workshop was to provide training for its overseas participants in community oriented conservation techniques, less widely practiced by our regional neighbours.

"For locals, it was an opportunity to showcase their community conservation skills," Millet said.

He said the community conservation programme, in 2005, convinced landowners of the importance of protecting their forest, and resulted in an agreement that banned commercial logging and other non-sustainable activities, as well as protecting the area from forest fires.

"The undertaking by the landowners means that they are also protecting their fresh water supplies, their food, and their fisheries and through their efforts in protecting the land minimise flood damage and erosion," Millet said.

"This is grassroots conservation at its finest," he said.

He said as a result of the workshop, 11 *mataqali* (sub-clans) from the area agreed to protect over 6000 hectares of their forest over a 10-year period reinforcing the 2005 agreement.

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