

## Battle for the oceans

GERALDINE PANAPASA (Sunday, June 15, 2008)

While people around the world celebrated World Environment Day on June 5, environmentalists concerned with the welfare of our marine resources and oceans maintained the good fight to commemorate World Ocean Day which fell on June 8.

In previous years, Greenpeace has been working on ways to create more awareness on the need to conserve and safeguard our marine life and oceans.

Greenpeace Australia Pacific oceans team leader Nilesh Gounder said constant awareness programs have been implemented at school level on the importance to keep our oceans clean and safe.

According to Mr Gounder, people are more aware of environmental awareness programs and the onus was on each individual to keep our oceans clean and pollution free.



Fijian volunteer Ana Jitoko (left holding banner) was onboard the Greenpeace vessel Esperanza in peaceful action against fishing vessels from Taiwan, Korea, China, USA and the Philippines

One of the major concerns for many ocean conservationists is the sustainability of tuna.

Mr Gounder said the future of the Pacific Ocean as well as the people are at the mercy of unscrupulous foreign fishers and a growing global market for tuna.

He said the Pacific is in the grip of unfair and unsustainable fishing.

"The Pacific is at a crossroad. One path leads to sustainable and equitable fisheries, a healthy marine environment and a stable and prosperous island community. The other path leads to the collapse of the major tuna fishery and loss of livelihoods and food supply for the people of the Pacific," he said.

"Bigeye and yellowfin tuna are subject to overfishing. Scientists warn these species are in serious trouble. But there are achievable solutions that will bring about sustainable fishing."

These solutions include:

- n An immediate cut to fishing by 50 per cent;
- n Creating three taboo areas in the international waters that are sandwiched between Pacific Island nations. This would become three marine reserves, the first ever in international waters;
- n Increasing local jobs and income by ensuring access agreements are fair, sustainable and shifting to domestic small scale harvesting;
- n Closing pirate fishing loopholes and banning all transfers of fish and refueling at sea; and
- n Negotiating all fisheries management agreements in a unified block to maximise trading power.

Mr Gounder said the three proposed marine reserves would cover extensive areas that include biologically rich undersea mountains, migration routes of tuna species and habitat of endangered marine species.

This includes leatherback turtles and breeding areas of skipjack, albacore and bigeye tuna.

He said more than half the world's tuna is fished from the Pacific. Mr Gounder said 75 per cent of the world's fisheries are exploited up to and beyond the point where they can be regarded as sustainable.

"Global fisheries expert Dr Daniel Pauly states that in the future people will be eating jellyfish because that is all that will be left unless we act now. Pacific people have fished the ocean for thousands of years and managing traditional fishing grounds sustainably.

"To date, over two million tonnes of tuna are fished out of the Pacific yearly. More than 90 per cent of our tuna is caught by the fleets of Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, the United States and the European Union."

Over 10 000 Pacific Islanders across the entire region are employed by the tuna industries.

A further 21,000 to 31,000 people are directly or indirectly by the tuna industry.

Mr Gounder said this can be increased with tighter foreign fishing restrictions and charging more for the tuna resource.

He said on top of overfishing pressure, pirate fishing boats do not comply with any rules and further disadvantage the region.

Mr Gounder said it is not too late to save the tuna treasure from being stolen by foreign fishers. He said the Pacific can be saved from the empty nets if we all take action now.

"There are various ways people can save our tuna. They can urge governments to support closing the three areas of international waters as taboo marine reserves.

This will restore the health and protect future tuna fisheries and breeding areas.

"People can also meet or write to their Pacific government leaders and officials encouraging 50 per cent cut in tuna fishing in their waters. They can also visit our website to help protect the Pacific."

To celebrate World Oceans Day 2008, Greenpeace and several renowned academics from the East West Centre, USP and the University of Victoria collaborated to select the names of the Pacific's first international marine reserves. On June 6, ocean defenders chose three mascots for three newly proposed marine reserves which were WOMAR the sea

snake, GOMAR the seahorse and MOMAR the sea turtle.

The scholars identified eight people for their creative contribution to the naming competition and for suggesting the sea snake, sea horse and sea turtle for the marine reserves.

According to Greenpeace, WOMAR represents west oceania marine reserve which is the area bounded by Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Federated States of Micronesia and Palau.

The second GOMAR stands for the greater oceania marine reserve which is the area of international waters bounded by PNG, the Solomon Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Fiji, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The third MOMAR stands for the Moana marine reserve bounded by Kiribati, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia.

Moreover, there are ocean defenders doing more than just talk and advocacy work. These volunteers are onboard the Esperanza defending the Pacific Commons for the past nine weeks. They have been taking peaceful actions against fishing vessels from Taiwan, China, Korea, USA, Philippines and Spain.

Greenpeace oceans campaigner onboard the Esperanza Lagi Toribau was shocked to discover the vulnerability the Pacific commons are to over and pirate fishing by distant water fishing nations.

"Far away in the international waters plunder of the Pacific resources continue day in and day out almost with no control laying waste to the regions tuna stocks and other marine life including threatened sharks and turtles," he said.

On a more serious note, Pacific nations are only receiving five to six per cent of the value of the catch caught by foreign vessels in their national waters.

According to Greenpeace, this is due to the unfair and unsustainable agreements negotiated by foreign companies and countries for access to fish for tuna in their waters.

Mr Gounder said the organisation is advocating these marine areas to be designated as fully protected marine reserves.

These three pockets of international waters cover extensive areas.

"Although the 'defending our Pacific' expedition onboard the M.Y Esperanza ended on June 6, the work to ensure the sustainable tuna fishing in the region has only begun. Last month alone, two major political agreements focusing on Pacific commons were reached.

"Eight Pacific Island countries took the boldest steps towards creating the world's first marine reserves in international waters through the Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) Third Implementing Arrangement where new rules will apply to all vessels fishing for tuna in the region."

This means tuna vessels licensed to fish in the waters of the eight countries will be banned from fishing in the WOMAR and upper GOMAR region.

Mr Gounder said these measures will go a long way to protect marine life and provide future food.

Greenpeace is calling on Pacific Island member states to actively progress this position through their UN Missions at the upcoming UN Open ended informal consultative process on oceans and the law of the sea in New York from June 23 - 27.