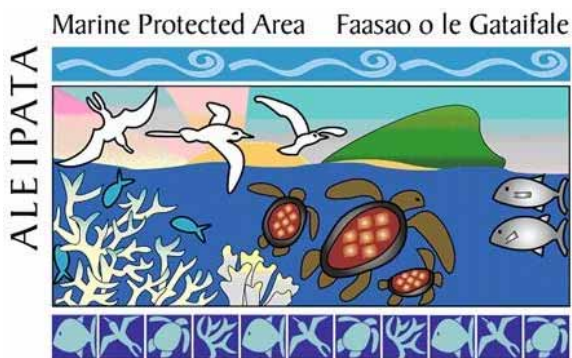


MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Information Sheet 2.B.

ALEIPATA MARINE PROTECTED AREA



1. BACKGROUND

In Samoa like other Pacific islands, coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds and other coastal ecosystems are vital to biodiversity and productivity but are being degraded by the impacts of coastal development, overexploitation and pollution. This has consequently led to a large component of its coastal marine biodiversity being critically threatened.

The ecosystems located within the District of Aleipata are amongst Samoa's best remaining examples of coral reef, mangrove and lagoon environments. These biodiversity values together with the strong support of the local communities have provided the basis for its selection as one of the priority areas for marine conservation. The strong support by the communities was due to their growing concern over the declining state of their marine resources.

The MPA Approach

The establishment of the Aleipata MPA is to provide for the protection and sustainable use of threatened coastal marine biodiversity within its core and multi-use zones. It aims at empowering the people and communities of the district to effectively protect and manage marine biodiversity and help them achieve sustainable use of marine resources. The Aleipata MPA is an example of a community-based approach to marine biodiversity protection and management that is practised not only in Samoa but also in the Pacific and other regions of the world such as Asia and Africa.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ALEIPATA MPA

The Aleipata MPA was established as a five-year project funded by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Bank through a grant from the Global Environment Facility (GEF). It was implemented in 2000 by the IUCN in collaboration with the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Meteorology (formerly known as Lands and Environment) and the local communities of the Aleipata District.

The Aleipata MPA was established with a community VISION which states that, "Our marine environment is

a gift from God and is critical to our way of life. We declare our commitment to taking care and working together to conserve our marine resources and establish solid foundation so that they may be used wisely and continue to provide new opportunity to sustain our way of life, and for future generation' (Aleipata Management Plan 2002-2006).

The project has been operational since January 2000 and was completed in June 2004. The Government of Samoa since then took over the operation with the involvement of the community. All activities have been incorporated into the work plan of the Marine Conservation Section (DEC) and is continuing as of today. Funds for the continuation of the project are currently sourced from the French Government under the Coral Reefs Initiative South Pacific (CRISP) and will continue through to 2007.

3. MPA DESCRIPTION



Plate 1: Aleipata Marine Protected Area

3.1. Size

The Aleipata MPA is about 19.44sq miles in total area, 0.331 sq miles of which is declared as a No-Take-Zone.

3.2. Location and Villages involved

The MPA extends from Utuele headland at Tiavea in the north and ends at Nonoa at Lalomanu on the south eastern coast. It also includes the area from the high water mark to about half a mile seaward from the reef drop-off and includes the islands of Nuulua, Nuutele (Vini), Fanuatapu, and Namua.

All the 11 villages of the Aleipata District namely Tiavea, Samusu, Amaile, Utufaalalafa, Saleaaumua, Malaela-Mutiatale, Lotopue, Satitua, Ulutogia, Vailoa, and Lalomanu are included in the MPA.

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3.3. Main Features

(i) Coral reefs/lagoons and seagrass habitats

The MPA encompasses the best-developed and least disturbed coral reef and lagoon areas in Samoa, especially around the offshore islands. These together with healthy seagrass beds provide for a rich diversity of fish and invertebrate species.

(ii) Aleipata Islands

The islands of Fanaatapu, Nuulua, Nuutele (Vini), and Namu'a offer a number of biodiversity attributes which further make these islands special and unique. These are:

- Home (nesting areas) to the only left and important seabird colony of brown and red footed boobies and frigate birds;
- Surrounding waters are the breeding, feeding and migratory areas for rare and endangered marine species (e.g. turtles & whales)
- The most significant remaining turtle (hawksbills) feeding and nesting grounds left in Samoa;
- A range of undisturbed native plants and animals;
- One of Samoa's most popular SCUBA and snorkelling areas because of the white sandy beaches, good water visibility and relative abundance of marine life.

(iii) No-Take-Zones

There are 10 'No Take Zones' within the MPA, one in each of the 10 villages excluding Samusu. Indicated mostly by buoys, fishing is strictly banned inside these zones. However, fishing is allowed outside of these zones within the MPA but access is strictly monitored. The islands are also declared as No-Take Zones all around.

(iv) Fish reserves

There are a number of small fish reserves in some villages in the district which have been established under the Village Fisheries Project implemented by the Fisheries Division in 1995.

Overall, Aleipata MPA and its encompassing habitats largely contribute to maintaining the overall marine biodiversity and productivity of Samoa's marine environment.

(v) Eco-tourism

Aleipata is a popular destination for other forms of tourism and a number of small-scale and locally owned

beach resorts exist in the area. Various recreational activities such as surfing, diving, canoeing etc. attract many tourists to the area.

4. OPERATION, CONTROL AND MONITORING

All the 11 villages are equal partners to the MPA and carry out the responsibility for all decisions via their MPA District Committee. The Committee comprises of a representative of high traditional status from each village within the district. Meetings with the District Committee serve as a vital aspect of the operation and management of the MPA. It offers an opportunity to discuss issues to improve the project.

The people of Aleipata are committed and have organised themselves through the District Committee to play the leading role in all related activities. Here, they work collaboratively at the district-level to solve key issues that extend beyond the boundaries of their individual villages, including poaching, overfishing, zoning for biodiversity conservation, and the need for wider integrated management.

A Management Plan 2002 - 2006 has been developed for the Aleipata MPA (through consultations with the communities) and approved by the MNREM Minister to guide the operation and management of the MPA. The Plan reflects the issues/problems faced within the MPA and the actions to take to address them. It also provides conservation and control undertakings for both of the District Committee/the community members and the Division of Environment and Conservation pertaining to the MPA.

The Division of Environment and Conservation conducts yearly Community monitoring surveys of the Aleipata MPA to assess and monitor the marine biodiversity within the MPA. These surveys involve the voluntary participation of the community members as part of their contribution to the management and protection of the area.

5. SURVEILLANCE AND ENFORCEMENT

The Aleipata District Officer is the key contact and facilitator of the close collaboration between the MPA and the DEC. He is responsible for implementing the work programme at Aleipata MPA including liaising and working with the District Committee and the marine eco-tourism operators. The tour operators utilize the MPAs for their tours and in return contribute a levy to the MPAs.

6. HOW THE PEOPLE OF ALEIPATA BENEFIT FROM THE MPA

The local communities of Aleipata district like other Samoans benefit in many ways from the MPA. These include:

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- Marine environment/Coastline Protection

Coral reefs and mangroves serve as natural defensive barriers against strong wave actions, storms and cyclones thus preventing extensive destruction of our coastlines. The conservation of these marine ecosystems increases the resilience of the coastal areas to natural disasters.

- Coral reefs products

The coral reefs provide raw materials such as sand and shells that the local people use for construction, handicrafts, etc.

- Food

As nursery and feeding areas for many marine fish and invertebrates, the MPA can be a source of these fisheries resources for the surrounding areas where people of Aleipata fish from for food.

- Income

Other than fishing for food, fish and shellfish are caught and sold mainly to the nearby resorts and sometimes on the roadside. Reef fisheries are the regular income earners for some families in the district.

- Eco-tourism

The Aleipata MPA is utilized for eco-tourism by the district people and has also served as a regular income earner for most either as operators or employees. The coral reefs are the points of attraction for visiting tourists and the local people as well. Eco-tourism activities generate income for the local people. The offshore islands for instance offer some recreational activities like botanical studies, nature photography, bird watching, etc.

7. THE NEED TO MAINTAIN THE ALEIPATA MPA

The local people rely on biological diversity for the very sustenance of life therefore it is a must to maintain MPAs as well as the marine resources and the environment as a whole. The establishment of the Aleipata MPA is a practicable management tool where the different groups within the communities and the government can all be involved.

8. HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE

If establishing MPAs is a solution to minimizing the threats to our marine environment which have resulted in the degradation of the valuable marine habitats such as coral reefs and mangroves, your contribution is to:

- (i) Educate yourself on the importance of MPAs and make others aware by passing the message on;

- (ii) Take precautionary actions when visiting the area and comply with the MPA rules as indicated in the Management Plan.

9. WHEN PLANNING A VISIT TO THE ALEIPATA MPA

The Aleipata MPA is co-managed and operated by the MNREM and the local communities through the District Committee so when planning a visit:

- (i) liaise directly with the MNREM through the Marine Conservation Section (Aleipata District Officer);

You are most WELCOME at Aleipata MPA to see the extensive range of coral reef and lagoon habitats. But note the basic rules to observe:

- ❖ Fishing, removal of materials (living or dead) and any damage to the area is strictly prohibited.

10. TOUR OPERATORS AVAILABLE IN THE MPA

To make your visit to the Aleipata MPA memorable and enjoyable, it would be worth your time to arrange with any of the tour operators available in the area. These are:

- Taufua Beach Fales
- Litia Sini Beach Fales
- Namu'a Island Beach Resort
- Romeo Beach Fales
- P & S Fishing Tours