

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Information Sheet 2.A.

SAFATA 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 Safata are amongst Samoa's best remaining examples of coral reef, mangrove and lagoon environments. This 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 Safata 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 Safata District to effectively protect and manage marine biodiversity and help them achieve sustainable use of marine resources. The Safata 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 SAFATA MPA

The Safata 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 Safata District.

The Safata MPA was established with a community *VISION* which is, "Safata's marine environment is critical to our way of life. We commit to taking care of our marine environment and establishing a solid foundation for our Marine Protected Area, which we hope will both sustain and bring new opportunities for our people and future generations" (Safata 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: Safata Marine Protected Area

3.1. Size

The Safata MPA is about 24.6 sq miles in total area, 0.085 sq miles of which is declared as No-Take-Zone.

3.2. Boundaries and Villages involved

The MPA extends from Le Niu at Saanapu in the West to Ava o le Fua at Mulivai in the East. It extends from the high water mark to one mile from the reef drop-off and includes the Aau Gasese submerged reef.

The MPA includes nine villages, namely Mulivai, Tafitoala, Fausaga, Fusi, Vaiee, Nuusuatia, Lotofaga, Sataoa, and Saanapu. There are 10 'No Take Zones' in the MPA which have been designated according to results of scientific survey and local knowledge.

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3.3. Main Features

(i) Mangrove forests and an estuarine environment

The Safata district includes the two largest intact mangrove stands in Samoa.

- *Saanapu and Sataoa mangrove forest*

This is a large mangrove forest on the western side of the MPA. It is the least disturbed mangrove area in Samoa and is an extremely important fish and mangrove crab (pa'alimago) breeding and nursery site.

- *Le Asaga mangroves*

Lining a creek on the eastern side of Le Muta Peninsula is another main mangrove scrub land which remains in a fairly healthy state. The area is mostly sheltered and stretches across 4 villages (Vaiee, Fusi, Fausaga and Tafitoala).

(ii) Coral reefs/lagoons and estuaries

Included in the MPA is a productive estuary, coral reef and lagoon system that provides for a rich fish and invertebrate fishery for communities in the area.

(iii) No-Take-Zones

There are 10 'No Take Zones' within the MPA, each belonging to one of the eight villages except for Fusi which has two. 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.

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

(v) Eco-tourism

Various recreational activities including canoeing and nature walks particularly in the mangrove areas are available for the many tourists that visit the site every year. The area is also utilized for diving, snorkelling and surfing.

4. OPERATION, CONTROL AND MONITORING

All the 9 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 Safata 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 Safata 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 Safata 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 Safata 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 Safata 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 SAFATA BENEFIT FROM THE MPA

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

- 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.

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

Similar to normal inland forests, mangroves provide wood materials that can be used for cooking, and construction of houses and boats. Bark, leaves and fruits are used to derive many products such as dyes, traditional medicines and drugs, house thatching and handicrafts. Mangrove leaves are also useful as fodder and green manure in agriculture. Some mangrove species have very little moisture content in their wood thus making them ideal as firewood and charcoal.

- 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 Safata fish from for food. The fisheries that are commonly conducted in Safata include the mud-crab fishery, Venus shell (tugane) fishery, reef fisheries for surgeonfish parrotfish, etc.

- Income
Other than fishing for food, fish and shellfish are caught and sold either at the local fish market or on the roadside. Reef fisheries are the regular income earners for some families in the district.

- Eco-tourism
The Safata 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. Besides the attractiveness of coral reefs for tourist sight-seeing, boardwalks have been established in mangroves areas which attract even more tourists which at the same time generating incomes for the local people. The Saanapu and Le Asaga Mangrove Conservation Areas for instance offer some recreational activities like nature walks, botanical studies, nature photography, bird watching and kayaking for tourists (Plate 2 below).

Plate 2: Saanapu Mangroves Boardwalk

7. THE NEED TO MAINTAIN THE SAFATA 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 MPAs 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:

- Educate yourself on the importance of MPAs and make others aware by passing the message on;
- 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 SAFATA MPA

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

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

You are most WELCOME at Safata 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 Safata MPA memorable and enjoyable, it would be worth your time to arrange with any of the tour operators available in the area. These are:

- * Samoana Resort
- * Sinalei Reef Resort
- * Coconut Beach Resort
- * Maninoa Surf Camp
- * PJ Sina Beach Fales - Tafitoala
- * Liquid Motion (Sinalei Reef Resort)
- * Virgin Cove Beach Fales