

OUR ENVIRONMENT OUR HERITAGE

POLICY STATEMENT ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

The '**National Policy on the Conservation of Biological Diversity (or biodiversity)**' was approved and endorsed by the Cabinet in August 2007. The sole purpose of this policy is to provide the framework for the conservation, sustainable use and management of Samoa's terrestrial and marine biodiversity including the protection of endemic and native species and the control of invasive species. Part of the policy is publicised and published below.

INTRODUCTION

Samoa's natural heritage has maintained and improved both the social and economic wellbeing of its people through generations. Biodiversity is present in all facets of Samoan life, from providing the resources needed for food and shelter, medicinal plants to care for the health of the nation and more importantly supporting the faaSamoa (Samoan way). Over generations this relationship was premised on the understanding that the Samoans would utilise these resources in a sustainable manner. With appropriate measures being taken improved village-based resource management and protection efforts will help bring about sustainability in the long-term.

Nevertheless with the change from subsistence to a commercial economy and from village-based to government-driven management the 'culture of care' the Samoans once had for their environment is rapidly eroding. The inevitable changes in people's lifestyles due to growing exposure to globalisation as well as increased population competing for limited remaining resources have imposed greater demands on a fragile environment with finite natural resources.

Furthermore the impacts of climate change on small island developing states, like Samoa, with the associated devastating consequences of frequent tropical cyclones with increased severity, droughts and flooding make the protection of island biological resources even more difficult. To address the existing problems facing Samoa's biodiversity a merging of new approaches with traditional techniques is needed along with closer collaboration among national, regional and international stakeholders.

This policy supports the Strategy for the Development of Samoa 2005-2007 focusing on improved economic and social welfare for all the people of Samoa. It promotes the creation of the enabling environment for sustainable development and requires the management of biodiversity and genetic resources to be integrated into social-economic planning in order to minimise the adverse impacts of development on the environment. It also demands the strong participation of local communities in the planning and implementation of relevant actions for the sustainable management of national biodiversity resources.

VISION

Samoa's biodiversity resources are protected, conserved and sustainably managed so they will continue to flourish and regenerate to support better livelihoods for all stakeholders at the present time and in the future.

There are two main components of Samoa's biological diversity. One is the terrestrial biodiversity comprising all organisms with land-based habitats including freshwater resources as well as all types and forms of plants which provide habitats for birds. Terrestrial biodiversity provides traditional medicines and products and supports a wide diversity of plants and animal species. It also serves as a major attraction for wilderness and nature adventure as well as eco-tourism. The diversity of different types of organisms and animals all contribute in different roles and functions to maintaining balanced ecosystems.

The other is the marine biodiversity which supports a diversity of marine species and ecosystems such as coral reefs, seagrasses and mangroves. These ecosystems offer natural protection against storm surges and coastal flooding. Marine resources have been critical to the Samoan way of life, providing a major source of protein for people as well as family cash incomes. Marine protected areas have been established to improve the status of degraded areas for the benefit of coastal communities. Fisheries, particular inshore, play a vital role in the economy of Samoa and contributing significantly to the health and nutrition of its people.

ISSUES, CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUES

- Over harvesting and overexploitation of terrestrial and marine resources
- Clearance of forest for agriculture development
- Impact of unsustainable development practice
- Unsustainable use of natural resources
- Impact of climate change and sea level rise
- Impact of invasive species
- Destructive fishing and land use practices
- Land tenure (ownership and usage rights)
- Development versus conservation (balance between the two), and
- Lack or limited public awareness and education on sustainable development.

CONSTRAINTS

- Lack of qualified skilled personnel
- Sustainability of human resources development
- Limited community and public support or participation
- Lack of research and scientific studies
- Lack of financial resources
- Impacts of climate change
- Land degradation due to poor land use practice, and
- Balance between meeting Samoa's development needs and the capacity of its natural resources to sustain now and in the future.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Access to the use of biological resources
- Enhance rural livelihoods through better use of terrestrial and marine resources
- Provide ongoing ecosystem benefits and services
- Support life for mankind
- Provide scientific and research opportunities
- Increased awareness on the values of biodiversity and genetic resources
- Strengthened stakeholder capacity for sustainable management
- Improved quality of data for planning and decision making.
- Income generating activities from access to and benefit sharing of biodiversity and genetic resources, and
- Protection of national biodiversity for the benefit of future generations

ROLES OF STAKEHOLDERS

The roles of stakeholders is important thus to collaborate closely with the ministry to implement some of the strategies in this policy in particularly the management of invasive species. An example was the biodiversity awareness commemoration last month with the 'Invasive Issue Management Control'.

You can obtain a copy of the policy at the MNRE office - DBS building - Level 3 / 5 - or download it from the website www.mnre.gov.ws

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