

THE RAJA AMPAT ISLANDS

In the Heart of the Coral Triangle

The Raja Ampat, or “Four Kings,” archipelago encompasses around 4 million hectares of land and sea off the northwestern tip of Indonesia’s West Papua Province. Located in the Coral Triangle, the heart of the world’s coral reef biodiversity, the seas around Raja Ampat hold the richest variety of coral species recorded in the world. Raja Ampat includes the four large islands of Waigeo, Batanta, Salawati, and Misool, plus hundreds of smaller islands.

The area’s massive coral colonies show that its reefs are resilient to threats like coral bleaching and disease—threats that now jeopardize the survival of corals around the world. In addition, Raja Ampat’s strong ocean currents sweep coral larvae across the Indian and Pacific Oceans to replenish other reef ecosystems. Raja Ampat’s coral diversity, resilience to threats, and ability to replenish reefs make it a global priority for marine protection. The archipelago is part of an area known as the Bird’s Head seascape, which also contains Cendrawasih Bay, the largest marine national park in Indonesia, and Jamursba Medi, housing some of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in the world.

Survey Confirms Highest Marine Biodiversity on Earth

In 2002, The Nature Conser-



Bird’s eye view of the karst islands in Misool, Raja Ampat ©Jez O’Hare

vancy (TNC) and its partners conducted a scientific survey of the Raja Ampat Islands to collect information on its marine ecosystems, mangroves, and forests. The survey brought Raja Ampat’s total number of confirmed corals to 537 species—an incredible 75% of all known coral species. In addition, 828 fish species were recorded, raising the known total for Raja Ampat to an amazing 1,074. On land, the survey found lush forests, rare plants, limestone outcroppings, and nesting beaches for thousands of sea turtles.

Though human impacts here are less severe than elsewhere in Indonesia, Raja Ampat’s natural resources

are threatened by overfishing and destructive fishing, turtle poaching, and unsustainable logging.

Ensuring Conservation through Partnerships

To address these issues, TNC is working in close partnership with the government, communities, non-profits and the private sector by: 1) contributing to the development of a comprehensive conservation action plan to protect Raja Ampat’s reefs and forests; 2) helping incorporate marine protected area management into the regency’s long-term planning and policy; and, 3) supporting the establishment of a network of



Meetings with local communities © M. Korebima, The Nature Conservancy

marine protected areas for Raja Ampat for the protection of biodiversity and sustaining ecosystem goods and services.

Supporting Policies for Sustainable Resource-Use Management

The Raja Ampat Regency Government established six new marine protected areas (MPAs) in December 2006, making it the first Indonesian district to declare an MPA network. TNC and Conservation International (CI) are working collaboratively to support the government in the planning and management of the MPA network by providing technical assistance, expert advice and education.

Through surveys and monitoring of reef health, fish populations and patterns of resource use, TNC provides technical input towards designing a zoning system and management plans for the Kofiau and South East (SE) Misool MPAs that would allow local communities to benefit from their marine resources while ensuring fish stocks are protected in no-take areas.

The Raja Ampat Government has also issued a decree for a joint patrolling system that involves cross-

sectoral divisions of the government, law enforcers and communities.

TNC is supporting this initiative by providing a wooden boat that serves as a Floating Patrolling Station for Kofiau and Misool to protect the area from illegal marine activities such as destructive fishing and turtle poaching.

TNC and partners are working closely with the Tourism and Fisheries Departments, and representatives from live-aboard dive industry, local non-government organizations and local communities to introduce a tourism entrance fee system within Raja Ampat. Funds raised are reinvested into tourism development, conservation and community health projects in Raja Ampat.

Reaching Out, Taking Conservation Action

In encouraging community participation in conservation initiatives, TNC conducts various activities including a Pride Campaign in collaboration with RARE. The campaign has improved conservation awareness among local communities through a series of site-specific education programs that are delivered to stakeholders by radio, puppet shows, pamphlets, and local gatherings. A post-

campaign survey shows promising result; in Kofiau and SE Misool, the percentage of the local community that understands the link between healthy coral reefs and increased fish catch has increased significantly.

Local communities in Kofiau and Misool have also established 10 small-scale village marine protected areas. The communities are reviving the practice of *sasi* – a traditional seasonal closure of marine areas to allow certain species to reproduce or grow. TNC is working with the Indonesia Locally-Managed Marine Area Network in supporting the government develop local content for elementary school curricula that incorporates marine conservation topics into natural science subjects.

CI and TNC are also running an *Education under Sail* marine conservation program using the 32-m wooden boat, the *Kalabia*, that circumnavigates the archipelago, bringing conservation education to over 88 schools in Raja Ampat. This program offers experiential learning, targeting elementary schoolchildren. Education modules include “field visits” to mangrove forests, coral reefs teeming with life, and sea grass beds where turtles and dugongs feed; games like the *Ecosystem Detective*, and *Tantangan Teteruga* or Challenges of the Turtles.

TNC’s ultimate goal is to protect Raja Ampat’s magnificent reefs while sustaining the livelihoods of local people.

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