



PROTECTING DUGONGS  
CONSERVING SEAGRASS  
CHANGE FOR COMMUNITIES



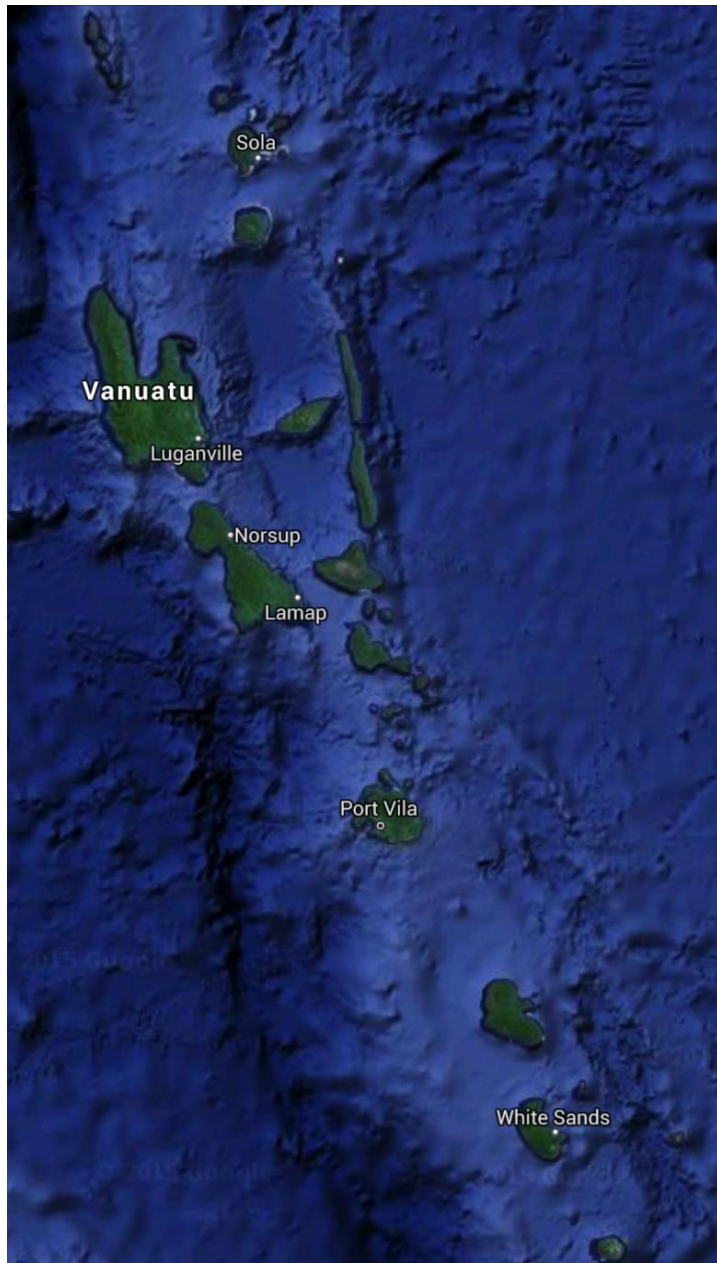
# COUNTRY PRESENTATION: Vanuatu

INCEPTION WORKSHOP  
THE GEF DUGONG AND SEAGRASS CONSERVATION PROJECT  
20-21 October 2015  
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Vanuatu – an archipelago of  
83 volcanic islands



There are seven active volcanoes



- Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago in the South Pacific
- 67 islands are inhabited
- The islands lie between latitudes 13-21°S and longitudes 166-172°E
- The archipelago is approximately 850 km in length

# Vanuatu Statistics: The Land

- Total Land area 12,200 Sq Km
- Proportion of land area covered by primary forest 36.1%
- Total forest area 4,400 Km<sup>2</sup>
- Proportion of terrestrial and marine areas protected 0.5%





# Vanuatu Statistics:

## The ocean

- Ocean area 680,220 Sq km (plus disputed Mathew and Hunter area 190,000 Sq Km)
- Length of coastline 3132 Km
- Total reef area 1,200 Sq Km
- Area of inner reef and lagoon 448 sq Km
- Vanuatu's has a narrow band of fringing reef generally less than 100m wide.



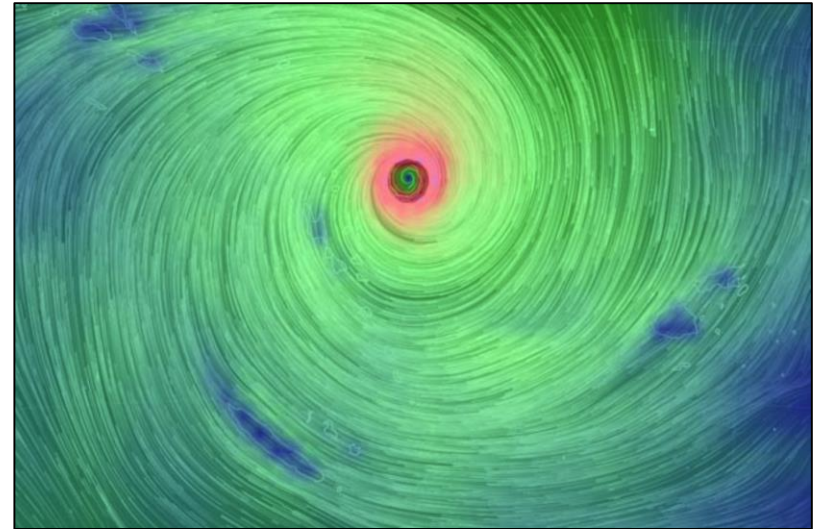
# Vanuatu Statistics: The People

- Population: 281,046
- At the time of the last census in 2009, 75% of the population was rural.
- GDP just over US \$800,000
- Per capital gross national income US\$ 3130
- Proportion of population below the poverty line 12.7%



# Top 5 conservation facts

- 1) Vanuatu lies within the East Melanesian hotspot for biodiversity. It has a high level of endemism. Vanuatu is home to 378 animals and plants which are either critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable or near threatened (IUCN Red list of threatened species).
- 2) Natural disasters are common: volcanic eruptions, earth quakes and cyclones all occur regularly in Vanuatu. Tsunamis are also a risk.





3. The majority of population rural and subsistence and rely natural resources for food and livelihood.
4. Most natural resources are managed by communities with a long history of traditional management.
5. There are provisions in the Environmental management and conservation Act 2002 to register Community Conservation Areas with Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC). Port Patrick in Aneityum and The Coolidge / Million Dollar Point in Santo are the only National marine reserves.





# Dugongs in Vanuatu



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# Dugongs in Vanuatu

- One survey has been carried out to assess the distribution, abundance, cultural importance and threats to the dugong in Vanuatu.
- This was in 1987.
- The study was carried out by a postal questionnaire survey and an aerial survey.

Chambers, MR, E Bani, and BET Barker-Hudson. "The status of the dugong (*Dugong dugon*) in Vanuatu." *South Pacific Commission, Noumea (New Caledonia)*. 1989.

# The conclusion drawn by the investigators

“On the available evidence, the dugong does not appear to be in any danger of decline or extinction in Vanuatu. The agencies which constitute such threats elsewhere - overhunting, high accidental death rates, pollution and loss of seagrass beds - do not exist in Vanuatu. Nor are they likely to on any appreciable scale in the foreseeable future. Thus Vanuatu may be one of the few countries in the dugong's very wide distribution where it is safe”.

In Maskelyns this year – over 20  
dugongs seen in this group



© Kaleva Yachting Service - Vanuatu



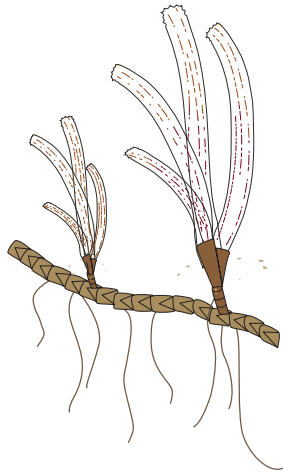
# Seagrasses in Vanuatu



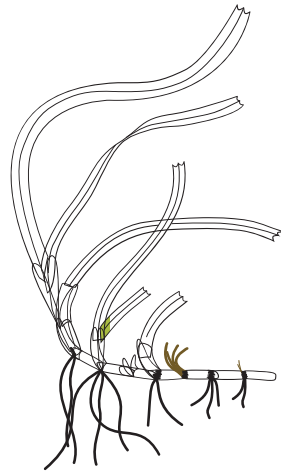
# Seagrasses in Vanuatu

- There have been 2 scientific assessments of seagrasses in Vanuatu as part of wider biodiversity assessments:
- Chambers M.R., Nguyen F, Navin K.F. Seagrass communities. In : Done T.J. (ed.), Navin K.F. (ed.) *Vanuatu marine resources : report of a biological survey*. Townsville : Australian Institute of Marine Science, 1990, (501), p. 92-103.
- Payri, Claude. "Benthic algal and seagrass communities from Santo island in relation to habitat diversity." (2011): 337-368. In *The Natural History of Santo*. P Bouchet, Le Guyader H, Pascal O (eds.) Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris: IRD, Marseille; Pro-natura international, Paris, 572p. (patrimoines naturels; 70).

# 9 species of seagrasses have been identified in Vanuatu



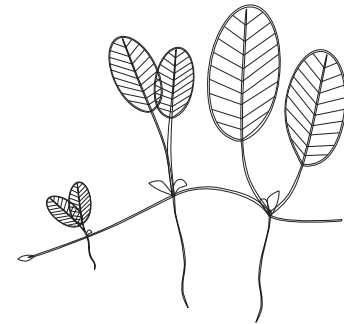
*Thalassia hemprichii*



*Halodule uninervis*



*Cymodocea rotundata*



*Halophila ovalis*

## The most commonly found species

# The knowledge gap

- There has never been a complete scientific evaluation of the seagrasses in Vanuatu
- The area of the seagrass beds is unknown.
- Although the distribution of dugong is known to be throughout Vanuatu, the abundance of dugongs is not known.
- The current threat level to dugongs and seagrasses is unknown.



# Interactions with conservation and development

- Tourism
- Foreshore development
- Increasing human population
- Lack of knowledge and awareness

# The projects in Vanuatu

- **Vu1:** To develop recommendations for a National Plan for conservation of dugongs and their seagrass habitats, identify areas important for dugongs and seagrasses conservation in Vanuatu and to raise awareness about dugongs and seagrasses amongst the local communities in these areas.
- **VU2:** National Facilitating Committee for the GEF Dugong and Seagrass Conservation Project

# Aims of Vu1

- To develop the Vanuatu Nation Plan for conservation of dugongs and their seagrass habitats.
- To fill the knowledge gaps and up date the information with respect to the distribution of dugongs and seagrass beds and the threats they face in Vanuatu.
- To increase awareness of the importance of conservation of dugongs and their seagrass habitats and change behaviour to those that mitigate the threats and help to conserve seagrass beds and dugongs.
- To encourage the custom landowners to create and register Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) in places identified as important for dugong conservation if they do not already exist and to incorporate dugong and seagrass conservation actions into the management plan for the CCAs.

# The Vanuatu project partners



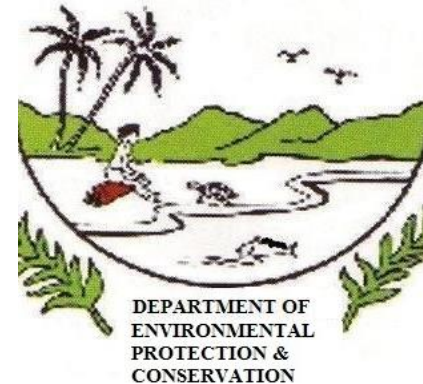
The Vanuatu  
Environmental  
Science society

Implementing  
partner



The Vanuatu  
Fisheries  
Department

Project Partner



The Department of  
Environmental  
protection and  
Conservation

Project Partner



# Filling the knowledge gap

- Conduct the questionnaire survey developed by CMS.
- Adapt it for Vanuatu by translating it to Bislama and adding eco-tourism questions
- Create a map of hotspots for dugong and seagrass conservation



# Project Outcomes

- National Plan of action for seagrass and dugong conservation
- Map of hot spots for seagrass and dugong conservation
- Increased awareness in communities of importance of seagrass and dugongs and how to look after them
- CCA management plans contain dugong and seagrass conservation activities in 50% of hot spot areas

Thank you for your attention





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Name: Dr. Christina Shaw

Position: CEO

Organisation: The Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS)

E-mail: [seashawconservation@gmail.com](mailto:seashawconservation@gmail.com)



The Vanuatu Fisheries  
Department

