

PNG was a signatory to the tri-nation agreement along with Indonesia and the Solomon Islands to protect the critically endangered Pacific leatherback turtles. The Karkum people cannot wait for the State to implement its policies. With support from Sea Turtles Restoration Project they have gone ahead to establish their Marine Protected Area using Conservation Deed.

Karkum Villagers sign Conservation Deed

By Wenceslaus Magun, Sea Turtles Restoration Project's Western Pacific Campaigner

The race to protect and restore the last remaining population of the critically endangered leatherback sea turtles or *Dermochelys Coriacea* in the western pacific region will now be a thing of the past at least in Karkum village, Madang, Papua New Guinea.

It will also be a dawn of a new era as Karkum villagers will now be documenting their cultural connections to their marine resources in order to have their traditional rights to land and sea recognized. The signing of their Conservation Deed will enable them to assert their customary rights, to respond to threats, to assist with land and sea management and planning, to identify the most important areas for protection and to record and safeguard their traditional knowledge.

As it is a community orientated conservation area, Karkum villagers have used Section 41 and 42 of the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-level Governments (Consolidated to No 29 of 1998) to protect their turtle nesting sites along the coast using Conservation Deed as a tool.

Conservation Deeds are a relatively new innovation in PNG, spearheaded by the work of the Bismarck Ramu Group (BRG). It is a result of a community-driven process that creates a locally managed conservation area, and along term community stake in the protection of natural resources in ways that also meet the economic and social needs of the community.

On Saturday 15th November, our team which comprised of Sea Turtles Restoration Project (STRP) Western Pacific Campaigner Wenceslaus Magun, Community Facilitators Leeray Robin, Adolf Lilai, Peter Gabu, Timon Dulau and Wren Mclean arrived at Karkum village at 3.00pm after one and a half hours drive from Madang town. Ms Mclean, is a student from Australia who came to PNG to do her internship (voluntary work placement) with the Bismarck Solomon Seas Indigenous People's Council and STRP on resource mapping. On this particular trip she wanted to learn more about the indigenous people and their connection to the sea.

After being shown the place to stay for a couple of nights, we held our briefing and later met with the Karkum leaders, elders and some members of the community and discussed the issue of the Submarine Tailings Disposal (STD) and the Deep Sea Mining a topic the villagers were eager to learn more about. After the meeting the team then rested for the day having informed the villagers that they will have a meeting on the following day to discuss and review their plans for the Karkum Deed launching program with them.

After the Church Service, our team met with the leaders and the clan representatives at 2.30pm on the following day and reviewed the contents of the Conservation Deed agreement. The purpose of this review was to see if they all understood the content of the Deed and agreed to all that was written in the document before the signing can take place. After they all agreed that everything in the contract was clear to them, the team moved on to explain the process of signing the Deed where

12 clan leaders, 4 conservation committee members and 3 witnesses are to sign on all the 14 Conservation Deed copies. After satisfactorily going through the process of the Conservation Deed signing the team ended the days meeting at 5.00pm. There were about 78 people of which 5 were women who had gathered for this meeting.

On November 17th the village was up at about 3am. Some women had gone to the garden to bring in food for the feast during the launching. Some men had teamed up to kill couple of pigs while some women, men and children went down to the beach to prepare the stage, sweep and clean up the place. For Wren our intern it was an opportunity for her to share her skills in making turtles out of sand dunes. She was gladly joined by a few children. Willie Mayang one of the village elders could not avoid the temptation to build the turtles and soon was crawling on the sand amongst the children happily building his own turtle as well.

The fun of making turtle dunes soon attracted the visitors and guests who lined the beach to watch in amazement. The main event for the day then started at 11.00am after many weeks of preparations with a traditional welcome dance by the Karkum Culture Group who lead the guests into the main square. As the clan leaders and invited guests made their way to the stage for the signing of the deed the sing sing group continued to entertain them belting out a few of their traditional songs with their kundu drums as they danced to the rhythm of their bit.

Three pigs have been killed and there was enough food for everyone – pork, sweet potato, taro, cassava, bananas and greens.

After the greetings and introduction, Mark Khon (former Ward Member), one of the leaders in the community gave the profile of the Karkum Sea Turtle Restoration Project. He stated that in the last 10 years, they had not seen any turtle coming up to lay eggs on the beach and that it was a great concern to them. They knew that if they continued to kill the turtles and take their eggs, their future generations may not be able to see the turtles. Mr Khon stressed that traditionally, they are connected to the leatherbacks as it originated from them based on their folklore.

“It is part of our culture to kill, share and eat everything out of it. This has resulted in the drastic decline of the leatherbacks. With this eminent threat facing us, not to mention the threats from pigs, dogs, birds or other feral animals and the rising sea level, we have decided to conserve the leatherback sea turtle in our community,” he said.

He said, with the help and support of STRP, the conservation deed process got underway together with our traditional conservation practices, and “today we see the result of what we were striving for, for two years with many ups and downs.”

He said since they started to protect their nesting beach even before signing the deed, they have witnessed 10 leatherbacks coming to nest on their beach. Sadly the nests were swept away by the strong waves.

Following his speech, Mr. Alphonse Igag, a community leader read out the content of the Conservation Deed agreement (contract). Another clan leader Joseph Parek shared their folklore on the leatherback turtles before the facilitator Otto Khon asked the clan leaders to go up to sign the Deeds that were laid out on a wooden table.

The Clan and their representatives who signed the Deed were as follows:

Ugerken Clan – Willie Mulom, Larry Yapen, and Danip Yaiaim

Nineng Clan – Mathew Dalek, Francis Nabuai and Domic Nambon
Nivap/Kirkur Clan – Willie Mayang, Willie Karem, and Vincent Nanai
Gorkom Clan – John Pakang, Joseph Labi and Wong Toles

They were followed by the STRP conservation committee members: Francis Nanai, Lennon Mulom, Vero Aimos, and Dick Akaski. The Local Level Government President John Sekum, the Ward 7 Council Member Peter Nambon, and the Chairman of the Sarang- Tokain village court area Tamol Dalek Mathew signed as witnesses. This signing took place in front of more than 1000 people who gathered to witness this launching.

All the clan representatives who signed the Deed, strengthened their agreement in their traditional ritual by making a knot on a *Tanget* leaf and placed it on a leatherback sea turtle image carved onto a wood and placed on a table. Traditionally, this sign tells the public not to kill and destroy the turtle population.

After the Conservation Deeds were signed copies of the Deed were presented to the leaders of each of the four clans, the LLG president, the Village Court chairman and STRP.

The signing was witnessed not only by villagers from Karkum, but by neighboring villagers from Sarang, Mirap, Dimer, Basken and invited guests including: Amos Ona from the World Wildlife Fund, Francis Hurahura from The Nature Conservancy, Hais Wasel –NGO Chairman with Madang Provincial Executive Council, Michael Samuga from NBC-Radio Madang, Mrs Matricia from the Madang Provincial Aids Council, Jane Nasd from Madang Visitors And Culture Bureau, Semus Takei representing the Madang Governor’s office, Gabriel Kagup Project Officer for the Member for Sumkar Open, John Sekum - Sumgilbar Local Level Government President, Brian Frey from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and Timon Dulau from the Madang Rehabilitation Association.

This occasion tells a story of how peoples attitudes, habits and behaviours of doing things can change for the better or for the worst depending on the training given. Fortunately, the Karkum experience has been one that has changed for the better as the villagers’ habitual attitudes of harvesting turtles has completely stopped.

The community has moved from a self-reliant community to an entrepreneurs and business minded people prepared to take on new challenges and finding greater opportunities in the resources they have to improve their lives. They have also embraced the value of conservation for sustainable livelihood options. These initiatives were clearly demonstrated as they have built their community development learning center, two guests houses and built good pit toilets. In fact prior to the launching of their Conservation Deed, numerous important events were staged in Karkum. Just to mention a few the Seventh Day Adventists Church had hosted their National Convention at Karkum. Similarly the Bismarck Solomon Seas Indigenous People’s Council was established after a week-long forum in Karkum in June this year.

Speaking at the launching, Karkum village Councilor Peter Nambon thanked everyone for making this occasion a reality. He said the signing of the conservation deed will see turtles and fish come back to Karkum. “They will reproduce. There will be plenty of fish and turtles to feed us and our

children and future generation if we take this initiative to protect our resources seriously,” he stressed.

WWF Program Manager, Mr Amos Ona was happy to share their work experience with the Kikori Project and the Madang Lagoon Project. He said there is no easy solution to conservation outcomes but that all parties must work together to achieve a positive outcome.

TNC Program Manager for Madang, Mr Francis Hurahura challenged the Karkum villagers to link conservation with business opportunities. Mr Hurahura said they have not found an answer to that yet, however he said “change will happen if we work together to achieve a common dream.”

Jane Nasd from the Madang Visitors And Culture Bureau made a commitment to support Karkum through training and other capacity building workshops. Mr. Wasel and Mr. Sekum also made pledges to support Karkum financially.

Community

Karkum village is situated about one and half hours drive north of the Madang town, in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea. It is in the Ward 7 area of the Sumgilbar Local Level Government in the Sumkar District. It has a population of about 700 people.

Karkum is one of the six communities STRP had been working with for the last two and a half years since this project was established in the western pacific region. The other villages STRP is working with to establish Conservation Deeds are Mirap, Yadigam, Tokain, Magubem and Kimadi.

Training

With the help of Mr Magun and his community facilitators the Karkum people have learnt about PNG History timeline, of true development and false development, of the different conservation practices in PNG and what form is suitable for them. The communities have appreciated the wealth of abundant resources and skills they have and found ways to use these resources and skills for their positive development without asking for handouts.

They have appreciated the fact that leatherback turtles makes them very special as it comes to nest on their beaches and then travel to as far as California to forage before returning to their beaches to lay their eggs. They also learnt that leatherback turtles are the only remaining turtle species from the time of dinosaurs. That they are the biggest turtle species weighing about 92 kilograms and can grow to two meters long. But these special turtle will not continue to make them special as their population has plummeted so much so that it is estimated in 1982 that 11,500 adult female leatherbacks existed worldwide. In the Pacific the nesting leatherbacks have declined in an alarming rate (95%) and if nothing is done these special turtles will soon be another extinct creature in the next 5 –30 years. In fact reports show that as few as 2,300 adult female leatherbacks now remain, making the Pacific leatherback the world’s most endangered marine turtle.

The year-long training has also built the community capacity to learn about the eminent threats facing their marine resources including the increasing number of fishing companies in the region,

the possibility of deep sea tailings disposals by Ramu Nickel and the proposed Sea Bed mining by Nautilus limited. They are now at the crossroads. It is up to them to protect their resources and share it with their children and their future generations or allow outsiders to deplete and destroy the remaining resources they have been blessed with.

Conservation Area Management Rules

For the next five years commencing on and from the date of the execution of their deed, Karkum villagers have agreed that they shall conserve their land and sea including the forests, and water resources in their mapped conservation area.

The four clans have agreed that: They will not kill and eat or kill and dump all turtle species from the open ocean and river within the conservation area. *Anyone breaking this rule will be charged to pay a fine of K200 and or 6 months community service;* They will not dig and remove eggs for all turtle species that come and lay eggs on the sand dunes. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K200.00 and or do 6 months community service;* They will not use poison ropes, dynamite, fishing nets, diving at night using guns and any other modern or traditional fishing methods within the conservation area. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K200.00 and or do 6 month community service;* They will not cut trees, shrubs and vines near the beach within the conservation area. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K100.00 and or 4 months community service;* They will not make any fire or roam with torch and lamp within the conservation area. Only the Sea Turtle Restoration Project Committee has the power to authorize anyone with interest or concerns to do such things within the conservation area. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K100.00 and or 4 months community service.* They will not throw all kinds of rubbish or garbage such as plastic, bottle, tin, iron, laplap, battery, oil, and paper within the conservation area that will disturb people's minds to clean and keep safe their environment. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K100.00 and or 4 months community service. Corporations will be charged to pay a fine of K1000.00;* They will not collect or destroy other wildlife in the sea such as echinoderms, mollusks, sea grasses, etc, within the conservation area. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K100.00 and or 4 months community services.* They will not remove or disturb reefs in the sea or on the beach within the conservation area. *Offenders will be charged to pay a fine of K100.00 and or 4 months community service.*

The Karkum villagers gathered the following weekend to seal the knot on the *tanget* leaves according to traditional rituals. The *tanget* leaves were taken to the Conservation Area and were dropped into the sea to mark the area as a "No Go Zone" or a taboo area for the next 5 years. This was followed by feasting to celebrate this occasion.

Mr Magun and his team noted that there is a need for training on turtle hatchery, tagging and monitoring to save the eggs and allow the hatchlings to return to the sea. The team will continue to work with Karkum on resource mapping with support from Wren and with the other four communities in the area as they are now at the final stages of the conservation deed process.

1. Karkum Mirap Conservation Area
2. Villagers sign Conservation Deed
3. Wren and children building turtles out of sand dunes