

Promoting Water Security in the Pacific

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Managing and protecting freshwater resources is of vital importance for the Pacific region's health and wealth. A recent mission by the IUCN Water Programme is leading to the development of the Nadi River Catchment area, to help both secure water supply and prevent downstream flooding.

With the opening of IUCN's Oceania headquarters in Fiji, January 2007, **Director Taholo Kami** aims to work with regional partners and members to develop the IUCN's Water Programme to support the many water challenges the region faces.

"We want to work in the Nadi River catchment. We are looking at one or two of the other islands and will work towards agreements with local communities on specific improvements in their water situation," said **Dr Bergkamp, Head of the IUCN Water Programme**. IUCN hopes to have specialist water program staff in place over the next year to look into water

projects with its partners. Dr Bergkamp believes key for the region is to look at the chain of supply for water from the mountains to the reef, and its role in development, economics and good governance.

"If you look at Suva or Nadi, we know that some years floods are a major devastating force. We need to manage our catchments upstream so that these floods become less damaging. During floods, the health of communities is also affected, so we need to ensure that water supply during floods is of good quality," he said.

Instead of endless extremes of floods and droughts, Dr Bergkamp notes there is a middle ground that needs to be considered with the help and expertise of local communities and member organisations. *"What we see in other places is that creating water storage or safe groundwater supplies can help in dry times. But at the same time, you also experience that investing in nature's infrastructure – such as getting forests back on the slopes, springs of good quality – is also important in dry times. So you need both types of infrastructure – manmade and natural – to have a secure and healthy water supply."*

Members in the Pacific region include 29 Members in Australia, including the Department of Environment & Water; 7 in New Zealand, including the Department of Conservation; and 3 in the Pacific, including USP and the National Trust of Fiji. IUCN Pacific director, Mr Kami added that Australia and New Zealand are state members, though several island states have now expressed interest in membership. IUCN also works in strong partnership with SPREP and SOPAC.

The IUCN Water and Nature Initiative (WANI) works towards managing and protecting water reserves and heritage for the future benefit of all. Stretching across five continents in 12 river basins, WANI works with governments and local communities to use and manage water resources in a more sustainable manner. WANI aims to help reduce poverty and protect the environment by helping people to manage river flows and improving water access and availability.

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Interviews: Photo and Bio of Dr Bergkamp are available online: <http://www.iucn.org/themes/wani/contactus/>