

Conservation deeds with communities in New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea: Challenges encountered and lessons learned

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Managing local marine resources in New Ireland Province

Located in northeastern Papua New Guinea (PNG), the long, slender landmass of New Ireland lies perpendicular to New Britain, jutting west into the Bismarck Sea, one of the most biologically diverse marine environments on earth. For generations, coastal communities in New Ireland have been harvesting marine resources for food, tradition and livelihoods. Yet today, an increase in the human population, better fishing methods and exposure to the market economy have led to reduced fish stocks, which when coupled with future climate change projections, could result in less seafood in the future. Population increase is a key concern: according to the national census in 2000, the total population for New Ireland was 118,350 (62,760 males and 55,590 females). This increased by 75,717 persons in 2011, giving a population of 194,067 (102,494 males and 91,573 females). This includes an 8% increase in the numbers of residents in New Ireland Province within the nine-year span from 2000 to 2011 (PNG National Statistics 2011). Considering the fact that 77% of New Ireland's residents live in the coastal zone, the increase in population could result in food security issues in decades to come, especially if the increasing trend continues.

As with other parts of Melanesia, communities in New Ireland own their land and marine resources through traditional tenure systems that have likely been in place for millennia. Unlike most of the PNG mainland, New Ireland Province – together with East New Britain Province, Milne Bay Province and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville – is a matrilineal society whereby, women are the customary land owners and where terrestrial and marine resources are passed down through the generations on the female bloodline. However, traditions and other vital aspects of New Ireland society are changing due to: 1) the introduction of practices from other cultural groups into New Ireland through intermarriage, 2) foreigners who have settled in New Ireland, 3) modernisation, 4) migration, and 5) even native New Irelanders who have been away for many years and have returned home but have forgotten local customs. Although women are the rightful landowners in decision-making processes, low literacy levels in the community and various customary barriers are major constraints that leave women struggling to voice their views and express their concerns publicly. In addition, many decision-making gatherings are often male dominated with less contribution from females, despite their status.

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has been working with 13 island communities in western New Ireland Province to assist community fishers in sustainably managing their marine resources. Since 2016, this has been achieved mainly through the establishment of locally managed marine areas (LMMAs) in the 13 island communities: eight in Lovongai local level government (LLG) and five in Tikana LLG (Tigak Islands), which are accompanied by community-driven fisheries management plans (Fig. 1). The site-specific fisheries management plans consist of marine management rules and penalties for non-compliance that were set by community residents during a series of community meetings and gatherings about the LMMAs. Through a fully participatory community-based approach, the rules and penalties (should the rules be breached) were selected and agreed on. Facilitated by WCS from 2016 to 2018, the fisheries management plans (FMPs) allow communities to effectively manage their marine resources with the enforcement duty delegated to locally appointed members of a marine management committee (MMC) in each community.

Formalising locally managed marine areas with conservation deeds

Since the FMPs were implemented, reports from MMCs from all 13 sites indicate that the LMMA rules are often breached and, due to no legal recognition of the FMPs, it appears that FMPs were seen as powerless. This affected the MMCs as they were often challenged to effectively conduct enforcement.

To address the complaints from village elders and other community members about the shortage of fish within their inshore waters and the increasing problems of FMP rules and regulation enforcement within their LMMAs, WCS introduced the concept of formalising each LMMA with a legal document known as a conservation deed. A conservation deed is a form of contract law between all resource owners within a community, and can be used for small-scale, community-based natural resource management and conservation matters. Similar to other vital development processes in the community, female representation was invaluable, and women must be involved in decision-making processes. In addition, all women and youth must give consent before the conservation deed process can take place.

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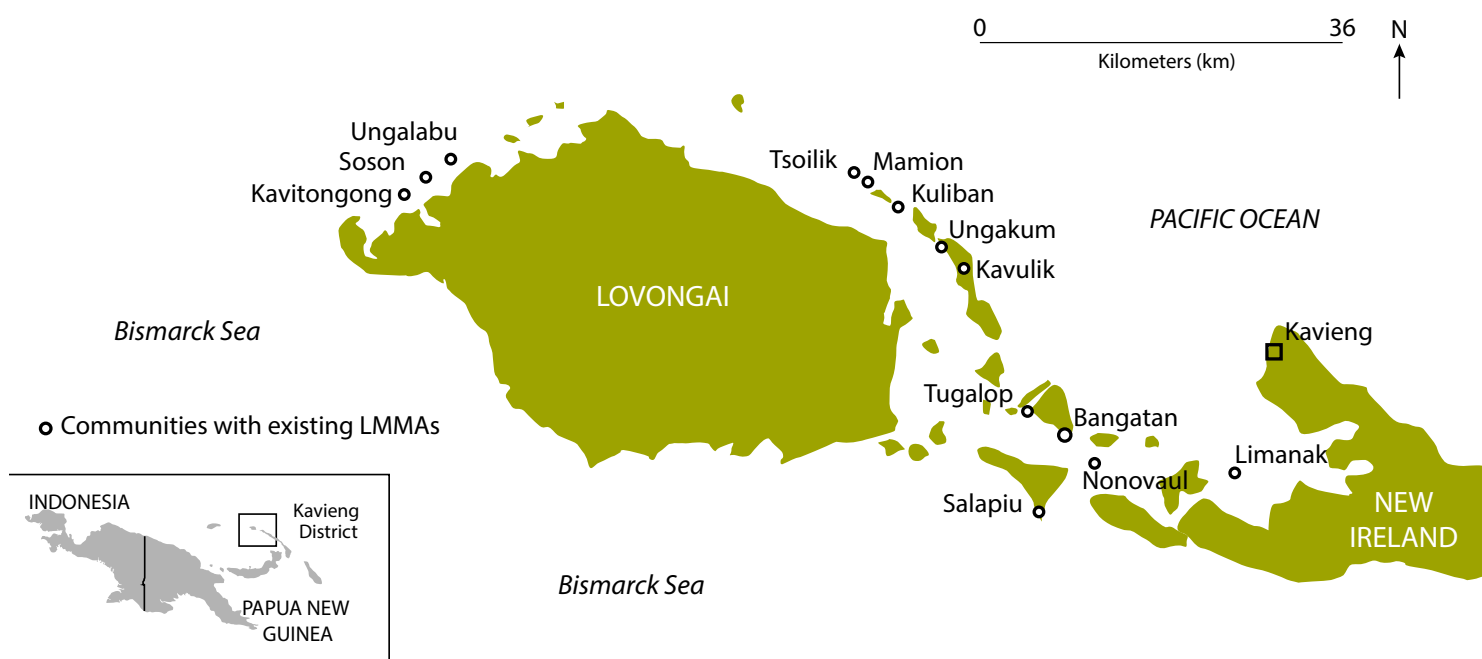


Figure 1. The 13 locally managed marine area (LMMA) communities in New Ireland Province.

The conservation deed process begins with an initial community consultation, together with an outreach, education and awareness programme, which includes: i) an introduction to tropical marine ecology; ii) threats to local marine resources; iii) the importance of marine management; iv) an overview of the conservation deeds and how they can be used; and v) how conservation deeds have been implemented in other parts of PNG. For instance, WCS learned from the successes and lessons learned from the Wanang Conservation Area in the Gama Rural LLG where communities wanted to protect their forest from logging, and the Karkum Conservation Area for turtle nesting grounds with interest from collective communities

in the Sungibar LLG of Madang. The goal was to try to adapt the conservation deed process for the purpose of improving the FMPs and their enforcement for the 13 LMMA communities in New Ireland. All community consultations were exercised through free prior and informed consent, and the support and consent from each community had to be granted before the conservation deed process could begin.

Conservation deeds are recognized under the PNG Constitution and provide a legal framework for formalizing LMMAs and the associated fisheries management rules. Table 1 outlines the eight-step process that is required by a

Table 1: The eight steps that are required to implement a conservation deed at the community level in Papua New Guinea.

Step	Processes involved	Sites where steps are completed	Stage at which each community is at
1	Prepare draft conservation deed	All 13 communities	Draft was prepared for all communities before step two took place.
2	Community entry	Sosson, Ugalabu, Kavitongong, Kulinang, Tsoilik, Ungakum, Kavulik, Tugalop, Bangatan, Salapiu, Nonovaul, Limanak	Mamion
3	Map the communities, with the communities	Tsoilik, Bangatan, Salapiu	Kavitongong, Sosson, Ugalabu, Kulibang, Ungakum, Kavulik, Tugalop, Nonovaul, Limanak
4	Lay down the rules for free, prior and informed consent	Tsoilik, Bangatan, Salapiu, Limanak	
5	Plan the network of conservation deeds with the communities	Tsoilik, Bangatan	Salapiu
6	At community meetings, prepare the content of the deed		Tsoilik, Bangatan
7	Draft the deed in the community, with the community		All communities yet to reach but aim to be done this year (2020)
8	Formalise and sign the deed		All communities yet to reach but aim to be done this year (2020) or early 2021



Figure 2. Salapiu community and clan leaders confirming area of management under Step 3 of the conservation deed process. © Yvonne Wong, WCS

community in order to establish a conservation deed for marine spatial management. Once signed, a conservation deed is effective for five to seven years, following which it can be renewed, allowing community members to take the lead in managing their marine resources (Fig. 2).

While the aim is to assist all 13 communities in establishing conservation deeds, the conservation deed may not be suitable for some communities, such as Kulibang, Ungalabu, Ungakum and Mamion, which are all in Lovongai LLG. This is because these communities do not meet certain criteria and have ongoing community issues that greatly hinder the conservation deed progress. For these communities, the FMPs will be reviewed and used with legal recognition under the Lovongai LLG law (which addresses local environmental and resource management issues).

Challenges encountered when establishing conservation deeds

WCS is currently working with communities to assist with strengthening the enforcement of LMMAs with conservation deeds. However, there have been many challenges during the initial steps of the conservation deed process, especially for women, who are the traditional land and coastal resource owners in New Ireland Province. For instance, we noticed that many women are illiterate, which hinders their ability to engage in the conservation deed process, yet when women are isolated from the men, they are often more vocal (Fig. 3). Other challenges include ensuring that residents understand the conservation deed process, including the potential advantages and disadvantages that may arise if a conservation deed is implemented, and conveying this information in the local language. The lack of communication between community members also caused some confusion regarding the purpose of the conservation deeds, which could delay the steps of the conservation deed process. Also, the lack of participation from some women, youths and elders resulted in the absence of certain sections of the society when information was disseminated or when decisions were made.



Figure 3. Women sitting away from the main meeting area at Bangatan during Step 3 of the conservation deed discussion. © Yvonne Wong, WCS

Some female fishers described the common challenges they face when managing their marine resources. During a learning exchange training workshop held by WCS for the Tigak Islands in Kavieng, Bernadette Bou from a small community in the Tigak Islands called Metemai said:

Many people are attending the education and awareness programme and have learnt much as possible, and have agreed that the conservation deed is a good thing. However, others are spending their free time doing something else and then stop us to ask about what we have learnt with WCS, which is frustrating.

Bernadette continued, “Reef management and the conservation deed is everyone’s concern so why do some people not have the time to attend the meetings? Is it a behavioural problem or do they just not see what we are trying to get done here?” Sentiments like these were common in places in the communities that had established LMMAs and which were keen to formalise such spatial management initiatives with conservation deeds. On the other hand, a woman named Martha Orongasi from Nusailas Island in the Tigak Islands stated in an interview:

My community is not privileged like the other communities in Tigak Islands that have fisheries plans already. But attending this learning exchange workshop, I have learnt a lot and come to know many good reasons why I should enter into management, not forgetting that there are challenges that will be encountered yet, I still see that it is the way forward. I am now in a state which I want to go back and start something for my community to secure the resources for our future generation and even for myself while I am still alive.

Many other communities that do not have management plans in place have expressed similar views.

In order to include women in decision-making processes, WCS arranged separate focus groups for female and male residents in order to enable women to voice their concerns, and the education materials were presented in visual forms to help disseminate the conservation and management

messages to illiterate members of the society in a simple yet effective manner. Despite the challenges and problems that have arisen during the initial phase of implementing the conservation deed process, if the community members continue to support and participate in the workshops and decision-making activities – and especially if female residents take part – it is likely that most of the 13 island communities will be able to better enforce their LMMAs and manage their fisheries and other marine resources. Indeed, participation for female residents in the decision-making process can also empower women and allow them to have a more leading role in the management of their coastal and inshore areas, which, according to tradition and custom – is rightfully theirs.

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