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Islanders compare notes on community management of marine resources

In the second of six international Indigenous ranger exchange visits funded by the Australian Government, five Torres Strait Island rangers and traditional owners have travelled to the Solomon Islands to work alongside their Pacific Island counterparts.



Credit: Jim Catlin/Marine Photobank

The one-week exchange comes just weeks before the inaugural World Indigenous Network Conference to be held in Darwin in May.

'Australia has taken a lead on the World Indigenous Network because we strongly value traditional knowledge and skills to help protect our land and sea not just here in Australia but across the globe,' said the federal environment minister, Tony Burke.

'Now we're taking our commitment to the global stage with the World Indigenous Network ranger exchanges and the conference in Darwin.

'In a world-first, we're bringing Indigenous and local community land and sea managers together from every continent on earth to share traditional ecological knowledge and learn from each other.'

Ahead of the conference, the Torres Strait Islander rangers will travel to the Arnavon Islands in the Solomons to meet with the Arnavon Community Marine Conservation Area group. This marine protected area encompasses 157 sq km of three small uninhabited islands, flourishing reefs, fish-filled lagoons and beaches that comprise the nesting grounds for thousands of hawksbill sea turtles.

Since the establishment of this protected area, numbers of critically endangered species have increased by nearly 400 per cent. Livelihoods around the Arnavons are dependent on the marine environment, and now local youth are employed as monitors and students learn about the group's conservation efforts. The area has also helped bring about an innovative solution to local resource

conflict through community collaboration around conservation.

The Torres Strait Islander delegation to Arnavon Islands includes Torres Strait Regional Authority chairman, Joseph Elu.

'We share much common ground with the Arnavon communities. We both are reliant on our marine environment to contribute towards our economic development and sustainability and at the same time ensure we meet our cultural obligation to care for sea country and all living things,' Mr Elu said.

'We're looking forward to the exchange, exploring how we can share knowledge about protecting threatened and culturally important species like marine turtles and dugongs, our conservation techniques and methods with each other.'

The Australian Government is working in partnership with the Nature Conservancy to make the Solomon Island and Torres Strait Island exchange possible.

The Director of the Nature Conservancy's Solomon Islands Program, Willie Atu, said they had worked closely with Arnavon Islands communities since the early 1990s and the exchange with traditional owners from the Torres Strait Islands will greatly complement this work.

'The Arnavon Community Marine Conservation Area was first established in 1995 and was the first community-managed marine conservation area in the Solomon Islands,' Mr Atu said.

'The project is one in a growing series of Equator Prize winners – vetted and peer-reviewed best practices in community environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods. That's why we're excited with our involvement in the sharing and exchange of knowledge between two communities with such strong sea country connections.'

Source: Australian Government media release

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