

Today's topic: We all have a role to play



And so Samoa is hosting a high-level meeting to discuss the protection and conservation of coral reefs this week.

The meeting was first announced by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE), Faumuina Tiatia Liuga in Japan two weeks ago. The 22nd General Meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) starts today at Hotel Millennia, Sogi.

Samoa is co-chairing the meeting with France and is attended by some 70 participants from different countries, regions and organisations.

Over the next few days, they will discuss ways to protect and conserve coral reefs.

The idea is to reverse the degradation of corals and related ecosystems, such as mangrove forests and sea grass meadows, by promoting the conservation and sustainable use.

It's a noble enough gesture that should be applauded and supported.

Our future generations need people like us who live today to show we care by looking after our environment. For a small country like Samoa, we need all the natural resources at our disposal for survival.

The ocean is obviously a crucial one. Entire villages depend on it on a daily basis, economies need it and countries simply cannot live without it.

There is no doubt mankind has been far too reckless to his surroundings. So much so we are already seeing the widespread destruction of this home we call our environment which was gifted to us to look after.

When it comes to coral reef conservation, the challenges are several. And there are people who have devoted their entire lifetimes to tackle such challenges, who can tell us a whole lot more. A number of them are in Apia this week.

But the key question, if you like, for the average person like you and me is this; why do we need to conserve our coral reefs?

There are many answers. There is the school of thought that the reef enhances the beauty of a country. We also know the reef provides food and without this resource, people would suffer.

You don't need to look far for proof. Life in Samoa for most people depends on the sea. They fish for food, money and more.

Without fish, life would be very difficult.

Sadly, the availability of fish is no longer plentiful as it used to be. No thanks to over fishing and the destruction of corals, villagers are finding it tougher to get a good catch in spots where they once caught an abundance of fish.

Consider the palolo rising for example. Many people would agree that the palolo of today is no longer the same as it was.

Catchers will be lucky to assemble two or three bundles. In some villages where the delicacy used to rise, it's been missing for the past couple of years.

The reasons differ. Pollution has been identified as a leading cause of coral reef degradation. This is the result of fertilizer runoff, raw sewage, oil spills and large and small pieces of trash which eventually end up in the sea.

And that's not all.

Coastal development is another. As populations grow, so does the pressure on nearby reefs as a source of food. The impact of farming, construction and other developments all add up.

And then we have to consider over fishing, a concept should be well aware of, and ocean acidification caused by rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The message is obviously clear, if we continue to destroy our oceans, particularly our reefs; the environment we depend on will be lost. The fish we need for survival will disappear forever.

So as the ICRI begins its meeting in Samoa today, it's important for everyone to remember we each have a role to play.

Start by remembering that we live within the largest of oceans rich in marine ecosystems. Our coral reefs are home to a number of marine animals crucial to our survival.

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