

By Sophie Price



Thinking globally but acting locally is what it will take to preserve our coral reefs.

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment CEO, Taulealeausumai La'avasa Malua said: "it's critical to work with the communities because you have to work from the bottom up."

Speaking at the 25th General Meeting of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) in Apia, Taulealeausumai told the Samoa Observer, while government could provide the technical skills needed to preserve our reefs, local knowledge was just as important.

"There is a lot of traditional knowledge...the planners and those who are putting the programmes together can take into account," he said.

"By doing this they (the planners) aim not to deprive those who are entitled to use the coral reefs as they (the villagers) depend on them for their livelihoods.

"At the same time ensuring that it is not being overharvested or damaged by non-sustainable methods."

He said conservation areas had been established through the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheriers and the MNRE had two major projects in the districts of Aleipata and Safata.

"But there are many other protected areas around the country agreed to by the village communities," said Taulealeausumai.

"They (villagers) have been given the responsibility to ensure that the marine life within those ecosystems flourish and they will reap the benefits if they look after those coral reefs."

The CEO added such programs needed to be developed in a way that reduced the impact on coral reefs.

"In order to support the improvement of people's livelihoods you have to depend on what God has given you – animals, ecosystems that exist," said Taulealeausumai.

"So we need to develop them in a way that adverse impacts are minimised as much as possible, even eliminated completely.

"So they can still farm and use the reefs and also be mindful of the values of having this in place of having the ecosystems."

However, Taulealeausumai said to ensure this method worked, his Ministry had to create greater awareness of the coral reef issues.

"The challenge is the knowledge, the understanding," he said.

"There is a lot of awareness that we have to build.

"While we have been doing awareness for over 10 years, there still seems to be a need for more, because this is a lesser developed country."

Bringing this sentiment to a regional and global level Taulealeausumai said: "the key contributions that this meeting will hold for us is the ability to work with other countries in the Pacific.

"To share our experiences, management tools and efforts.

"To improve on how we are doing this work."

He said the meeting means a lot to Samoa as much work had been done to preserve our coral reefs.

"I believe the intention (of the meeting) is to maintain momentum on the progress that has been made so far.

"And to set milestones for the future and to win support of our development partners who are able to assist our region.

"Cooperation in protecting the coral reefs will be a major achievement."

The ICRI meeting was opened at the Millennia Hotel in Sogi by the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment Faumuina Liuga.

It will conclude this Friday.

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