

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

**Twenty-second Meeting of the Donor Council
Conservation International, Arlington, VA
18 December 2012
8 a.m. – 11 a.m. EST**

Ecosystem Profile for the East Melanesia Islands Biodiversity Hotspot

Recommended Action Item:

The Donor Council is asked to approve on a no-objection basis the ecosystem profile for the East Melanesian Islands biodiversity hotspot. Similarly, the Donor Council is asked to increase CEPF's spending authority by \$9 million for the implementation of this profile.

Background:

On October 29, the Secretariat shared with the members of the Donor Council for their review and approval the ecosystem profile of the East Melanesia Islands Biodiversity Hotspot.

The Secretariat wanted to take advantage of the presence of the members of the Donor Council at its 22nd meeting to present the results of the profiling exercise and the strategy outlined in the ecosystem profile. Representatives of the University of the South Pacific will be present at the Donor Council meeting to share their experience with the donor members and walk them through the proposed investment strategy for this biodiversity hotspot.

As a reference a copy of the cover note included in this package. Also the full text of the ecosystem profile of the East Melanesia Islands Biodiversity Hotspot can be downloaded at

http://www.cepf.net/SiteCollectionDocuments/east_melanesia/EMI_ecosystem_profile.pdf

Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

No-Objection Approval Pursuant to Section 2.03(c) of the Financing Agreement
29 October 2012

Ecosystem Profile for the East Melanesian Islands Biodiversity Hotspot

Recommended Action Item

The Donor Council is asked to **approve on a no-objection basis** the ecosystem profile for the East Melanesian Islands biodiversity hotspot. Similarly, the Donor Council is asked to increase CEPF's spending authority by \$9 million for the implementation of this profile.

The deadline for the no-objection approval is 11 December 2012.

Background:

The Donor Council approved five new biodiversity hotspots as priorities for CEPF investment in July 2007 based on the paper "Setting Priorities for Future Investment" as follows:

- Mediterranean Basin;
- Caribbean Islands;
- East Melanesian Islands;
- Eastern Afrotropical (incorporating the Horn of Africa as appropriate); and
- Maputaland-Pondoland-Albany.

In June 2012, the Donor Council selected the Wallacea Hotspot as one of two additional new investment areas for CEPF, and another new region is expected to be chosen in December 2012. The East Melanesian Islands Hotspot is the last of the hotspots approved in 2007 to undergo ecosystem profiling. East Melanesia comprises Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands plus the islands region of Papua New Guinea (PNG), which includes the provinces of Manus, New Ireland, East New Britain and West New Britain as well as the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. The hotspot holds exceptional cultural and linguistic diversity. Vanuatu, for example, has 108 living languages: more per unit area than any other country. The Solomon Islands, with 74 languages, are only slightly less diverse. Because many languages are spoken by only a few hundred people, they are dying out or mixing into pidgin-Austronesian creoles, leading to a rapid erosion of traditional knowledge and practice. This is highly significant in a region where most land and resources are under customary ownership, and local people are true stewards of biodiversity.

The East Melanesian Islands qualify as a hotspot due to their high levels of endemism and accelerating levels of habitat loss, caused chiefly by widespread commercial logging and mining, expansion of subsistence and plantation agriculture, population increase, and the impacts of climate change and variability. The hotspot is one of the most geographically complex areas on the earth. Isolation and adaptive radiation have led to very high levels of endemism, both within the hotspot as a whole and on single islands. Because most of the islands have never been in land contact with New Guinea, their fauna and flora are a mix of recent long-distance immigrants and ancient lineages derived from Pacific-Gondwanaland species. The hotspot harbors 3,000 endemic vascular plants species, 41 endemic mammals, 148 endemic birds, 54 endemic reptiles, 45 endemic amphibians and 3 endemic freshwater fishes. Notable endemic species include the majestic Solomons sea eagle (*Haliaeetus sanfordi*) and many species of flying fox.

The hotspot is a terrestrial conservation priority, with habitats including coastal vegetation, mangrove forests, freshwater swamp forests, lowland rainforests, seasonally dry forests and grasslands, and montane rainforests. Nevertheless, the East Melanesian Islands lie partly within the Coral Triangle, whose ecosystems support 75 percent of known coral species, with an estimated 3,000 species of reef fishes. The geographic scope of the hotspot includes nearshore marine habitats, such as coral reefs and seagrass beds, thus presenting opportunities for investment in ridge-to-reef conservation strategies that preserve environmental flows and foster resilience to climate change.

The ecosystem profile for the East Melanesian Islands Hotspot was developed by a team led by the University of the South Pacific, with support from the University of Papua New Guinea (PNG) and CI's Pacific Islands Program. The ecosystem profiling process was launched by the profiling team at the Pacific Islands Roundtable on Nature Conservation in Suva, Fiji on July 27, 2011.

The profiling process began with data compilation and desk study at the regional level, to define draft biological priorities (conservation outcomes) and conduct situational analyses, which were subsequently reviewed by experts in the hotspot. Input from stakeholders was facilitated through consultation workshops at regional, national and provincial levels. In December 2011, the first consultation meeting (a technical workshop to define conservation outcomes for the hotspot) took place on Motupore Island, PNG. This meeting brought together 15 stakeholders from the three countries in the hotspot plus two external experts. This was followed up by three national launch events, covering PNG, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, over the following months.

In keeping with CEPF's participatory, bottom-up approach to strategy development, a series of eight provincial workshops followed, from January to May 2012, to elicit input from representatives of provincial and local government, NGOs, community-based organizations, media organizations and communities. In PNG, 69 stakeholders participated in meetings held in Lorengau (Manus), Kavieng (New Ireland), Kimbe (West New Britain) and Buka (Bougainville). For the Solomon Islands, 31 people participated in consultations held in Honiara city and Gizo (Western province). In Vanuatu, 34 people attended meetings held in Port Vila, Luganville (Santo) and Lenakel (Tanna). These meetings were open to anyone who wished to attend, and were advertised through local media, including radio broadcasts. They provided an opportunity to engage representatives of local communities in the consultation process and, thereby, ensure that the conservation strategy emerging from the process was grounded in reality.

The profiling process was concluded by a three-day regional stakeholder workshop, held in Honiara in May 2012, which brought together 24 representatives of government departments, domestic and international civil society and local communities to review draft outputs from the profiling process and consider conservation strategies from a regional perspective. The overall process engaged more than 150 stakeholders, making it one of the most inclusive exercises of its kind to have been undertaken in the region.