



# ENVIRONMENT: FIJI

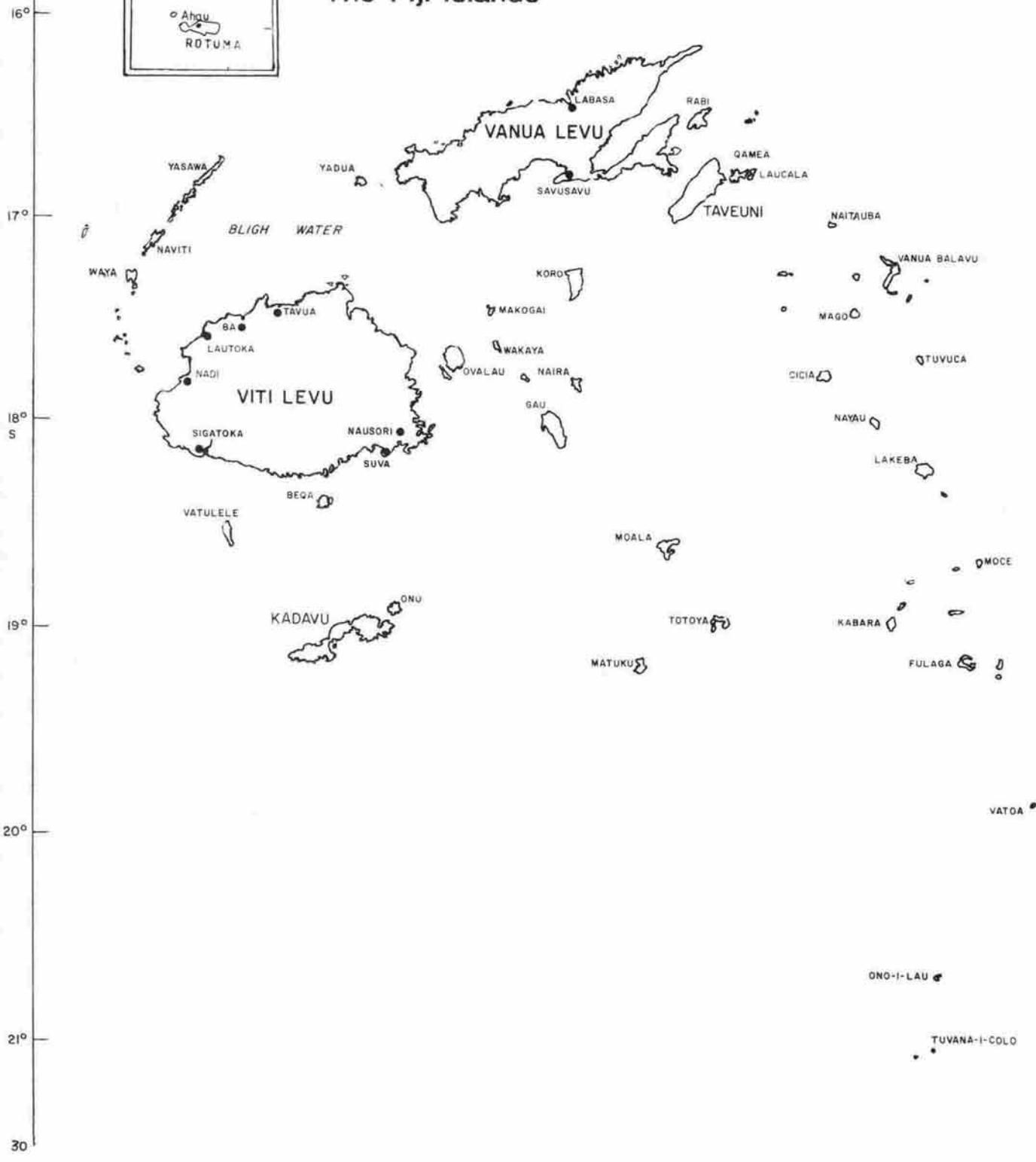


THE  
NATIONAL  
STATE OF THE  
ENVIRONMENT  
REPORT



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# The Fiji Islands



**ENVIRONMENT : FIJI**  
**THE**  
**NATIONAL**  
**STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**REPORT**

Prepared by IUCN - The World Conservation Union for the National Environment Management Project,  
as part of technical assistance provided by the Asian Development Bank to the Government of Fiji.

Compiled by;

|                  |              |
|------------------|--------------|
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| IUCN Team Leader | NEMP Manager |

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# FOREWORD

In 1989 the Interim Government agreed to accept a technical assistance grant from the Asian Development Bank to support the Government's own environmental management initiatives. It was agreed that a two year project would be developed which would prepare a National Environment Strategy for Fiji. The technical assistance, known as the National Environment Management Project, subsequently commenced in August 1990. The consultant appointed to undertake the work in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development's Environment Unit is IUCN - The World Conservation Union.

Obviously before we reach the point of being able to produce a National Strategy we must first review our historic and existing situation with respect to environmental quality, natural resources and the way we use them, environmental policy and law and their administration, and so on. This review or "stocktake" is an essential first step in the development of the overall Strategy.

The Government has, in directing the preparation of the National Environment Strategy, recognised that there is a need to convert our stated environmental policies into action. I am mindful of the fact that Fiji's policies and proposed initiatives span at least 16 years, going back to Development Plan 7. This "State of the Environment" report certainly highlights the need to transform our past promises into action.

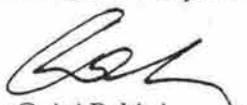
The report covers all the major issues which should be of concern to us. Perhaps the most important aspect of the report is the fact that it makes us realise to what extent the environment and its resources support virtually every aspect of lives. While Fiji is blessed with an abundance of natural resources relative to many parts of the world and lacks the serious demographic, economic and industrial pressures from which the majority of serious environmental problems originate, we must also be aware of the physical constraints under which we are developing the country. Fiji's small size, young landscape and evolutionary isolation make our natural resources vulnerable to loss or degradation. It is through understanding of these aspects that we can enhance opportunities for development based on the sustainable utilisation of our environmental resources.

That we are currently not operating on such a sustainable basis in many areas has been brought to light in the findings of this report. For example, our limited first class arable soils are now almost fully utilised and the increasing use of marginal lands has led to erosion of valuable top soil. The associated problem of poor catchment management has resulted in declining water quality in some areas and increasing dredging costs to maintain our waterways. Waste disposal is a growing problem. Development pressures are increasing on our limited coastal lands and on nearshore marine resources. In the area of heritage conservation Fiji is sadly lagging behind many of our neighbours and does not have an effective national parks and reserves system.

A major concern is that our present administration and legal capacities are inadequate to deal with current environmental issues, let alone if problems should increase. It is also worrying that some laws are not actually being enforced which could be, such as the regulations controlling vehicle emissions.

Clearly, if our environment and natural resources are to continue to sustain us then we need to manage them efficiently and effectively. In its concluding chapter the report states that Fijian land ownership and customary rights and their future management are central to sustainable development and sound environmental management. In the words of Professor Asesela Ravuvu, in discussing the concept of *vanua*: "the land is the physical or geographical entity of the people, upon which their survival as individuals and as a group depends. It is a major source of life, it provides nourishment, shelter and protection ... and the material basis for belonging."

It is time that we remember that our environmental resources are not commodities to be used and disposed of as we please. They have been passed on to us, in trust, to be managed wisely and conservatively, so that we in turn can pass their benefits on to future generations. That we should do this is both a responsibility and an obligation.



Ratu Ovini Bokini  
*Minister For Housing and Urban Development*

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A draft of the report was widely circulated within Government Ministries and comments incorporated into the final report.

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