



FR

2019



# ASSESSING FOREST FUNCTIONALITY TO PROVIDE SERVICES RELATED TO WATER RESOURCE

An innovative tool for South Pacific Island countries

MISSION CONCLUSIONS REPORT

January 2020

## WWF

WWF is one of the very first independent environmental protection organizations in the world. With an active network in more than 100 countries and with the support of nearly 6 million members, WWF works to halt the degradation of the planet's natural environment and build a future where humans live in harmony with nature, conserving global biodiversity, ensuring sustainable use of renewable natural resources, and by promoting the reduction of pollution and waste. Since 1973, WWF France has been working on a daily basis to offer future generations a living planet. With its volunteers and the support of its 220,000 donors, WWF France is taking concrete action to save natural environments and their species, promote sustainable lifestyles, train decision-makers, support companies in reducing their ecological footprint, and educate young audiences. But for change to be acceptable, it can only happen through respect for everyone. That's why WWF's philosophy is based on dialogue and action.

### **Together possible.**

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## **PROJECT PRESENTATION**

### **SDGs target**

*In 2015, the UN adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to “protect the planet from degradation...so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations”. Through the SDGs, the UN recognises that conservation directly supports human health and wellbeing by providing goods such as water and fibre, and global public goods such as habitats for species and mitigation of climate change. Although trade-offs can indeed arise between conservation and economic development, the Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health states unequivocally that “the environment has been the foundation of human flourishing”, suggesting that if environmental degradation persists then ongoing improvements in human health are likely to be reversed.*

The SDGs targets on which the project focuses are:



#### **SDG 6 - Clear water & sanitation**

6.5 By 2030, implement integrated water resource management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.



#### **SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities**

11.A Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning



#### **SDG 13 - Climate action**

13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.



#### **SDG 15 - Life on land**

15.4 By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development.

### **Countries :**

- New-Caledonia
- Vanuatu
- Wallis-and-Futuna

### **Data types and technologies**

- Administrative data
- Geospatial data
- Satellite imagery

### **Project objective**

This project aims to assess the functioning levels of forest ecosystems in watersheds that supply water catchments through an innovative and low-cost tool based on geospatial data. It considers ecosystem services provided by forests and calculates parameters that translate them into spatial indicators. The method is to be replicable and cheap so that a long-term monitoring can be done, and provides information that can be used by elected officials and managers to help securing water resource through green infrastructures.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In early 2016, WWF launched a pilot study to assess the functioning levels of existing water collection protection zones in New Caledonia by defining a forest ecosystem function based on the loss of water-quality-related ecosystem services.

The project relied on existing data and offered a reliable methodology based on satellite imagery analysis to assess and monitor this forest ecosystem function. Given existing data in the territory three indicators were likely to provide information on these criteria: erosion risk (soil stabilization ecosystem service), dominant landscape type (moisture-buffer ecosystem service), and forest fragmentation (ecosystem resilience = sustainability). A decision tree then allowed the functioning levels to be characterised based on the concatenation of these three calculated indicators.

This project aims to scale-up the pilot phase by updating data sources and improving the process to create a fast and large-scale tool to deploy the methodology over South Pacific countries with similar concerns.

Therefore the assessment has been carried out on all water drainage basins located above the water catchments supplying the population of New Caledonia, Vanuatu and Wallis-and-Futuna. In order to scale-up the work at an affordable cost, the methodology relies on free accessible data such as satellites imageries from Landsat and Sentinel Programs, SRTM topography, and World Climate Rainfall Data. Local partners were included in the project in order to inform and provide higher resolution or more recent or accurate data when available.

The results of the assessment give an overview of forest functionality at country-scale to contribute to decision-making a national level, but a closer analysis of specific watersheds results can also improve decision-making and actions at the local level.

## **AUTHORS**

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**BLUECHAM SAS** – An innovative Caledonian company whose core business is to build new solutions to develop greater knowledge and understanding to help protect our planet. Internationally awarded, BLUECHAM SAS is a pioneer in Geospatial Cloud Computing, providing high value added products and systems from earth observation satellites and scientific models. It increases its expertise through R&D projects in cooperation with international space agencies. BLUECHAM's clients are therefore guaranteed of obtaining the best possible data quickly and at the lowest cost.

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# 1 CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE FEEDBACK SESSIONS

The purpose of the assessment is to highlight the functionality status of forests located on drainage basins above water catchments that provide services related to water resource. The final meaning is to use the results to encourage good behaviours and forest management in order to provide good water quality and water for all people.

Therefore, the results of the project and its prospects have to be shared with local organizations in charge of lands and resources management so they can seize its results and turn them into concrete actions to the advantages of both forests and men. So the WWF and BlueCham team planned meetings with all stakeholders that may be concerned by the results as a full part of the project. The missions also permit to meet, sometime for the first time, local partners and discuss with them the collaboration perspectives and potential diagnosis improvements to meet further needs of the managers. A practical and meaningful name was searched for the project in order to make it easy to present and talk about with the partners. The choice was decided for “*FLOW project*” which was standing for *Forest Landscapes as Opportunities for Water*.

These business trips were planned in the countries directly concerned by the project: New Caledonia (where the WWF France satellite office is located), Vanuatu and Wallis-and-Futuna. It was also planned to organize another trip in the event of a regional meeting to spread the project outside of the concerned countries’ boundaries. In the end, two opportunities were provided: a regional workshop based in Fiji to answer the problematic of the Great See Reef protection management, and a second one during the 29<sup>th</sup> meeting of Officials of the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), which was this year combined with the Pacific Environment Forum.

## 2 WALLIS-AND-FUTUNA

### 2.1 Former exchanges between WWF and Wallis-and-Futuna

In the framework of the INTEGRE<sup>1</sup> project, the WWF France had the opportunity in 2017 to present the methodology of forest functionality assessment to the Department of Environment and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests. These two departments had a high interest in this project and were at the time very willing to conduct it on their own water catchments’ forests.

So the WWF has stayed attentive for funding opportunity and when the Innovation Fund proposal call was released, the Department of Environment, which is in charge of monitoring water quality and land use on the watersheds, was able to quickly provided a support letter expressing their interest in the project and its results.

During the implementation of the project, they were very responsive to provide all the needed information. The Futuna office of the Department of Environment gave the location of water catchments and both the Environment and the Agriculture gave useful information to create a ground occupation model. Thanks to their reactivity and to the small number of water catchment, Wallis-and-Futuna was the first territory where the assessment was completed.

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<sup>1</sup> INTEGRE: *Territories Initiative for Environment Regional Management (INitiative des TErritoires pour la Gestion Régionale de l’Environnement)* is a sustainable development project common to the four European Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) funded by the 10th European Development Fund.

## 2.2 Mission in Wallis-and-Futuna

The visit was carried out at the end of June at the request of the Director of the Environment Department, Mr. Atolo Malau, to ensure his presence before his departure for a new position.

This period was even more interesting as the teams from the Environment Department and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Department were about to define actions as part of the PROTEGE<sup>2</sup> project deployment, which includes a significant amount of work on watershed restoration to conserve water resources.

During this mission, the WWF team had the opportunity to present the assessment and its conclusions to both Departments and to others stakeholders involved in the thematic the project covers. As the Wallis-and-Futuna administrations are quite small (for the record Wallis-and-Futuna population is of 12,000 inhabitants), almost the full staff manage to attend the presentation.

The Honourable David VERGE, President of the Territorial Assembly, also attended the meeting and expressed his satisfaction towards the work and the outcomes that can be expected.

The organization of this reporting meeting has allowed to launch transversal discussions to the different areas of expertise of the departments, particularly in order to take advantage of the momentum triggered by the PROTEGE project and associated funding.

A questioning of some people of the Environment Department was about the absence from the assessment of some water catchments set up and managed by the local tribes and if there were some shortcomings that unable to apply the methodology. The WWF team expressed its surprise concerning those catchments reminding that they asked for all water catchments above which the Department of Environment wanted to conduct the assessment. There were only those six official catchments locations provided, but the method could have been applied on any other ones. Therefore the Departments in charge all express their interest in seeing the assessment done on these other watersheds. It is slightly regrettable that these absence was not highlighted earlier so all water catchments could have been included in the FLOW project.

The general meeting allowed to exchange about the expectations of the various departments. It was thus possible to propose within the framework of the "Water" component, actions whose implementation ultimately depends on the forestry or agricultural domains. Following this general meeting, bilateral meetings with the various identified PROTEGE stakeholders were conducted in order to valorize the data obtained in the FLOW project. In particular, a lot of work has been done with the Laboratory Manager of the Environment Department, Mrs Karine Brunet, in order to reach an operational level of declination of the project results allowing to directly implement actions of the field.

Unfortunately, due to school holidays, all flights were fully booked and the WWF team could not manage to visit Futuna Island. It was ensured by the Wallis office that Futuna representatives of the Environment Department would receive all information about the results of the project and its conclusions.

In conclusion, the follow-ups to the project will be taken in charge by the Department of Environment as part of the PROTEGE project. They will use the results provided by the FLOW project as a guidance to implement actions and ensure the deployment of the assessment over the other water catchments

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<sup>2</sup> PROTEGE is the project funded by the 11<sup>th</sup> European Development Fund in the overseas territories. It stands for Oceanian Territories Regional Program for Ecosystems Sustainable Management (*Programme Régional Océanien des Territoires pour la Gestion durable des Ecosystèmes*).

of Futuna Island. The WWF and BlueCham team will keep up working with them to help along with the methodology and the data treatment.

## **3 VANUATU**

### **3.1 Former exchanges between WWF and Vanuatu**

As for Wallis-and-Futuna, in the framework of the INTEGRÉ project, the WWF France had the opportunity in 2017 to organize a visit in Port-Vila, capital of Vanuatu, to present the methodology of forest functionality assessment to the newly created Department of Water Resource and to the Department of Forests. Vanuatu was at the time delineating the very first water catchment perimeter on the Tagabe River, which is the main water supply of Port-Vila, and was therefore interested in monitoring tools to assess the health of the watershed vegetation.

In March 2018, thanks to an additional funding, the WWF and BlueCham had the opportunity to visit the official representatives of the Vanuatu Government during a ceremony organized by the Consul of Vanuatu, Mr Jean-Claude Dinne. This meeting gave an official start to the project on Pele Island in the presence of Honourable Alfred Maoh, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources<sup>3</sup>. It succeeded in a collaboration agreement between the WWF France and the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources to exchange data concerning water catchments and land occupation.

### **3.2 Mission in Port-Vila, Vanuatu**

As there was no special event in the calendar, the WWF and BlueCham team planned the mission in order to ensure at least the availability of the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources and the Director of the Department of Water Resource. It was scheduled in the capital Port-Vila during August 2019 with the participation of both BlueCham and WWF members to present the results obtained with the assessment of vegetation on the watersheds above the 1 600 catchment points of the country. The Consul of Vanuatu was again of a great help organizing the meetings with different partners.

A first meeting was held with Honourable Alfred Maoh to present the project and its conclusion and discuss together the points that from his perspectives would be particularly interesting to highlight in regards of the priorities and concerns of the expected participants.

Indeed a global meeting was planned the day after with all the public organizations concerned in both water and land management as the project draws attention to the connectivity between all these fields of work.

The invitations to the global meeting were officially sent by the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources Office to:

- The Prime Minister Office,
- The Ministry of Agriculture, which includes to the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Livestock and the Department of Forest,

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<sup>3</sup> This official launch was covered by the national media: [https://dailypost.vu/news/assessing-forest-functionality-to-provide-water-services-project-launched/article\\_5aa544be-3d4d-5330-8df6-12c4b37b9a38.html](https://dailypost.vu/news/assessing-forest-functionality-to-provide-water-services-project-launched/article_5aa544be-3d4d-5330-8df6-12c4b37b9a38.html)

- The Ministry of Climate Change, which includes among others the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation, the Department of Energy, and the National Disaster Management Office,
- The Ministry of Education and,
- The Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Firstly planned in the Prime Minister Office, due to a change in the agenda, the meeting was finally hosted in the Vanuatu Institute of Technology.

As a fortunate event, a training to the use of the national hub, which uses Quëhnëlo technology developed by BlueCham, was currently dispensed in this Institute. Knowing that the national hub is the internet portal where the project results are hosted, the trainees had been kindly invited by the Minister of Lands to attend the meeting as it was a good example of how environmental data are stored and used to improve land management.

The presentation was very well welcomed and the Prime Minister Office congratulated Minister Maoh for his support and the organization of the meeting, and the WWF and BlueCham team for its initiative and its work. Not many technical questions were raised as the talks mostly focused on the way to improve the operating ways the different Ministries and Departments work together.

In order to address the technical aspects with the relevant staff, the FLOW team planned a meeting with the Forest Department to discuss the role the Department plays, or could play, as part of water protection. The project was presented to Godfrey Bome, Senior Forest Officer, who could not attend the global meeting. The Forest Department works to implement a forest policy aiming for a multifunctional use in order to benefit from the services provided by forests and to create a timber resource with a long-term vision of forestry. So Mr. Bome was glad to see that the connectivity between forest and water had been publicly highlighted in front of official managers and recognised as a critical concern for the country sustainability.

In parallel of the meeting with the public institutions of Vanuatu, the WWF-BlueCham team had the opportunity to make a short presentation to the French Embassy in Vanuatu. Mrs Delaunay, the Cooperation and Cultural Action Counsellor, had a strong interest and knowledge about environmental files in the context of the “2020 Momentum for Biodiversity” in which France hopes to play a significant role. Because France is also aiming to support innovative actions in the South-West Pacific, she was therefore willing to increase the visibility of such project that set the path for a harmonious development of human activities with their environment. France Embassy appears to be a potential help to promote and apply the project in the Pacific Region for countries where the FLOW methodology can be applied.

It was also expected to meet two more potential stakeholders:

- The ADTO-Van master students (Planning and Development of Oceanian Territories of Vanuatu; *Aménagement et Développement des Territoires Océaniens du Vanuatu*) of the bilingual University of Vanuatu, but since the scholar year had already ended all students were working in ministers and institutions and could not make themselves available.
- The Department of Environment, whose representative attend the global meeting, however, none of them had a free time slot in its agenda. Since a representative had the opportunity to attend the global meeting, it was decided to keep in touch by email exchanges. It is especially interesting as this Department is currently writing the "State of Environment Report" where the results of the FLOW project could legitimately be integrated. The exchanges will have to be accentuated by emails so as not to miss this opportunity of valorization and appropriation of the project by the Vanuatu governmental institutions.

Following the interministerial meeting organized by the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources, it became clear that there was an interest and an implicit demand for transversal projects to bring the various stakeholders together and discuss the synergies between their different fields. Indeed, bilateral exchanges have highlighted the usually compartmentalized and autonomous functioning of many departments where pooling would be beneficial to all.

As for Wallis-and-Futuna, a detailed analysis of some watersheds will be provided to rise the interest of stakeholders to the decision tool that the FLOW results are.

## **4 FIJI**

### **4.1 Former exchanges**

The South Pacific Program Office of WWF or WWF-Pacific has three local satellite offices based in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, with which the WWF France has occasional exchanges.

At the time when the WWF-BlueCham team was responding to the call for proposal, the office of Fiji was solicited to integrate Fiji in the project. Nevertheless, busy at that time with the organization of the COP 23, they had not answered fast enough and so without their support, it would have been a sensitive choice to include the country, as their participation and interest could not be ensured. However, despite the delay, the office expressed afterwards a great interest in the FLOW project and wished to be kept informed of development of the methodology and possible results. One of the sharing missions was therefore carried out at their office.

### **4.2 Mission in Suva, Fiji 2019**

The mission was planned in May 2019 to coincide with the holding of a national stakeholders' concept development workshop for the Great Sea Reef Seascape/Landscape Programme (GSR) in readiness for a Green Climate Fund (GCF) submission. This workshop was held by the WWF-Pacific in order to rise the main issues and priority actions to implement in their pilot site of the Great Sea Reef.

It should be noted that thanks to external funding, the FLOW evaluation had also been carried out on two priority rivers of the country: Ba and Labasa rivers. This workshop and the trip gave the opportunity to present face-to-face the results and their perspectives within the framework of rising funding for the integrated management of the GSR.

The WWF-Pacific expressed its interest in the method which could be used to define the priority watersheds of the GRS area but also the actions to be carried out.

However, if precise actions can be determined for the watersheds of the Ba and Labasa rivers, the diagnosis concerning only these two rivers, it does not allow to have an exhaustive vision of the actions to be carried out at the scale of the GSR. The other watersheds do not benefit from the same level of analysis, making the decision and implementation of actions very uneven. Additional funds may be sought to complete this assessment. As an indication, WWF France will carry out a thorough analysis of the diagnosis, in the same way as it was done for Futuna, in order to accompany its appropriation by the WWF-Pacific Office for at least the two rivers assessed.

## 5 SAMOA

### 5.1 Former exchanges

Due to its project history and a good relationship with the Government of New Caledonia and the regional authorities, WWF France has long been identified as a key interlocutor for SPREP. As an acknowledgment, a Memorandum of Understanding with the SPREP was signed in 2019, giving WWF France an external observer status and allowing it to attend meetings and events organized for member countries. It is in this context that WWF France was invited to the 29<sup>th</sup> SPREP Meeting<sup>4</sup> and to the Pacific Environment Forum in early September 2019.

### 5.2 Mission in Apia, Samoa 2019

The two planned events (the Pacific Environment Forum and the 29<sup>th</sup> SPREP meeting) took place over a whole week in Apia, capital of Samoa Islands and location of the SPREP Head Office. At this occasion, outside the official discussion tables, side events were organized allowing SPREP or external actors to present projects related to the management of environmental issues. Unfortunately having been warned of this opportunity late, all slots had already been booked. However, the WWF team was able to discuss with the technical operators during the many occasions where the official representatives of member countries were talking in private.

One of the side-events carried directly by SPREP, as part of the Inform project, covered the thematic "*Environmental data to support planning and decision making*". Although it was impossible to add a "FLOW part" in their presentation, it was possible to identify privileged interlocutors to discuss the perspectives opened by the FLOW project for the Pacific countries.

Indeed, the SPREP has adhered to the concept "*If you can't measure it, then you can't manage it*" and many actors support the need for development of tools for monitoring the environment. The SPREP therefore supports a project, "*Building National and Regional Capacity to Implement Multilateral Environmental Agreements by Strengthening Planning and the State of Environmental Assessment and Reporting in the Pacific*", referred to as the Inform project, and recognises the need for this data-driven decision making. The Inform project aims to establish a Pacific island network of national and regional data repositories and reporting tools to support the monitoring, evaluation, and analysis of environmental information, which supports environmental planning, forecasting, and reporting requirements.

This network is therefore of interest for hosting and disseminating data from the FLOW project, in addition to being able to potentially support its deployment in other regions of the Pacific. The methodology, results and prospects were therefore presented to Mr. Paul Anderson (Inform Project Manager) and Mrs. Julie Callebaut (Environmental Monitoring and Reporting GIS Specialist). Both have shown strong interest for the project results and replicability to other ACP countries with similar topographies. The questions focused on the technical feasibility of the deployment, including the realization of the land use model, due to the very high cloud cover of the countries located in the tropical zone, as well as the rights of access and use. The WWF will keep in touch to facilitate the integration of FLOW data in the Inform portal as much as to encourage and support the forest functionality assessment in other countries.

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<sup>4</sup> For more information:

The 2019 Pacific Environment Forum: <https://www.sprep.org/news/8th-pacific-environment-forum-focuses-on-tackling-plastic-pollution>

The 29<sup>th</sup> SPREP meeting: <https://www.sprep.org/sprep-meeting/29th-sprep-meeting-2019>

Mrs. Callebaut also gave the contact information of the person in charge of the “*State of Environment Report*” in Vanuatu to share the FLOW project and have it integrated in the report. In another of the SPREP teams, the FLOW project was discussed with Tagaloa Cooper, Director of the SPREP Climate Change Resilience Program.

Apart from the SPREP staff, the WWF team was able to meet bilaterally with different representatives or technical operators of the SPREP member countries in order to underline the crucial role that forests play for the preservation of the water resource and the need to be able to assess their capacity to provide these ecosystem services. Thus these encounters enable to complete the promotion of FLOW with the Wallis-and-Futuna delegation, led by David Vergé, President of Territorial Assembly, or to present it to the representative of Solomon Islands, to share with the WWF-Solomon, and to the French Polynesia technical counsellor of the Ministry of Culture and Environment, Mrs Sylviane Fauvet. Finally, the FLOW project presentation was also given to Emma Luke, working for the Government of Australia, Environmental Geoscience Division, as Governmental and International Strategy Advisor has expressed interest in the watershed assessment tool. In fact, Australia is a member of the Group on Earth Observations (GEO), and wants to develop a Pacific-wide project aimed at the production of forest cover monitoring products, used in particular by FAO.

## 6 PROSPECTS

All these meetings have permitted to highlight the interest that forests represent for humankind and sustainable development and to create relationships between the WWF and the people or organizations most likely to carry and promote the FLOW project and implements forest management actions.

They have also been essential to ensure fluid and interdisciplinary discussions and thus to emphasize the synergies between the different areas of expertise of each other within the framework of existing or future projects.

The follow-ups will aim at enhancing these links to facilitate the appropriation of the FLOW results by local governments and their integration into action plans or assessment reports. The WWF will also support the wish to see the extension of the FLOW assessment to a larger number of Pacific countries, giving a complete and homogeneous picture of the state of conservation of these green infrastructures essential for the survival of the small island countries of the South Pacific.

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# The New-Caledonia office in numbers

## 2001

opening year of the WWF  
France New-Caledonia office

## 3

partner territories  
included in the forest  
assessment project



## + than 600

volunteers involved in New-  
Caledonia

## + than 100 000

trees planted in order to restore the  
New-Caledonian forest



#### Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build  
a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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