

Acknowledgements

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	Agence Française pour le Développement
AUSAID	Australian Aid
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy
CBD	Central Business District
CCA	Community Conservation Area
CIRAD	Centre International de Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement
CLT	Customary Land Tribunal
COT	Crown of Thorns (starfish)
CRP	Comprehensive Reform Program
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
DESP	Department of Economic and Social Planning
DOF	Department of Fisheries
DOS	Department of Statistics
DPI	Department of Primary Industries (Australia)
DSM	Department of Strategic Management
EDF	European Development Fund
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EIA	Environment Impact Assessment
EMC	Environmental Management and Conservation
ENSO	El Niño Southern Oscillation
FAD	Fish Aggregating Device
FED	Fonds Européen de Développement
FSP	Foundation for the People of the South Pacific
FSPI	Foundation for the People of the South Pacific International
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communication
HDI	Human Development Index
IGFA	International Game Fishing Association
IRD	Institut pour la Recherche et le Développement
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
IWP	International Waters Programmes
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MLSEEMWR	Ministry of Lands, Survey, Environment, Energy, Mineral and Water Resources
MOH	Ministry of Health
NBS	National Biodiversity Strategy
NFTP	Non Forest Timber Products
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NTO	National Tourism Office
NZAID	New Zealand Aid
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OFC	Offshore Financial Centre
ORSTOM	Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique Outre Mer (now IRD)
PCB	Polychlorinated Biphenyls
PEA	Preliminary Environment Assessment
pers. comm.	Personal Communication
PICs	Pacific Island Countries
POP	Persistent Organic Pollutant
POPACA	Projet d'Organisation des Producteurs pour la Commercialisation Associative
PWD	Public Works Department
REDI	Rural Economic Development Initiatives
SGS	Small Grant Scheme
SHEFA	Shepherds and Efate Province
SPREP	South Pacific Regional Environment Programme
SPRIG	South Pacific Regional Improvement on Forest Genetic Resources
TDO	Tourism Development Office
TEM	Traditional Environment Management
TVL	Telecom Vanuatu Limited
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNELCO	Union Electrique du Vanuatu
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USGS	United States Geological Services
VAM	Vanuatu Maritime Authority
VANGO	Vanuatu Non Governmental Organisations
VANRIS	Vanuatu Resource Information System
VARTC	Vanuatu Agricultural Research and Training Centre
VASTP	Vanuatu Sea Transport
VEU	Vanuatu Environment Unit
VIPA	Vanuatu Investment Promotion Authority
VNCW	Vanuatu National Council of Women
VNPF	Vanuatu National Provident Fund
VT	Vatu (Vanuatu's currency unit)
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTEC	Wantok Environment Centre

1. Executive Summary

As part of the mid-term review of the implementation of the indicative programmes for Vanuatu the European Commission requires a Country Environmental Profile.

The objective of this study is to provide decision makers in the European Commission and other partner countries with sufficient information to identify European Commission cooperation activities with specific environmental objectives and to establish environmental safeguards for other activities.

Vanuatu is a Western South Pacific Island nation constituted of approximately 80 islands of volcanic origin. Although biodiversity is often rated as low in comparison with neighbouring countries such as New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea and even the Solomon Islands, it is of paramount importance to ni-Vanuatu.

A country where cultural diversity is represented by the number of vernacular languages (105), Vanuatu is united through a sense of identification to the land. One of the major reforms following the country's independence in 1980 was related to land tenure.

Vanuatu is a signatory of many major international conventions relating to the environment such as the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and the provision of Agenda 21, UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and UN Convention on Climate Change.

In March 2003 an important Environmental Act was implemented: the Environment Management and Conservation Act No. 12 2002. Under this Act it is now compulsory to provide an Environmental Impact Assessment with every new development project that could interfere with the environment. Compliance with all aspects of this Act is mandatory and monitored by the Vanuatu Environment Unit. Non-compliance may result in financial penalties or even a jail term. This legislation is starting to be enforced fully but effective enforcement of the Act could be a problem as it is in other legal areas. A recent review of environmental legislation has identified overlaps, gaps and conflicts between the various Acts. Harmonisation with other legal environmental provisions will therefore be required.

To fully achieve implementation of the EMC act it is necessary to consolidate the knowledge of Vanuatu biodiversity and to document the Traditional Environment Management methods employed for centuries by the various communities in Vanuatu. Effective sustainable development will not be achieved without involving the custom landowners in the management processes.

Although traditional environment management systems are still in use on most islands, environmental awareness is low in Vanuatu. Raising environmental awareness at various levels from political to individual is still on the agenda of the Vanuatu Environment Unit.

Some endemic species, and some important areas have been identified as threatened and urgent action is needed to ensure that they will be protected. Forestry activities that represent an important source of revenues for the country need to be strengthened towards sustainability. Vanuatu, in accordance with the international conventions that were signed, will take steps to regulate the potential sources of pollution. Lastly and importantly, a matter of real concern in developing urban Vanuatu is the management of both solid and liquid wastes.

2. Background

Physical Condition, Geography and Climate

Vanuatu is an archipelago of around 80 islands and numerous islets located between latitude 12° and 23° south and longitude 166° and 173° east. The global shape of the country is roughly that of a 'Y'. As part of the South West Pacific Ocean, Australia lies at around 2,000 km to Vanuatu's west. Vanuatu's closest neighbours are the Solomon Islands (170 km north), New Caledonia (230 km south-west) and Fiji (800 km east).



Fig. 1: Location of Vanuatu in the South West Pacific Ocean

The total area of Vanuatu is approximately 860,000 km² taking into account the Exclusive Economic Zone of 200 miles from the shores. The total land area is only 12,336 km², which represents 1.4% of the total country area. Only 12 islands can be considered as significant in terms of economy and population. The eight largest islands contribute 87% of the total land area (Weightman, 1989). The capital city, Port Vila, is located on the island of Efate.

Geologically, Vanuatu is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire and is an island arc resulting from the geological activity of the New-Hebrides subduction zone. Geologically young, the islands are mostly mountainous and volcanic with some raised reef islands and a few low coral islands and reefs. Corollaries of the subduction are the numerous volcanoes that constitute the majority of the islands as well as contribute to the very active seismicity Vanuatu experiences.

The climate in Vanuatu varies from wet tropical in the northern islands to dryer sub-tropical in the south of the archipelago. Average temperatures range between 21°C and 27°C and average humidity ranges between 75% and 80%. Average annual rainfall declines from over 4000 mm in the north to less than 1500 mm in the south. The country is prone to cyclones during the warmer months from November to April.

Current Economic Trends and Social Conditions

Vanuatu was admitted to the group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in 1985. Today it is still part of this group although its per-capita GDP exceeds the LDC threshold. This situation has occurred due to the adjustment based on the 'vulnerability index' which takes into account the vulnerability of Vanuatu's economy to natural disasters (earthquakes, cyclones, tsunamis¹). Vanuatu obtained a score of 46.4 while the threshold for graduation from LDC status is a vulnerability rating of less than 33. The next UN review of LDCs is due in 2006, however, indications are that if Vanuatu was able to meet the required ratios it would be at least 2009 before Vanuatu could be officially recommended for graduation.

Vanuatu's economy is highly dualistic. There clearly is an urban economy in Port Vila and Luganville and a rural economy for the rest of the country.

Vanuatu had a per-capita GDP of US\$1,315 in 2002 (Statistic Office). Vanuatu's GDP is made up of three sectors: Agriculture (14.9%), Industry (8.5%) and Services (76.6%). Four commodities (copra, beef, cocoa and timber) made up the bulk of the domestic exports from 1992 to 1996. A new commodity emerged with the development of kava² (*Piper methysticum*) trade in 1997. The kava trade dramatically reduced following a ban on kava products put in place in importing countries. The fisheries sector contributes minimally with only 1.0% of GDP.

Tourism represents 40% of GDP and is concentrated around the two main urban centres. This activity is expected to gain importance with the establishment of a second airline on the routes between Australia/New Zealand and Vanuatu.

Vanuatu's trade deficit showed an improvement of VT 392 million in 2003 (VT -9,451 million) compared to 2002 (VT -9,843 million). While the European Union (EU) is the main buying partner for Vanuatu (21% of exports go to EU), the majority of the goods imported into Vanuatu originate from Australia (40%) and New Zealand (13%) (Statistics Office, 2004).

Average inflation rate is 2.5% (2000). It is expected to be around 3% in 2004 (Reserve Bank of Vanuatu). Real growth rate is 2.9% (2000). The average exchange rates in

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