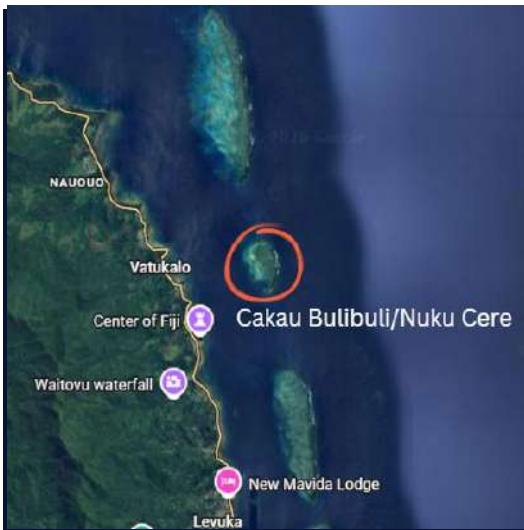


# Traditional Governance and Marine Recovery: An Analysis of the (Cakau Bulibuli) Tabu in Levuka District



## Objectives

- To examine the governance structures in decision making
- To investigate the environmental catalysts that led to the establishment of the Tabu area
- To evaluate recovery of marine biodiversity and the impact of external environmental threats.
- To investigate the socio-cultural enforcement mechanisms, focusing on the roles of community

## Methods

- Semi Structured interviews: Five men and women
- Focus Group Discussions: Men and Women

## Data Findings

### Theme 1: Origins and Implementation of the Tabu

**The Impact of Cyclone Winston and Formation of Nukucere** Most interviewees identify **Cyclone Winston (2016)** as the catalyst for the current physical state of the reef. The Cyclone Winston led to the accumulation of sand, forming the sandbank now known as **Nukucere**.

"It was Winston that brought the sand on Cakau Bulibuli". This new formation became a focal point for picnics and eventually, conservation efforts.

### Theme 2: Governance and Traditional Authority

**Chiefly Authority and the Malo** The Tui Levuka holds final decision-making power, often consensus with the *Malo* (Council of Chiefs from 10 villages) One interviewee notes "the Tui Levuka would not be able to know much. He would consult his chiefs".

**Communication and "Top-Down" Flow of Information** Decisions are made at the highest levels and then disseminated. One interviewee outlines the process: "Vanua meeting; from the Vanua meeting to the village meeting... From bottom to the top; from the top and back". An interviewee confirms that after the chiefs meet, the *tabu* is announced to heads of clans to inform the village

### Gender and Youth Dynamics in Decision-Making

There is a clear distinction between the *Bose ni Tikina* (District Meeting), where women can participate, and the *Bose Vanua*, which is traditionally male-dominated. An interviewee states, "For the Meeting of the Vanua, its only for the men... They [women] don't say anything during the meeting". However, a participant notes that in the District meetings, women are given time to speak and their voices



### Theme 3: Spirituality and Cultural Significance.

The *tabu* is not merely a legal or administrative boundary; it is a sacred covenant.

• **Ceremonial Procedures:** The restriction is formalised through traditional *yaqona* protocols and Christian prayer. An interviewee explains, "it was prayed over by two (2) priests and its now prohibited... for 5 years". An interviewer emphasizes that the *tabu* is strong because it involves both the *Vanua* and the Church (*Lotu*).

• **Supernatural Consequences (Mana and Sau)** Many residents believe the *tabu* has the power to "bite" or harm those who disrespect it. interviewer warns, "Restrictions/taboo can bite/harm... when these restrictions are placed by the Vanua and the church (being prayed over), it is very dangerous". A participant shares stories of illegal fishers who suffered accidents or death, noting, "the land/vanua has eyes; the wrongs being done will accorded to the wrongdoer"

### Theme 4: Management Challenges

Despite the sacred nature of the *tabu*, various factors undermine its effectiveness.

**Illegal Fishing and Poaching:** poaching by outsiders, particularly commercial divers from Suva, is a significant concern. An interviewee remarks, "Most of them are divers that came from Suva... they don't give care about anything". Another participant also notes that boats from Tailevu often fish illegally in the area at night

**Lack of Enforcement Resources** A lack of equipment, specifically boats and fuel for patrolling, hinders security. An interviewer points out that the Fisheries Department is often stationary because "they got no boat; no engine... sitting down in the office selling ice". An interviewer shares his opinion NGOs for making "false promises" regarding the provision of boats and engines to help the village monitor the area.

### Theme 5: Effectiveness and Community Impact

• **Perceived Success in Restoring Biodiversity** Some residents report a visible "spillover" effect where fish are more plentiful near the boundaries. One interviewee notes, "if you fish in the surroundings next to it you can feel that... there's really a lot of fish". A participant shares that women fishing near the edge have found large fish and clams that were previously missing.

• **Socio-Economic Hardship vs. Long-Term Gain** While the *tabu* is seen as beneficial for the future, it can create immediate difficulties for those who rely on the area for food. A interviewee mentions that some women are unhappy because it was their primary fishing spot, forcing them to spend more on fuel to travel to distant reefs. However, most agree with Viniana that "the taboo is good and I am happy because it will make us rich... all of us"

## Concluding Sentence:

*In order for the Tabu to be respected both parties from all grounds are needed to be more involved in the system.*

**Question:** What are the some of the criteria or ways do you think about the Tabu now and moving on into the future after five years?