



# Ocean Country Partnership Programme

# Vanuatu

## Achievement Report

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## Programme:

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCP) is a 5 year (2021-2026) technical assistance and capacity building programme that provides tailored support to countries to manage the marine environment more sustainably, including by strengthening marine science expertise, developing science-based policy, management tools and creating educational resources for coastal communities. The OCP delivers work under three thematic areas: biodiversity, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood. OCP was delivered by three British Government Arm's Length Bodies (ALBs): the Centre for the Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and the Marine Management Organisation (MMO). Other components of OCP were delivered by the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) and the Friends of Ocean Action (FOA) and those elements are not covered in this report. More information on OCP can be found at: [DevTracker Programme GB-GOV-7-BPFOCPP Documents](#)

## Document Purpose:

This Achievement Report presents a summary of the activities undertaken and the achievements obtained as a result of cooperation between countries for this partnership. This document does not cover the multilateral components of the programme and this report only covers achievements by the end of the programme. A range of further achievements are expected as recommendations from the OCP are adopted by partner countries in the preceding period post-programme closure.

All OCP Achievement Reports have been authored by the ALBs and therefore key achievements and impacts of collaboration reflects individuals own perspectives. Independent evaluation by the OCP MEL provider verifies outputs and outcomes against the programme logframe, the findings of which can be viewed in the programme's annual reviews and closure report on Dev Tracker.

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# Acronyms

BPF	Blue Planet Fund
Cefas	Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science
DCDT	Department of Communication and Digital Transformation
Defra	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DEPC	Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation
EBS	Engineering Business Services Ltd
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee
LLV	Live & Learn Vanuatu
MMO	Marine Management Organisation
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NCP	National Contingency Plan
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OCPP	Ocean Country Partnership Programme
RCP	Regional Contingency Plan
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment
SPC	The Pacific Community
SPREP	Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme
USP	University of the South Pacific
VBS	Vanuatu Bureau of Standards
VESS	Vanuatu Environmental Science Society
VMSA	Vanuatu Maritime Safety Authority





# Context

## Coastal and Marine Pressures

Vanuatu is a Small Island Developing State (SIDS) located in the South Pacific Ocean and includes more than 80 islands, of which 65 are inhabited by a population of 342,000 (2025). Vanuatu has the highest density of languages per capita in the world with 138 indigenous Oceanic languages and three official languages: English, French

and Bislama. Vanuatu's culture diverse is deeply intertwined with its marine environment which supports a diverse range of marine and coastal habitats, including coral reefs, seamounts, deep ocean ridges, mangroves, seabed troughs, seagrass beds, and hydrothermal vents. These habitats support many vulnerable and economically important species that are critical to local livelihoods in fisheries and tourism, with cruise tourism a major driver of economic growth, accounting for approximately [40% national GDP](#).

Despite a rich history in marine conservation and community management, Vanuatu's diverse marine habitats are threatened by rapid population growth and associated coastal development, causing coastal erosion and overexploitation of natural resources, particularly subsistence fisheries. Uncontrolled wastewater and solid waste disposal in urban areas, particularly around Port Vila, introduce high levels of nutrients and pollutants into coastal lagoons, posing threats to human health and marine ecosystems.

Vanuatu is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, particularly from sea level rise and increased cyclone severity and frequency. Vanuatu normally encounters an average of two to three cyclones annually, but in March 2023 Vanuatu was hit by two severe Category 4 cyclones, affecting over 80% of the population and causing widespread socioeconomic damage ([Only One, 2023](#)). With sea-levels rising and storm frequency climbing, the impacts from these events are becoming more severe. Vanuatu is also at risk of earthquakes (up to 40,000 annually) and volcanic eruptions, being part of the Ring of Fire ([Only One, 2023](#)). Natural disasters are a significant driver of socioeconomic deprivation and instability, costing on average 6% of GDP each year ([Climate Risk Country Profile: Vanuatu \(2021\): The World Bank Group](#)).

Community management is important in Vanuatu. The current official Marine Protected Area (MPA) network consists of 15 MPAs, the majority of which focus on inshore areas, equating to 0.01% of the total marine area under protection. However, the majority of protective measures are implemented at a community level, with a network of over 250 Community Conservation Areas, both terrestrial and marine. Vanuatu is committed to the Global Ocean Alliance 30by30. The Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) continues to work closely with local communities, encouraging them to protect their important resources through the use of the traditional management approach 'tabu'<sup>1</sup>, and were accepted by the traditional owners, formal designation as a Community Conservation Area.

Fish and marine resources are vital for a large proportion of Vanuatu's population, both as a primary source of protein and income. Coastal fisheries in Vanuatu are complex, where the Vanuatu Fisheries Department are the governing authority for coastal fisheries management. However, coastal fisheries are also subject to varying degrees of provincial and community level management, based on traditional ownership arrangements. As a result, enforcement of fisheries laws, regulations and compliance remains a significant challenge to coastal fisheries managers. Concerns

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<sup>1</sup> Tabu eria – customary/neo-traditional spatial-temporal marine closures often marked with an insignia of some sort. Such tabu eria forbid people from fishing, swimming and (sometimes) even walking along the adjacent shore – which is to maintain the integrity of the fishing closure and make the fish less wary when subsequently entering the area once the tabu has been lifted. **Source:** <https://journals.librarypublishing.arizona.edu/jpe/article/2301/galley/2521/view/>

**The current official  
Marine Protected  
Area (MPA)  
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over coastal overfishing and the limitations on human resources, capacity and financial resources, makes effective management of inshore fisheries vital to protect livelihoods and the resilience of coastal communities.

## Poverty, Development and Climate Change

Vanuatu's economy is predominantly based on the service sector (67% of GDP), followed by agriculture (22%) and industry (11%). Significant local dependence on subsistence agriculture is prevalent and the country's extensive natural resources supplement the livelihoods of the 80% of the population living in rural areas ([Climate Risk Country Profile: Vanuatu \(2021\): The World Bank Group](#)).

The poverty rate in Vanuatu was estimated as 34.9% in 2019, but severe cyclones and earthquake events occurring since then have led to declines in food security, employment and income ([World Bank 2025](#)). Rapid population growth has put pressure on health and education services, meaning it is not uncommon for children to finish formal education by the age of 10, limiting employment chances for young people ([Oxfam, 2026](#)). Vanuatu is extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts, ranked 132<sup>nd</sup> out of 182 countries in the 2020 ND-GAIN Index ([Climate Risk Country Profile: Vanuatu \(2021\): The World Bank Group](#)).

## Stakeholders

The Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) is responsible for Vanuatu's environmental laws, including assessing the environmental impact of proposed developments, working with communities to establish Community Conservation Areas (CCAs), protecting internationally endangered species, and managing waste and pollution. The DEPC is the main partner involved in the OCPP Marine Protected Areas (MPA) workstream, and activities around data management were also coordinated with the Department of Communication and Digital Transformation (DCDT) and the Vanuatu Bureau of Statistics. The OCPP Marine Pollution activities predominantly worked with the Vanuatu Bureau of Standards, while OCPP Emergency Response (ER) provided targeted support to the Vanuatu Maritime Safety Authority (VMSA).

Coordinating with regional organisations to align and avoid duplication was critical, as the Pacific region has a busy and complex programme landscape. MPAs and ER were coordinated and delivered in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the regional organisation charged with protected and managing the environment and natural resources of the Pacific. Activities were also aligned with The Pacific Community (SPC) and presented on a regular basis at donor forum meetings by the British High Commission (BHC) to aid coordination. Local contractors have been critical to the success of the partnership, enabling significant impacts to be made in enhancing evidence-based decision-making capacity. Engineering Business Services Ltd. (EBS) and Live & Learn Vanuatu (LLV) have been instrumental in delivering support to DEPC and DCDT, while the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS) have supported marine pollution activities.

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# Impact

Both the Biodiversity and Pollution themes were active in the Vanuatu partnership following discussions with Government departments and NGOs in 2022-23 and based on:

- Limited capacity to monitor and regulate human activities in the marine environment.
- Full value of marine ecosystems often not accounted for in national or local decision-making.
- Increasing threats to marine species and habitats through unsustainable use of resources, climate impacts and environmental hazards.
- Limited coordination between government agencies and inclusion of community stakeholders.

OCPP's overall impact statement is: *Partner countries better address the challenges to their marine environments and biodiversity, enhance marine dependent livelihoods, and the wellbeing of those that depend on them, sustainably, equitably, and inclusively.* In Vanuatu, OCPP progressed towards the following outcomes:

## Strengthened preparedness to respond to emergencies

OCPP **assessed each country's preparedness to respond** to emergencies at the start of programme intervention, taking into account its baseline in the categories of (1) Policy, (2) Governance, (3) Delivery, (4) Trained Personnel and Equipment, tools, and laboratories. A regional approach was taken to build capacity in both Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, as well as across neighbouring nations in the Pacific. A **capacity building programme and regional symposium** enhanced collaboration and coordination among Pacific nations, promoting unified action and knowledge-sharing to combat marine pollution more effectively. OCPP brought together experts such as ITOPF and OSRL to provide technical training and knowledge exchange sessions on topics such as dispersants, Hazardous and Noxious Chemicals (HNS), and compensation conventions. By focusing on prevention, preparedness, and response, the support builds long-term resilience and equips countries with the strategies and tools needed to address future challenges, helping to protect vital marine and coastal ecosystems. Additionally, the **symposium served as a platform to mobilise sustainable funding and support the use of the PacPlan**, ensuring tangible next steps, ongoing progress and longevity of the programme.

## Enforcement or monitoring activities implemented and resourced

OCPP has developed, in collaboration with Engineering Business Services Ltd, a **data management system and field data collection app** linked with an instant and seamless data flow, for the Vanuatu Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC).

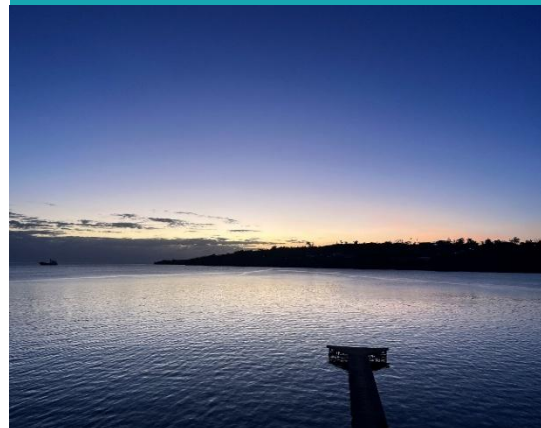
The data system includes public forms, enabling DEPC to manage licence applications, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes and waste disposal, among other functions. The data system hosts all biodiversity and environmental monitoring data for the department, with biodiversity data collected using the Kobo Toolbox data collection forms developed by OCPP.

DEPC are able to receive submitted data from Community Conservation Area (CCA) rangers at any time to support the CCA designation and management processes. Each CCA has a field data collection account and the app allows data to be collected offline and submitted seamlessly to the DEPC data management system, which displays up-to-date information for all DEPC staff. The data system and data collection app collectively meet DEPC's monitoring and enforcement obligations, with continuous monitoring information submitted via the field data collection app, and public-facing forms enabling DEPC to perform compliance and enforcement activities for waste disposal, chemical licencing, and EIAs. OCPP **secured formal commitment from DEPC, DCDT and EBS to use, maintain, and support the upkeep of the system**, ensuring sustainable resourcing of these functions beyond the lifetime of the programme.

## Uptake of policy recommendations or sustainable practices

OCPP's investment in **data management capacity building** has resulted in DEPC committing to implement data management best practice and utilise the standardised data entry capacity in the data management system and monitoring app provided by OCPP, to enhance their ability to make evidence-based decisions.

During the **Pacific Emergency Response symposium**, OCPP facilitated the technical endorsement of the PacPlan, supporting use of the plan during and after the symposium. The event generated recommendations on steps to be taken to ensure better collaboration such as regular regional exercising, communication with operational centres and discussed issues such as country protocols on dispersants. Pacific partners committed to integrate these recommendations and best practice standards into their emergency response planning and action.





# Workstreams

## Marine Protected Areas

The Marine Protected Areas workstream has focused on **enhancing data management and collection, and related capacity building** in Vanuatu. The development of a **centralised data management system for DEPC** was a **key priority** for the partnership, and this development began in 2023 with an extensive user research process to define functionality requirements.

Following further refinement of the scope by local partners Engineering Business Services Ltd (EBS), the system build commenced in 2024. EBS developers built a **prototype system using open source Nocobase software**, meeting the priority requirement stated by DEPC. The system included an **interactive map interface** to display data of different types e.g. biodiversity monitoring data, waste disposal site locations and EIA development zones, biodiversity **monitoring data repository** using standardised taxonomy lists and metadata templates, and **public-facing forms** triggering internal workflows for waste licencing and EIA processes.

EBS performed several iterations of user training and testing for all DEPC staff, adapting the design according to feedback and liaising with DCDT to ensure the data system could be hosted on the national Government network. The **fully functional data system was launched** in January 2026 alongside **comprehensive training manuals and video tutorials**, and a commitment from DEPC, DCDT, and EBS to use, maintain and support the upkeep of the system. OCPP's implementation of this data system ensures DEPC have the information required to make evidence-based management decisions to better protect and conserve Vanuatu's natural resources.

This activity links closely with the **data sharing and management support** provided by OCPP, including **best practice guidance around standardising monitoring protocols and metadata**. Introductory training in data management best practice coincided with the release of the prototype data system for DEPC user testing, and the guidance materials and presentations were provided as hard copies for future reference, helping to establish a more stable data management culture in the department.

To enhance data collection capacity in Vanuatu, the **continued development and expansion of Community Conservation Area (CCA) ranger toolkit and app** began in July 2024 and continued until March 2026. Live & Learn Vanuatu (LLV) were commissioned by OCPP to create a ranger toolkit to include all CCA species in Vanuatu, providing scientific and Bislama names, and ensuring rangers have access to **accessible, user-friendly guidance materials** to complete CCA surveys. To complement the ranger toolkit, OCPP contracted EBS to develop a Kobo Toolbox-based monitoring app, for use by DEPC and CCA rangers for field data collection. An **integrated data workflow to bring data from the CCA monitoring app directly to the DEPC data system** has been established. LLV performed in-depth training in 10 CCAs across Vanuatu, selected as priority sites by DEPC, and held two central location meetings for all CCA rangers to provide training and gather feedback on the guidance resources and data collection app. The ranger toolkit and monitoring app are in use in the selected 10 CCAs from early 2026 onwards, gathering valuable biodiversity information to inform CCA management plans.

To support DEPC in disseminating information and data to Vanuatu communities, OCPP has been working with the DEPC provincial outreach division to deliver **banners and leaflets communicating key laws and statistics**. OCPP also delivered a **three-day training course on infographic and video content creation** to support DEPC in developing engaging and educational resources to raise awareness of environmental conservation across Vanuatu.

## Marine Pollution

The pollution workstream focused on enhancing in-country knowledge, skills base and access to equipment to build capacity for the Vanuatu Bureau of Standards (VBS) as a priority. The workstream aimed to continue to provide increased capacity for the Vanuatu government to allow them to perform **pollution monitoring, using globally recognised protocols and methods**, as well as connecting them to a **global network of microplastics laboratories**. OCPP provided laboratory equipment, as well as training in analytical techniques for detecting microplastics and other pollutants in the marine environment. This included a **training component on in-field sample collection** and

assistance in monitoring programme design towards assessing and improving water quality and pollutants including marine litter.

Through a sub-contract with the Vanuatu Environmental Science Society (VESS), OCPP conducted a **desk-based study performing a gap analysis of vulnerable marine species**, particularly in respect to vulnerability to risks and pollutants. The comprehensive report covered laws and existing policies, threats to marine life, protected areas, and existing projects and initiatives.

Building on previous Commonwealth Marine Economies (CME) work, a **climate change risk mapping activity sought to enhance Vanuatu's National Ocean policy** by providing a summary of current evidence on marine and coastal climate change drivers, including sea temperature, ocean acidity, cyclones and sea level rise. This activity produced both an easily disseminated **Risk Report Card**, as well as a complementary **full climate change evidence summary report**.

## Emergency Response

The Emergency Response workstream partnered with the Vanuatu Maritime Safety Authority (VMSA) and SPREP, working in collaboration with the Solomon Islands OCPP team. OCPP has **facilitated contractor-led upskilling and capacity building** in priority areas such as IMO and ICS training alongside stakeholder engagement tabletop exercises. In September 2024, a dedicated **workshop on Marine Pollution Emergency Response** was convened in the Solomon Islands, bringing together key stakeholders from both Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. This collaborative event provided a valuable platform for participants to share experiences, strengthen networks, and develop practical strategies to improve readiness for marine pollution incidents. By promoting regional cooperation and facilitating hands-on training, the workshop significantly enhanced local capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to emergencies, ensuring the protection of marine environments and communities for the future.

Following on from this, the **Pacific Regional Symposium on Marine Pollution Emergency Response**, held in Suva, Fiji from 15-19th September 2025, brought together regional governments, experts and community leaders to strengthen collective resilience against marine pollution. The event promoted collaboration, enhanced technical skills, and the integration of local knowledge, gender inclusion, and cultural sensitivity in response strategies. Delegates participated in practical exercises and gained a deeper understanding of international compensation frameworks, resulting in improved preparedness and renewed commitment to protecting Pacific marine environments and communities. Collaborating with SPREP, OCPP delivered **Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) training to Government departments and NGOs** in Vanuatu, sharing best practice from the UK process and facilitating knowledge exchange between departments.

## Education

Through the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the OCPP funded **two rounds of scholarships in the South Pacific** for applications from Vanuatu. All students were registered with the University of the South Pacific (USP), completing their studies at the main campus in Fiji. From the pilot cohort launched in 2022, there are **thirteen scholars in total, ten studying for a Masters degree and three undertaking a PhD**. A second cohort of students started in 2023, with a further four students studying for a Masters degree. All studentships are expected to complete their scholarships by April 2026.

A full list of scholar research topics can be found in Annex 1.



**VANUATU RANGERS**  
WILDLIFE SURVEY

\* **Survey type**

You can enter transect and plot details in the next page for survey types that require it

Select Answer

\* **Transect ID**

Enter a Transect ID, either an existing transect or a newly established one

\* **Observers**

Comma-separated full names, e.g. John Doe, Marie-, Ieanne Smith

Next >

# Case Studies

## Case Study 1 - DEPC Data Management System

The Vanuatu Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation (DEPC) data management system is live! The system, built using the open-source software Nocobase by local partners Engineering Business Services, involved extensive user research, training, and testing over the last two years and shows a fantastic collaboration

between DEPC, EBS and the Vanuatu Department of Communication and Digital Transformation (DCDT), all of whom have committed ongoing support for maintaining and further developing the system, with the ambition to roll the model out to other government departments.

The system provides a home for all data the DEPC collects and uses, a public facing licence form section (e.g. for licencing chemical disposal) and a full EIA workflow, connecting developers with EIA officers in DEPC. Crucially, the system includes a seamless data flow from the Kobo Toolbox monitoring tool OCPP has produced (enabling offline data collection) to the data repositories - meaning biodiversity monitoring data from Community Conservation Areas, as well as DEPC regular monitoring surveys, are updated in real time, enabling DEPC to make informed evidence-based decisions on environmental management.

## Case Study 2 - Pacific Emergency Response Symposium

Hydrocarbons and chemicals from accidental spills pose a threat to marine biodiversity, livelihoods and the cultures in South Pacific Islands. These islands have large maritime zones which play a significant role in island economies, cultures and environments. There is a need to understand the risk posed by spills to inform proactive preparedness and to strengthen the islands' resilience. Not all countries are prepared to respond to a spill, as constraints, such as resource, equipment, and capability, can inhibit a nation's ability to respond to such incidents successfully.

The symposium's five-day programme encompassed a series of technical capacity-building activities aimed at enhancing communication, collaboration, and coordination within the region for marine pollution prevention and response in partnership with SPREP. This event served as a platform for knowledge sharing and stakeholder engagement and included practical exercises, and capacity-building initiatives. The workshop aimed to promote a unified approach to marine pollution response in the South Pacific, supporting the protection of the marine environment and safeguarding coastal communities.



# Annex 1: Scholar research titles in the South Pacific

## Fiji

1. Strengthening Ciguatera Poisoning Detection Tools to Reduce Human Health Risks, Build Climate Change Resilience & Improve International Economic Trade for Seafood (PhD)

## Vanuatu

2. Holistic and sustainable management approach for land-sea ecosystems: a case study on ciguatera fish poisoning in Vanuatu (PhD)
3. Assessing Feeds and Culture Methods for Growth and Survival of the Mud Crab (*Scylla serrata*) for aquaculture in Vanuatu.
4. Integrating traditional Knowledge into Climate Adaptation Strategies for the Fishing communities in Vanuatu
5. Investigating the potential of farming land crab, *Cardisoma* spp, in Vanuatu using simple methods and low-cost local feed
6. Distribution patterns and breeding phenology of collared petrel (*Pterodroma brevipes*) on Tanna Island.
7. Assessing the condition and community knowledge of seagrass beds in Vanuatu – A case study in Eratap village and Nguna Island, Efate

## Solomon Islands

8. Microplastic contamination in coastal water and coastal reef fish in Malaita province, Solomon Islands.
9. Effectiveness of Community-based Resource Management (CBRM) by examining the biophysical and socio-economic aspects in two marine managed areas in Solomon Islands.
10. Mangrove flora, ecosystem services and carbon sequestration potential of Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands (PhD)
11. Cooking fuel choices in the Solomon Islands – an environmental health analysis.
12. The Presence and Abundance of Microplastics in two food fish, the *A. lineatus* and *P. barberinus*, in the Solomon Islands
13. Research Title: Assessing Seagrass: Community Insights and Ecosystem Services in Ngongosila and Kwai Islands, Solomon Islands.
14. Microplastic occurrence and its implications for small-scale tilapia aquaculture systems in Malaita, Solomon Islands
15. Adaptive capacity of small-scale fisheries to climate change in Malaita, Solomon Islands.
16. Evaluating Waste Management Strategies for Reducing Land-Based Pollution and Protecting Marine Ecosystems: A Case study of Honiara City, Solomon Islands.
17. Trend analysis of temperature and precipitation, and its impact on root crop cultivation in Solomon Islands