

Research Notes

Parks, reserves and tourism

The Fiji experience

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Abstract

The establishment of parks and reserves is regarded by key elements of the tourism industry as a means of diversifying Fiji's tourism product away from its current dependence on sun, sea and sand. Increasingly, Fiji is unable to compete with destinations such as Hawai'i, the Caribbean Islands and Queensland, which offer an equivalent product but are located closer to the main tourist markets.

The concept of developing parks and reserves as tourist destinations is a comparatively new phenomenon in Fiji, even though Fiji was one of the first countries in the Pacific region to establish a park and reserve system. Noting the affective significance of forest areas to Fijians, this paper looks at both the institutional and legislative bases for the establishment of parks and reserves of various kinds in the Fiji Islands, and urges the potential benefit in terms of diversification of the tourist product.

Introduction

For Europeans, the Fiji Islands have been a place of romance and dreams for more than three centuries (King 1995). Abel Tasman was the first European recorded to have come across the Fiji group, in 1643. Since then, millions of people from around the world have visited the islands, attracted by the warm climate, sunshine, clean water, white sandy beaches fringed by swaying palms and the reputation of the islanders for extreme friendliness. The *kava* (or *yaqona*) ceremony performed as an *i-sevusevu* is a hallmark of tradition, proffered to visitors as a show of welcome, emblematic of the hospitality of the Fijian people (Waqaisavou 1997).

The Fiji group, geographically an extension of Melanesia, is situated in the southwest Pacific between latitudes 15 and 22 degrees South, and longitudes 174 degrees East and 177 degrees West. The group comprises about 300 islands, the largest being Vitilevu, where both the capital, Suva, and the international gateway, Nadi, are located. The second and third largest islands, both considerably smaller than Vitilevu, are Vanualevu and Taveuni respectively (see figure 2).

Tourism has replaced sugar as the country's main source of income: in 1989 it earned \$269.6 million, and it has maintained, even strengthened, this predominance since then (see figure 1). Previously, tourism was built around the 'sun, sea and sand' image but recognition is growing that the country must diversify its product to attract a wider cross-section of the tourist market (Weaver 1991b). The establishment of parks and reserves has been identified as having the potential to attract new source markets (King & Weaver 1996).

Although Fiji has a significant area of native forested lands and an even greater expanse of adjoining ocean, the notion of creating a network of parks and reserves is fairly new. Recently, however, Fiji's potential as a nature-based tourism destination has been given impetus by the attention it has received from international authors. Ayala, for example, has proposed that Fiji's tourism strength should be centred on such a network of parks and reserves (1995).

Justifying the designation of large tracts of land as parks and reserves on the grounds that to do so is in the national interest is relatively straightforward in countries where the state controls most of the land and sea. The establishment and maintenance of a park and reserve system is less easily achieved in a country such as Fiji, where the land tenure system is extremely complex and government authority is more constrained.

The tourism industry in Fiji

In 1982, tourism surpassed sugar as Fiji's main source of foreign exchange. As an immediate effect of the May 1987 coup, tourist arrivals declined and earnings fell sharply; sugar was once again more important as an earner. In 1989, though, tourism regained the ascendancy and maintained it for the next decade. Figure 1 charts tourism earnings relative to those for other sectors of the economy over the period 1988 to 1997.

As in most of the South Pacific island tourism destinations, the primary attractions of Fiji are the sunny tropical climate, the beaches and the scenery. Activities related to the beach and marine environment, such as snorkelling and scuba diving, are especially popular. Fiji entered the field of formal tourism planning earlier than most South Pacific island countries, the first national tourism programme being drawn up in 1973 (Belt, Collins & Associates 1973). The second masterplan was completed in 1989 (Coopers & Lybrand 1989) and the latest in 1997 (Deloitte & Touche and others 1997).

The role and significance of parks and reserves

An understanding of how Fijians perceive forests is important for understanding the relationship between a network of parks and reserves and Fiji's indigenous population. According to oral history, the Fijians first arrived to find the entire landmass covered with thick bushes and forests. In Fiji, the process of cutting one's way through thick bushes and forest is *viti*. The Fijian name for Fiji is *Viti*.

The forest has special significance for the Fijians as it contains the *yavutu*. This is the place where the original ancestral group, or at least the earliest pioneer ancestors of the present occupants of the territory, are believed to have lived (Farrell 1977). It is common practice for Fijians to visit and pay homage to the *yavutu* from time to time. The younger generation is constantly reminded of its connection with the *yavutu*, which is seen as providing a source of inspiration and strength.

The forest is particularly significant at both birth and death. At birth, the child's umbilical cord is buried in a particular area of forest that is considered sacred to the family. The child is reminded of where his or her umbilical cord was laid and is expected to maintain a high regard for the particular tree under which the object was buried. At closure of the life cycle, the dead are buried in an area of forest designated as burial ground. In some instances, the chiefly clan's burial ground is located in an area of

Figure 1 Major sources of national income, 1988–1997



Source Based on figures found in Bureau of Statistics, *Facts and Figures*, 1989–1999. At the time of writing, Manufacturing data for 1995–97 were not yet available from the Bureau.

forest separate from the commoners' burial ground. The spirit of the newly dead person follows the area of forest or the spirit path (*nodra sala na yalo*). There are particular areas along the way where the spirit undertakes specific actions. An example is the area where it waits and calls for other spirits (*i kacikaci ni yalo*). Other examples are the spot where the spirit drinks from the well (*medra mata na yalo*), a spot where the spirit hops (*ladelade ni yalo*) and the destination itself, Naicobocobo, an area in Udu Point, Vanualevu.

Every clan has its claim to a particular area of forest where it alone can plant, dig and hunt. Within the clan, each household knows which area of the forest is designated as their respective planting ground (*lumulumu*), and members—especially the household head—know where their grandparents grew wild yams (*veisavaki*).

Every Fijian tribe takes pride in its own totem tree, bird and fish, which can be found in the forest, many of which are forest species. It is regarded as an affront to a tribe if a person, knowing a particular tribe's totem, cuts the tree or kills the bird or fish in full view of a member or members of the tribe. The customary 'penalty' for such an 'offence' is the presentation of a kilogram of *kava* to the tribe.

Fijians have always turned to the forest as a source of food supply: much of their staple diet originates there, including wild pigs and vegetables. The forest provides men with materials for house building and for making sailing boats, canoes and rafts. Women have turned to the forest for weaving materials. The forest has always been a source of water supply to the Fijians. Less than half the rural population has access to a piped water supply and the forest provides an important unsedimented source (Lenoa, Lees & Waqaisavou 1989). The forest contains an enormous supply of medicinal herbs that remain in use as treatments for certain ailments. It has been estimated that Ba province's Abaca Forest Park alone contains about 400 types of medicinal herbs (Native Land Trust Board 1995).

Beyond Fiji, some of the thinking that has led to the creation of parks and reserves has biblical associations dating back to the Garden of Eden. According to Bardwell (1974), three themes firmly grounded in anthropocentrism help to explain man's attitude to nature. The first is the tendency to view topography in terms of the human form. For instance, the appeal of special landscapes or landforms such as deep gorges can be related to the view of earth as a maternal being. The second theme is the quest for a perfect place of residence as an alternative to the everyday world.

The town or city is viewed as an uncongenial place to live and urban man is seen as far removed from his biological moorings. The search for areas of natural landscape to compensate for this failure has focused on the closest approximation to paradise or Eden. The third theme is associated with the view that mankind has a divinely ordained duty on earth to subdue nature and to exploit it. Unfortunately, this may lead to a tendency to ignore or devalue nature. Implicit in this is a faith in the inevitability and worth of 'progress', defined in terms of the infinite capacity of nature to supply for human needs and the (arguably) infinite ability of humans to perpetuate their exploitation of nature.

The establishment of parks and reserves can be viewed not as a reaction against the themes associated with the anthropocentric doctrines but as being part of the subjugation process. Bardwell's three themes are in many respects more pronounced now than previously, as more people reacting against the pressures of urbanised and industrial lifestyles have turned to nature as a setting for relaxation and leisure.

The development of a park and reserve system in Fiji

Definitions

Parks and Reserves are areas set aside for specific purposes. In this paper, parks and reserves are areas designated for conservation, environmental and tourism purposes. Parks and reserves in Fiji are of two types: *forest reserves* and *nature reserves*. A third category, *native forest reserves*, is no longer open to the creation of new areas.

Proclamation An Act of Parliament declaring a specific action for a specific purpose. For the purpose of this paper, the relevant *proclamation* is the Forestry Act, which enables the setting aside of areas of land in Fiji as parks and reserves.

Traditional The word is used here synonymously with 'customary' or to signify something that has been passed down through the ages by custom and/or practice.

The Fiji Parliament has not passed any legislation specific to parks and reserves, though Watling and Chape (1993) have estimated that at least 25 Acts of Parliament have some bearing on environmental management issues and consequently on parks and reserves. When areas are designated as having special interest and significance, reference is commonly made to a

whole range of Acts of Parliament, including the Forest Act (1978 edition), the National Trust Act (1978 edition), the Native Land Trust Act (1985 edition), the Native Lands Act (1985 edition) and the Land Conservation and Improvement Act (1985 edition). Under these pieces of legislation areas are generally set aside for reasons of 'conservation' and/or 'protection'.

The first known park and reserve system in Fiji was established under the Forestry Ordinance (later the Forestry Act). It covered the areas bounded by Suva and Namuka harbours and was proclaimed in 1913. A number of other reserves were subsequently created under that Act, namely Taveuni Forest Reserve (1914), Buretolu Forest Reserve (1946) and Nadarivatu Forest Reserve (1954).

The agency most active in the establishment of parks and reserves is the **Forestry Department**, drawing upon its powers under the Forestry Act. Section six of the Act confers on the department the authority to declare areas as Forest Reserves or Nature Reserves.

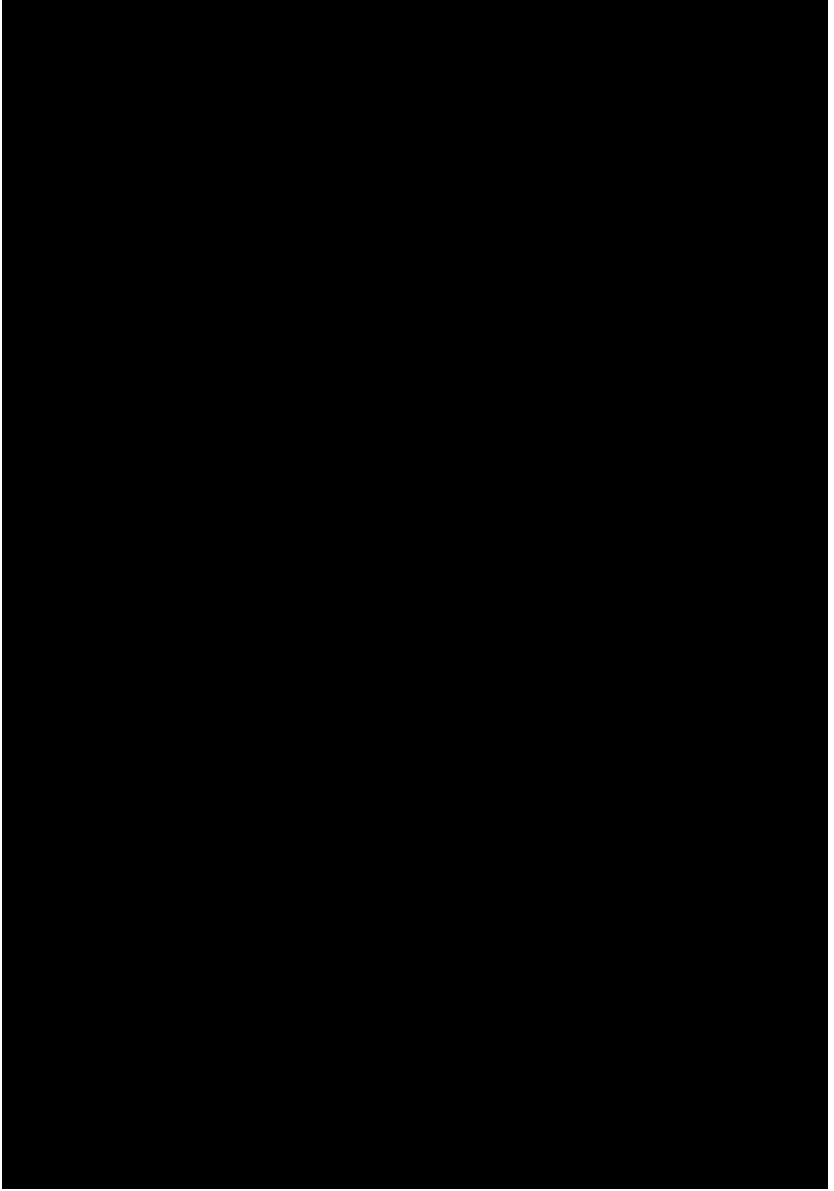
Forest reserves are areas managed as permanent forest to provide benefits and/or protection on a permanent basis. Official information from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forests (MAFF) marks out some of the powers in these terms:

No one has the right to do any commercial activities in a Forest Reserve unless approved in writing by the Conservator of Forests, under a contract or grant. (Tabunakawai et al.1993:17)

In Fiji there are 16 forest reserves covering an area in excess of 22,000 hectares (see figure 2). Only one of these, Colo i Suva, provides amenities such as walking trails, barbecue facilities and sheds for tourists. Those wishing to use these facilities must first register their names with the Colo i Suva Forestry Office at the entrance to the reserve. Tourists may also visit the other forest reserves, all of which lack recreational facilities.

Nature reserves are areas set aside to preserve the forest and also the animals and birds for which it constitutes the habitat (Tabunakawai et al. 1993). Cutting (of plants), hunting and shooting are prohibited unless undertaken for conservation purposes or for the improvement of the nature reserve. All nature reserves are located on State land (land that is owned by government) and no tourist activity of any kind is allowed in them (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Forest Reserves and Nature Reserves in Fiji



Key

Forest Reserve (province, year established, area (ha))

■	Suva/Namuka Harbour (Rewa, 1913, n/a)
■	Taveuni ** (Cakaudrove, 1914, 11,290)
■	Buretolu (Ba, 1926, 1197.9)
■	Nadativatu (Ba, 1954, 7400.7)
■	Maranisaqa** (Naitasiri, 1955, 77.3)
■	Naitasiri (Naitasiri, 1955, 30)
■	Qoya (Rewa, 1955, 67.2)
■	Tavua (Ba, 1958, 2 roods)
■	Yarawa (Serua, 1962, 161.9)
■	Colo i Suva** (Naitasiri, 1963, 369.5)
■	Savura** (Naitasiri, 1963, 447.6)
■	Lololo (Ba, ?, 8.3)
■	Naboro (Rewa, 1969, 19)
■	Korotari (Cakaudrove, 1961, 1046.9)
■	Vago (Naitasiri, 1959, 24.7)
■	Saru Creek (Ba, 1973, 3.2)

Nature Reserve (province, year established, area (ha))

■	Nadativatu (Ba, 1956, 93.1)
■	Naqaramibuli (Ba, 1958, 279.2)
■	Tomaniivi (Ba, 1958, 1323.4)
■	Ravilevu (Cakaudrove, 1959, 4018.7)
■	Darunibota (Rewa, 1959, 2.2)
■	Vuo Island (Rewa, 1960, 1.2)
■	Vunimoli (Cakaudrove, 1968, 20.2)

** indicates that the relevant forest reserve is located on native land.
 Source Tabunakawai et al. (1993).

The **Native Land Trust Board (NLTB)** was created by the Native Land Trust Act (1940) to control and administer the land designated as native land, comprising about 83% of Fiji's total area. The NLTB is charged with administering the land for the benefit of its Fijian owners and has a responsibility to the landowners to ensure that their lands are managed and used wisely for the benefit and improved welfare of the landowning unit and for the country as a whole. Section 2 of the Native Land Trust Board's *Environmental Charter* (1994), dealing with 'Environmental Goals and Objectives', states that:

The Native Land Trust Board, working in partnership with Government and other organizations, will administer Fijian owned lands and resources under its control efficiently, economically and effectively in the interests of promoting:

The conservation, protection, preservation and enhancement of important aspects of the Fijian environmental inheritance for their natural, cultural, educational, scientific, recreational and tourism use and value.

Fitting its actions to this idealistic rhetoric, the NLTB works closely with other institutions in the establishment of parks and reserves. Figure 3 locates the various parks and reserves in which the NLTB has played a part and indicates other agencies involved in the administration of each of them.

Section 4 of the Native Lands Act empowered the **Native Lands Commission** to determine the ownership and boundaries of native land. During this process, the creation of *native forest reserves* was a possibility. As the Commission has now completed its work of determining the ownership and boundaries of the land, the creation of native forest reserves has ceased.

The **Land Conservation Board** was created in 1950 under the Land Conservation and Improvement Act. Its main functions as listed in Section 5 are:

- (i) to exercise general supervision over land and water resources;
- (ii) to stimulate, by propaganda and such other means as it may deem expedient, public interest in the conservation and improvement of land and water resources;
- (iii) to recommend to the Minister the nature of legislation deemed necessary for the proper conservation and improvement of land and water resources.

The Land Conservation and Improvement Board has been criticised in recent years for having failed to address land conservation issues (Watling & Chape 1993). Although the board is given wide-ranging powers under the Act, its work has been hampered by staffing shortages and by political intervention.

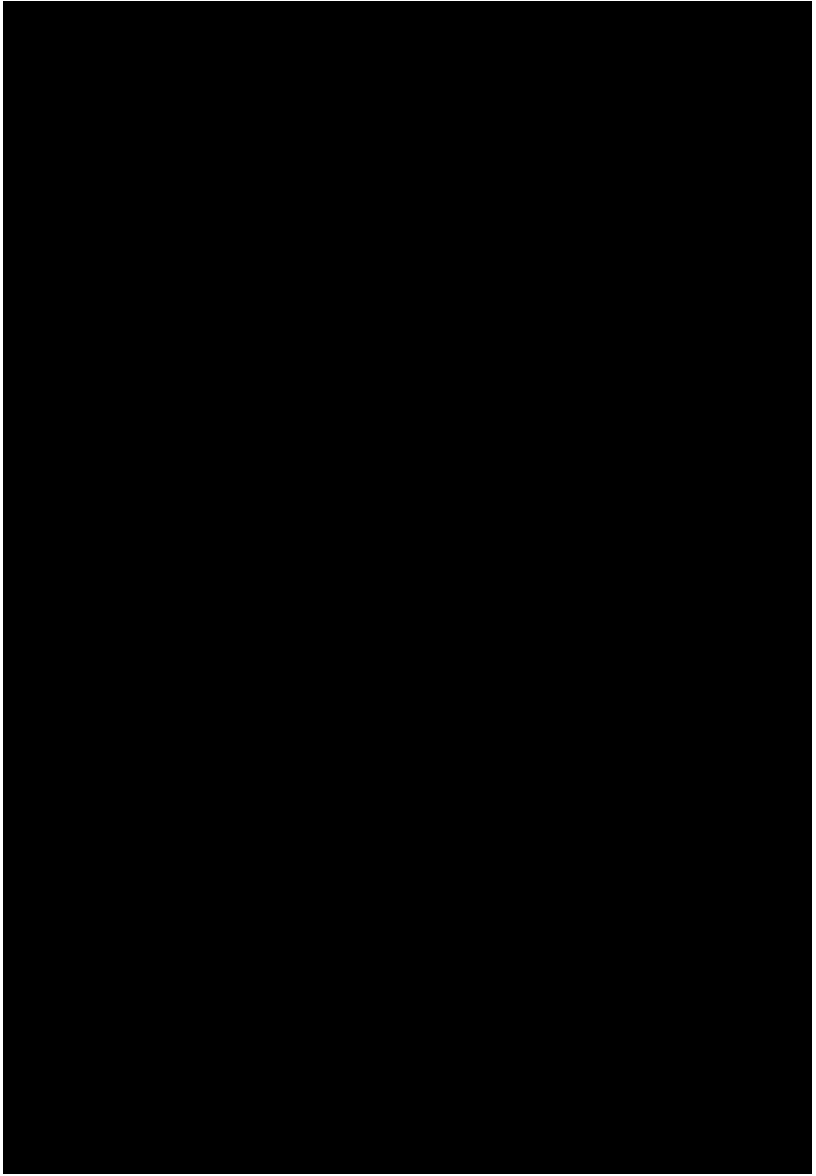
Another organisation that plays a significant role in the establishment of parks and reserves is the **National Trust for Fiji**. The Trust was incorporated in 1970 under the National Trust Act to promote and preserve the country's heritage—including land, buildings, furniture, pictures and chattels of every description having national, historic, architectural or natural interest or beauty. Another role specified in the incorporation document is the protection and augmentation of the amenities of any such land or buildings and their surroundings for the preservation of their natural aspect and features. Cabaniuk noted that six parks and reserves involving the Forestry Department, Native Land Trust Board and the National Trust for Fiji were in the process of establishment at that time (1996). However, according to Watling and Chape the Trust's efforts to develop conservation and heritage protection within Fiji have failed as a result of staffing problems and a lack of imagination and creativity (1993). The various parks and reserves whose establishment and management have involved the Trust are also located in figure 3.

The importance of parks and reserves in tourism

Many countries have recently established systems of parks and reserves with a view to diversification and a number of studies have attempted to explain why destinations have chosen to diversify their tourism product in this way (e.g. Brown 1986; Buckley & Pannell 1990; Ostrowski 1984).

This rationale is typical of the comparatively small island nations of the South Pacific, which previously relied on 'sun, sea and sand' as their core product but have recently begun to widen their base of attractions (King & Weaver 1993). Tougher competition is evident from the equivalent products offered by destinations such as Hawai'i, Bali, the Caribbean countries and Queensland, all of which are located closer to the major tourist markets than is Fiji. Such competition has placed pressure on Fiji to add a new dimension to its tourism product in the form of a rainforest national park experience (National Trust for Fiji 1988). Ayala has argued that the development of an

Figure 3 Parks and Reserves with significant NL/TB and NTF involvement



Key

Park (province, year established, area (ha)) [administration]

Significant NLTB (Native Land Trust Board) involvement

- Sigatoka Sand Dunes (Nadroga, 1988, 240) [National Trust, Public Trustee, NLTB]
- Namenalala Reserve** (Bua, 1984, 43) [Lessee, NLTB]
- Bouma Forest Park** (Cakaudrove, 1991, 2000) [Forestry Dept, NZ Govt, NLTB]
- Lavena Park** (Cakaudrove, 1993, 10) [Forestry Dept, NZ Govt, NLTB]
- Abaca Park** (Ba, 1993) [Forestry Dept, Fiji Pine Ltd, NZ Govt, NLTB]
- Tavuni Hill** (Nadroga, 1994, 20) [Tourism Dept, Forestry Dept, NLTB]

Significant NTF (National Trust for Fiji) involvement

- Sigatoka Sand Dunes (Sigatoka, 1988, 240) [NTF, Public Trustee, NLTB]
- Garrick Forest Reserve (Namosi, 1986, 428) [NTF]
- Yadua Taba Iguana Reserve** (Bua, 1991, 50) [NTF]
- Wasavulu National Monument** (Macuata, 1969) [NTF, Fiji Museum]

** indicates that the particular park is located on native land.
 Source Cabaniuk 1996.

adequate system of nature reserves and recreation areas in Fiji will ensure the establishment of an alternative source of income while at the same time protecting and preserving the unique features of the country's environment (1995).

An Ecological Survey Team from the Maruia Society and Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society of New Zealand, after examining the potential for the establishment of a system of parks and reserves in Fiji, recommended the expansion of the existing system. Reasons suggested for such a course of action were: (1) to ensure the survival in the long term of representative examples of the plants, animals, ecosystems and landscapes that together originally gave Fiji its own distinctive natural character; (2) to provide a secure basis for retaining traditional forest-based cultural knowledge and practices, as an integral and distinctive part of Fijian culture; and (3) to provide the basis for diversification of visitor attractions for the Fijian tourist industry, to allow new tourist markets to be tapped and renewed growth to occur in the industry (1989:2).

Studies have indicated that tourists attracted to destinations known primarily for their sun, sea and sand may also have an interest in visiting parks and reserves. A survey on park and reserve systems, for example, found that 93% of respondents were interested in visiting a national park during their trip to Fiji (Green & Frodey 1994). A number of authors have commented that for Fiji, tourism is a more sustainable alternative resource than logging. The logging of Fiji's indigenous forests undoubtedly offers a potential source of income to owners, though the assumption that logging offers a better financial return was challenged by McDermott Miller Ltd (1993). They estimated that the present value of logging in the areas identified in the Maruia Report (1989) is \$F95 million, compared to a possible \$F167 million that could be realised from tourism if the same forests were to be turned into parks and reserves. The clear implication is that owners should keep those forests for tourism purposes instead of logging them. In another report, Cabaniuk, Lees and Wright claimed, with reference to the Sovi Basin, a greater potential return from tourism than from logging. They stated that: 'If they prove to be a reality, ecotourism development options may match, if not eventually exceed, financial returns to the land owners from logging' (1995:79).

This is not to deny that the mutually exclusive activities of logging and the establishment of parks and reserves for tourism purposes cannot be undertaken simultaneously in one area. In the selection of the most appropriate economic activity both the short- and long-term interests of the landowners need to be balanced. Problems may be envisaged where there is a need to sacrifice short-term benefits in the interests of the long term.

Management of parks and reserves

In Fiji, which is the appropriate management agency is determined by the nature and characteristics of the particular parks and reserves. Generally speaking, the Forestry Department manages those parks and reserves operated by government, and the National Trust for Fiji manages those seen as possessing particular heritage values. Finally, parks and reserves on unalienated Fijian lands are managed by the communal landowners, with some assistance from government institutions and external sources (Cabaniuk 1996; Wakelin 1991).

Some parks and reserves have been established exclusively for the preservation of areas of natural beauty and of wilderness. In Fiji, the creation of native forest reserves under the Native Lands Act is an example of the operation of this motive. In a Native Lands Commission sitting at which a section of native land in the Noikoro area was set aside as a Native Forest Reserve, Ratu Sir Lala observed that:

The scene from the Koroniyalewa ridge is fascinating. The wild beauty of Munavatu well toned by distance and its high rock face with grey blotches, its broad and narrow shoulders, its dark forest lit up by red and yellow flowers, its precipitous dark and light green walls dropping to the Wainivau Stream, the hazy, bluish periphery of the distant peaks (three over 3000 feet), all these contribute in providing a blend of soft colours to give the imagination an opportunity to fill in the blanks and make one gaze again at a wonderful panorama by nature. (Native Lands Commission n.d. p.107)

The establishment of such areas of natural beauty as parks and reserves occurred sporadically over a period of some 40 years. There is a need for studies to determine the extent to which the objectives in doing so have been achieved, i.e. the extent to which these areas have maintained their original values.

Weaver (1991a) points out that protected areas can be established in Fiji under three Acts of Parliament: the Native Land Trust Act, the Forests Act and the National Trust Act. Some critics have typically suggested that responsibility should reside with a single agency. This suggestion may have some merit, although the situation is considerably more complex than is at first apparent.

Watling and Chape (1993) have highlighted the need for the setting up of a single management body for protected areas. Implementation of their report's recommendations has been slow because of the considerable degree of overlap in the responsibilities of the departmental and statutory bodies presently involved. Fiji, they note, despite being a party to no fewer than 21 international environmental and conservation conventions, has *no* internationally recognised parks, although there are some in neighbouring Pacific nations.

In their compilation for the National State of the Environment Report, Watling and Chape declared that:

It is important not only from the tourism point of view but as an obligation to the nation and future generations to preserve representative areas of original habitats, as well as examples of the cultural and constructed heritage. Fiji can also be seen to have an international responsibility to conserve representative areas of rain forest. Unless a system of national parks and reserves or equivalent protected areas is accomplished quickly, the forest resource is likely to become too fragmented and degraded to be conserved as a viable ecological unit. (1992, p. 138)

Cabaniuk, Lees and Wright have also urged that specific areas of the Fiji Group be conserved so that the unique natural and cultural features of the Islands are protected:

The Sovi Basin is the largest, most diverse and most scenically outstanding of Fiji's forested areas. If this forest-filled natural 'tanoa' bowl were to be protected, it would be the 'jewel in the crown' of Fiji's protected areas. Containing as it does almost half the undisturbed wet forest types of the country, Sovi Basin would function as the main store house of Fiji's terrestrial biodiversity. (1995, p.87)

As indicated by the listing provided for figures 2 and 3, the situation in Fiji relating to protected areas is perhaps not as gloomy as has been presented by Watling and Chape (1993). Though the finalisation of arrangements has been slow, the moves to designate Sovi Basin as a protected area are testimony to the country's desire to set aside large tracts of land as protected areas. Fiji may learn useful lessons from other countries in the Pacific but the reverse may also be the case, reflecting the different land tenure arrangements prevailing across the region.

Fiji's terrestrial ecosystems contain some areas of tropical rainforest that have been proposed by the Fiji Government for World Heritage Listing. In pointing this out, King and Weaver claim that the marine and forest resources can function both as a scenic setting for tourists and as a resource for more vigorous activities such as trekking (1993).

Conclusion

The paper has identified the potential of Fiji's forests, parks and reserves as an alternative to the traditional sun, sea and sand tourism package, with a view to attracting a wider cross-section of the tourist market. The establishment of parks and reserves may be seen as assisting this process.

The Fijian people have always had a close relationship with and attachment to their land and forest resources. In the Fijian context, ownership of the land is indivisible from ownership of its forest resources, because ownership of one *means* ownership of the other. Such ownership is documented by the Native Lands Commission and by the Native Land Trust Board.

The setting aside of large tracts of land in the national interest is relatively straightforward in countries where the state controls most of the land and sea. This is not the case in countries, such as Fiji, where most of the land is owned on a communal basis and where the people-land relationship is accorded strong emotional and spiritual significance. Clearly progress in this direction will be made only slowly and cautiously in Fiji.

Increasingly over recent decades, the importance of conserving the environment and its biodiversity has been stressed, both locally and in international forums. Fiji has long recognised the need, from both the environmental and biodiversity points of view, to conserve areas of special significance. Trends in current thinking argue that such a course also offers a feasible base for significant diversification of the tourism product offered at home and overseas.

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