ISLAND REACH

2017 Annual Report

Summary

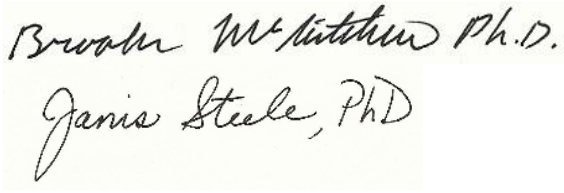
2017 has seen tremendous organizational growth for Island Reach, both new and deepening relationships, some exciting international exposure, dynamic programs, and increased funding support with 5 successful grant applications.

Our commitments remain to the core themes of supporting community-based conservation of Vanuatu's rich biocultural diversity from ridge to reef, enhancing food security, catalyzing Vanua-tai resource monitors, and facilitating peer-to-peer networking between environmental champions.

The dynamic growth and broad reach of IR that is revealed in this report is, we believe, attributable to our unique approach and the varied skills sets our team members bring to the work. IR focuses on collaborative models of stewardship that bridge between traditional and scientific knowledge; we foster alliances and teamwork that can catalyze local environmental champions, and thereby strengthen local aspirations, and mobilize conservation efforts.

In 2017, IR engaged projects and partnerships in all provinces of the archipelago, and continued to improve our video productions, including capturing some incredible drone footage of turtle feeding grounds.

We continue our collaboration with The Ocean Foundation, and marked our first year as a registered charitable organization in Vanuatu, and now operate with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation.



Janis Steele, PhD, & Brooks McCutchen, PhD
Directors, Island Reach

www.IslandReach.org

contact@islandreach.org

Ongoing projects

Partnership with Vanua-tai Resource Monitors

Many of Island Reach's activities are exercised through our partnership and Memorandum of Understanding with Wan Smolbag's **Vanua-tai Resource Monitors Network**. IR has built a close working relationship with program coordinator, Donald James, helping to grow the Vanua-tai programming from ridge to reef, build monitors' capacity through workshops, exchanges, and collaborations, expand the network with new participants, enhance the recognition of the program nationally and locally, and develop the participation of women through establishing a women's network across the country.

In 2017, IR co-led with Donald the national Vanua-tai Annual General Meeting in June in Luganville, Santo. Themes focused on the national Vanua-tai turtle monitoring program, coral reef husbandry and gardening, organic gardening, gender and conservation, and support for the myriad local projects emerging between the Vanua-tai Environmental Monitors and their communities. In the field, IR collaborated with monitors on local projects and agendas, facilitating their leadership skills and enabling their productive capacity through partnering in community presentations, coordinating exchanges, sharing video footage of monitors at work, and, on occasion providing material support. For example, this year, IR distributed 6 cameras to monitors around the country to share within their local networks to document activities and to build storytelling capacity across Vanuatu and beyond.

This network of environmental champions is an incredible resource for Vanuatu, and these individuals are inspirational leaders in their communities and nationally.

Women's Vanua-tai network building

This year, we received a grant from **the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF**) and the **IUCN** for a project titled, ***Promoting gender equity for conservation initiatives through catalyzing a women's environmental network across CEPF priority sites***. This ongoing project follows up on our collaboration with the Vanua-tai Resource Monitor Network in 2016 to help launch the new women's network. With this grant support in 2017 and into 2018, IR has been able to grow the women's network significantly, bringing in new monitors from key biodiversity areas, as well as build the capacity of women monitors around the country. Extensive video footage has been collected from this project and will be included in a final production due April of 2018

WOMEN MONITORS PARTICIPATING AT 2017 AGM

Some **highlights** of this project:

Community visits and engagements were made to CEPF priority sites of Aneitium, Tanna, and Futuna in Tafea Province and Gaua in Torba. These engagements resulted in new women monitors from these islands joining the network and attending the Vanua-tai Annual General Meeting in Luganville.

One of the new women monitors, recruited by IR, now heads the newly constituted Tanna Usiusi environment network, a remarkable achievement for a woman.

A five- day workshop, led by IR project coordinator Sam Suendermann, was held in Sola, Torba Province to build the capacity of 6 women monitors from around the province, bringing in multiple guest speakers and coinciding with a turtle monitoring workshop led by Vanua-tai coordinator Donald James. The workshop was opened by the Secretary General of Torba Province, included IR intern, Risu Kalotiti, and was held in collaboration with **OceansWatch's** Eryn Hooper. Check out the short video here.

Mobilizing climate change adaptation and TC Pam recovery in TAFEA Province

IR received a grant from the **Global Greengrants Fund** for work in Tafea Province, catalyzing environmental monitors and building networks as part of ongoing efforts to recover from Cyclone Pam. This was IR's first year working in this southernmost province of Vanuatu and site visits were made to Aneitium, Tanna, and Futuna.

Some **highlights**:

Futuna: IR team members made two trips to Futuna Island over the last year. Ronneth John and Janis' visits helped spur the revitalization of the Futuna Vanua-tai monitors, which included the selection of a new woman monitor, and renewed participation at the Annual General Meeting. In addition, Futuna has been launching a network of fishing cooperatives on the island in the interest of developing sustainable livelihood options (supported by Fisheries and Vanuatu Cooperative Association) IR produced a documentary about this program for the Futuna communities, and it was made available to the Dept. of Fisheries, and the Vanuatu Cooperative Association.

VANUA-TAI MONITOR ELDER ISAAC SERU AT THE FUTUNA FISHERIES COOPERATIVE

TANNA USIUSI ENVIRONMENT NETWORK

Tanna: IR team members met with government officials, existing monitors, and helped recruit new monitors during multiple site visits to Tanna this year (January, June, and November). Our engagements helped lead to the creation of the **Tanna Usiusi Environment Network**, led by Chairwoman Jocelyne Usua, who became involved with the Vanua-tai following IR's June visit.

Aneitium: IR site visits helped strengthen the network and support new monitors in the region. IR joined Tony Keith in making local presentations, and recruited a new woman monitor from the region. We also produced a short documentary on shell crafting for sustainable livelihoods that was later screened at the Vanua-tai AGM.

SHELL CRAFT

Networking Across Regions & Provinces

IR received a grant from the UNDP SGP GEF, to support projects in Malekula and Mota Lava, titled, ***Local, regional, and national networking to build capacity and inspire actions for climate change adaptation in the communities of Southwest bay and SE Malekula, and Mota Lava***.

Some highlights of this project:

- Helping launch the **Senewen Environment Network** of southwest Malekula, currently encompassing the communities of Southwest Bay with interest to reach north to Bamboo and south to Melip.
- IR-led Community presentations, facilitated by monitors Joe Woleg and Sophie Frank of Mota Lava, with the assistance of monitor Alphonse Yemen and Dept of Agriculture Extension Officer, Daniel Neneth, across 6 villages of Mota Lava on climate change adaptation, coral reefs, and organic gardening.

SOPHIE FRANK, OF MOTA LAVA, TALKING WITH IR TEAM MEMBERS SAM AND RISU ABOUT HER WORK.

Monitors in the Banks are forging local environment networks, making plans for establishing community managed conservation areas, increasing protection of endangered species, such as turtles, and visiting area communities to make awarenesses.

- Follow-up site visits to Dravail, SE Malekula, to review progress and status of the **Nanamor Lehur Environment Protected Area** that IR helped establish in 2016.
- Bringing monitors from Mota Lava, Dravail and Soutwest Malekula together for a training in coral reef restoration.

IR activities in Southern Malekula were further supported with our third annual grant from **Global Greengrants Fund** and **Aveda** to support communities in the region (video) IR has built a strong relationship with the community of Melip, where we have made multiple visits over the last three years. One highlight of the project this year was recruiting a new woman monitor from Melip whom IR brought to the AGM as well as to the coral reef restoration workshop in Southwest Bay. This monitor has been very active, including traveling with her Vanua-tai partner Chief George from Melip, making awareness along the south coast of Malekula.

In the Southwest Bay region, our collaborations with the communities took a large step forward with the support of a **Rapid Ocean Conservation Grant** from the **Waitt Foundation** for a project titled, **Developing the MPA Network of the Senewen Environment Association Network** of Southwest Bay, Makelula, Vanuatu. These communities, extending from Bamboo Bay to Caroline Bay, and centered around Southwest Bay, have unified to create a vast marine conservation network with a complex of integrated conservation areas both custom and science based, including 9 permanently closed MPAs, 6 marine Tabu areas, and 2 terrestrial tabu areas. IR has made multiple trips to the region in 2017 and IR senior project coordinator Ronneth John will return in January 2018 to conclude this phase of this grant-funded initiative.

SCENES FROM MALEKULA: CORAL GARDENING, MPA DEVELOPMENT

Other IR work in the Banks islands of Torba Province this year included partnering with stakeholders across the region to develop strategies for effective local management of biodiversity and opportunities for livelihood development. For example, on Gaua, IR is working with members of the Lake Letas conservation committee to help build food security into their management plans for their conservation areas. IR is assisting the Committee Secretary in developing a grant proposal on a ridge to reef integrated farming system for Gaua. Our work in Gaua is in association with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation's goals to register Lake Letas as a conservation area.

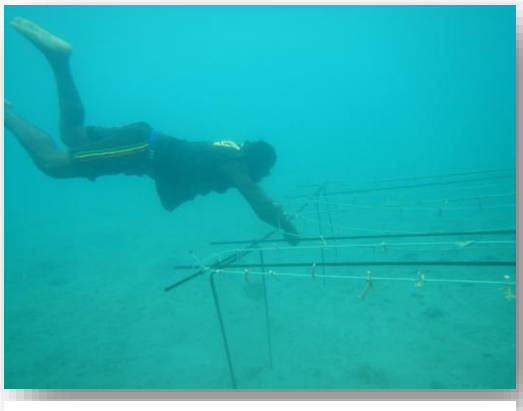
On Vanua Lava, IR met with the council of Chiefs and, at their request, delivered numerous workshops around the island on marine conservation. This was part of IR's work with Chief Alphonse Yemen, Chair of the Vanua Lava environment committee and our documenting of the vast turtle feeding ground in East Vanua Lava near Quanlap.

BANKS MONITORS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGING IN DISCUSSIONS, TRAINING, AND TURTLE HATCHING MONITORING

Coral Reefs and Restoration

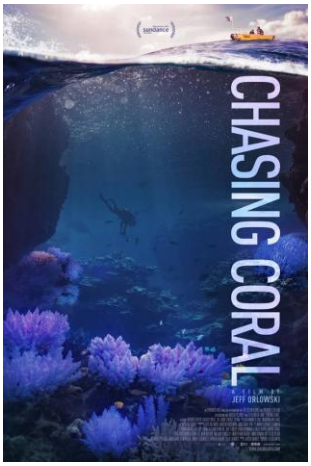
In August IR brought the renowned coral gardening expert Dr. Austin Bowden-Kerby to Vanuatu for a series of workshops and a public presentation in Port Vila. This activity was in partnership with the ***Nguna Pele Marine and Land Protected Area Network***, with whom IR holds a Memorandum of Understanding. Using Dr. Bowden-Kerby's simple techniques available to local communities, IR has established a network of trainers and three coral garden sites on Nguna Island, Pango on Efate, and in Southwest Bay. These low cost projects seek to identify and propagate surviving corals resistant to bleaching.

The methods involve the entire community, including women and children, and have been met with tremendous local enthusiasm and capacity. The methods provide a new toolkit for communities to integrate into their larger marine conservation Management Plans. All primary hub sites are now both growing and radiating into other communities across Vanuatu.



MAKING THE CORAL NURSERY

Island Reach was pleased to play a small part in the award winning film, **Chasing Coral**, now available for viewing on Netflix. IR's Ronneth John appears briefly in the film as do some of our photos of the coral bleaching that occurred in 2015-6 Vanuatu.



BLEACHING 2016, DEAD 2017

IR held a public screening of **Chasing Coral** in Port Vila at the Suzanne Bastien Foundation in August. Following the screening, Dr. Bowden-Kerby made a presentation with a focus on coral restoration methods.

Growing the Island Reach Team

IR welcomed Sam Suendermann to the team, first as a Fellow, and then as a full member in the capacity of project coordinator. Sam has a BA in International Community Development and joined our team after a year in Vanuatu with the AVID program (Australian Volunteers in International Development) as the Women's Surf Development Officer for the Vanuatu Surfing Association. During her time with AVID, Sam focused on increasing women and girls' participation and leadership in the sport as a means to promote education and advocacy around social and environmental issues. Sam dove into projects, taking major responsibilities for catalyzing the women's network and leading coral gardening trainings.

IR welcomed Risu Kalotiti from Pango on Efate as an intern this year. Risu traveled with the team visiting Torba Province and Malekula and returned to Sola in October to assist with the Torba women's monitor workshop.

IR also developed collaborative relationships with field workers and volunteers, introduced on our website, who are acting as field point persons, organizers and catalysts in their communities, helping link IR programs to local actions.

Other News

Janis, IR's co-director, was invited to join a panel presentation and national dialogue **titled Women's Leadership in Climate Change /DRR/Displacement**, hosted by **Action Aid** and the **Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs**. Janis spoke about women and the environment and screened video clips of interviews with women Vanua-tai monitors. Janis spoke about women and the environment and screened video clips of interviews with women Vanua-tai monitors. She was accompanied by Sam Suendermann and Leisavi Joel, communications officer of the women's network.

In September, Sam, along with Risu (representing Solwota Sista (joined a panel discussion on Vanuatu's FM107 **"Empawa Hour"** to discuss Climate Change resilience and gender.

In October, Ronneth John and Sam attended the **Special & Unique Marine Areas Vanuatu** workshop to contribute information regarding important marine habitats around Vanuatu as part of implementing the country's Ocean Policy.

Video footage from IR's documenting of the **350 Vanuatu Pacific Climate Warriors** canoe project in 2014 and 2015 is to be featured in the new Oceania gallery and exhibit at the **Horniman Museum** in London, England.

IR continued our collaborations with communities on Crown of Thorn starfish outbreaks, supporting ongoing mitigation efforts and documenting new outbreaks, including at Dixon Reef, Western Maklekula. We oriented cleanup programs with local chiefs and communities, supplied culling hooks and bags, and undertook culling dives using low-cost injection guns and citric acid.

Janis taught a graduate level course for the University of Massachusetts-Amherst in the Department of Public Health during the Fall 2017 Semester. She designed a course titled **Food insecurity, climate change, and women's resilience in the developing world**.

Videos produced and in production

Turtle Feeding Ground, Vanua Lava, Vanuatu

Women's Leadership and Climate Change - Yumi Redi Produced for Vanuatu Climate Action Network, funded by Oxfam in Vanuatu and screened at COP 23 in Bonn, Germany.

Vanuatu: Community-based conservation and sustainable livelihoods in South Malekula

Torba Women's Vanua-tai Conference

Coral gardening in Southwest Bay.

Women's Vanua-tai network 2017 (in production)

Some Forward Actions

Continue to build women's participation in natural resource management as monitors and active community members, including enhancing their capacity and knowledge for habitat and species conservation.

Help Vanuatu reach its goal of 20 registered community managed conservation areas by 2020 with a ridge to reef approach, as articulated in our MoU with the Department of Environmental Protection and Conservation. Islands where we're engaged in these efforts include Gaua, Vanua Lava, Pentecost.

Build capacity of monitors across the archipelago and facilitate peer to peer networking, as per our MoU with Wan Smolbag.

Continue to radiate out lessons learned to outer islands from our partners in the Nguna Pele Marine & Land Protected Area Network. Reach environmental stewards in the new West Coast Santo network.

Assist communities with their goals to develop management plans for conservation actions.

Expand coral gardening initiatives and explore potential for ecotourism benefits.

Catalyzing community efforts to protect biocultural diversity.