

## From Fish Banks to Ecotourism

Vanuatu



Chris Bone



### Organization type:

nonprofit/ngo/citizen sector

### Budget:

\$100,000 - \$250,000

### Website:

<http://www.oceanswatch.org>

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### Project Summary

#### Elevator Pitch

#### **Concise Summary: Help us pitch this solution! Provide an explanation within 3-4 short sentences.**

OceansWatch works with coastal communities in developing countries to create "Fish Banks" to ensure the village's main protein supply is sustainable into the future. These Marine Protected Areas are looked after by trained "Reef Guardians". They result in ecotourism opportunities through their enhanced snorkelling and diving potential.

#### About Project

#### **Problem: What problem is this project trying to address?**

The problem on Mystery Island is that not everyone is happy with no fishing in the area and this year there is to be a review of the Marine Protected Area (MPA). The local Tourism Board have been feeling a lot of pressure to allow fishing again. Without the scientific data and backing of OceansWatch it would be very hard for the Board to get the support of the community to ensure the reef is protected for future tourists and for the villager's food supply. Another problem or opportunity is that the community is expecting a huge increase in the numbers of tourists as the number of cruise ships increase. Several other factors are also going to increase tourism numbers in this area including the relocation of the airport and increased numbers of flights, the building of a customs and immigration point and making it an entry and exit point for yachts and overland tourists and they are also building a new University.

#### **Solution: What is the proposed solution? Please be specific!**

Our innovation is in our organisation's efficient use of resources. Through using donated yachts and yachts that are already cruising the oceans we have access to the coastal communities that are isolated, forgotten and in need. We also use the services of the abundant supply of young marine biologists and divers that need the experience before they can get paid work and so are willing to pay their expenses for the opportunity to volunteer on an expedition. We are a small organisation so we have low administration costs but can achieve a lot. We are currently working with communities in Vanuatu, the Solomon Island and Papua New Guinea. We run annual expeditions in the non cyclone season and we plan to revisit the communities until they are seeing the results and able to manage their marine environments themselves. We are recruiting yachts a number of ways. Right now our focus area is Melanesia so the yachts that go to Melanesia head there from Mexico, Panama, New Zealand and Australia. We have people in Panama distributing brochures as yachts go through the canal. For Mexico I am part of a very active discussion group of yachts leaving there and also have a person going there just before the yachts leave. In New Zealand I personally present to yachts that arrive here through film nights etc... about the Discussion about entry: From Fish Banks to Ecotourism discussion

#### About You

**Organization:**

OceansWatch

**Section 1: About You****First Name**

Chris

**Last Name**

Bone

**Website****Organization****Country**

, NTL

**Section 2: About Your Organization****Organization Name**

OceansWatch

**Organization Phone**

+64 9 4344066

**Organization Address**

PO Box 1803, Whangarei, 0140

**Organization Country**

, NTL

#### Your idea

**Country your work focuses on**

, XX

**Website URL**

<http://www.oceanswatch.org>

**Would you like to participate in the MIF Opportunity 2010?**

#### Innovation

**Do you have a patent for this idea?**

#### Impact

**What impact have you had on your clients and the tourism sector?**

This is one example of how what we are doing for the local communities impacts the tourism sector. Aneityum is an island in Vanuatu its villagers are mostly subsistence farmers and fishermen, as in all the communities that we visit. For the last 30 years "Mystery Island" a small uninhabited island just off shore has been occasionally visited by cruise ships. In 2009 this was once every 5/6 weeks and this year 30 ships will visit. This has meant a huge increase in opportunities for the community by selling to and guiding tourists. In the late 1990's a government funded tourism board was set up and in subsequent years the tourists that came to enjoy the sun and sand and to snorkel complained about a lack of fish. In 2001 this area was declared a Marine Protected Area for a 10 years period. This time is now up and the Area is currently under review but the problem is that without assistance it will probably no longer be maintained.

Other communities where we have been invited to help all have the same problem of reducing fish resources. In different communities this is for different reasons but the solutions of education and marine management are the same. In all communities that have healthy reef systems their tourism potential is enhanced. At present all the tourist resorts in remote coastal locations of these developing countries like Kimbe Bay in Papua New Guinea exist because of their healthy coral reefs and the diving opportunities this encourages. These eco-tourism ventures bring money into the community through work opportunities and allow crafts to be traded.

**Actions**

OceansWatch has been asked to support the Tourism Board in ways to help them maintain the Marine Protected Area. We will do this by providing scientific data on fish resources and the locals will be educated in the fact that this "Fish Bank" insures their fish stocks for the future due to the effects of fish and fish egg spill-over and the benefits that the fish have on the reef itself. OceansWatch will also assist the community in applying for official recognition of the MPA so that it will be a long term asset for the community.

OceansWatch has also been asked to help with ideas to manage and promote their coastal area. So far we have assisted the locals in the re-setting up of a previous turtle tagging program where tourists can name and tag and release a turtle as part of a SPREP (South Pacific Regional Environment Program) data collection project. Another idea that is being incorporated for the tourists is an underwater botanical garden where the different types of coral are labelled.

## Results

The consequence of having Fish Banks for each coastal community will be that these subsistence villages will be sustainable in protein. Other tourism opportunities extend from this. One of the results of the Marine Protected Area around Mystery Island has been increased cruise ship visits - as they would only go there if it was a popular destination. The potential result that the Tourism Board can achieve with OceansWatch's assistance is a healthy coral reef serving the community as a Fish Bank and providing the tourists with beautiful Snorkelling and a clean island with activities including turtle tagging and the underwater botanical garden. This community has the potential to be a thriving tourist destination but as the growth is going to come fast they will need a lot of support to create a sustainable community that benefits all sectors of society and the environment.

## What will it take for your project to be successful over the next three years? Please address each year separately, if possible.

2011 During the rest of this year and next year OceansWatch will do what it can to support the Tourism Board to work with the locals to maintain the Marine Protected Area. During our 2011 expedition we will visit this community and other communities to support them in their projects and to serve the increasing tourist numbers. We will monitor the coral reefs, train monitors and check the other projects are working and provide assistance as needed.

2012 We shall work with the Tourism Board to get the Marine Protected Area formally recognised so that it is safe-guarded long term and helps provide a sustainable fishery and tourist attraction. We will again monitor the coral reef with all reports being sent to Reef Check, both in Vanuatu and International. We will continue to train Reef Guardians.

2013 At this stage we will hopefully be able to see that some of the communities that we have been working with are now able to manage their marine resources. There will be marked MPAs that are looked after by well trained Reef Guardians who can carry on the regular monitoring of their coral reefs. The villages will be providing good tourism attractions and making an income from selling their crafts.

## What would prevent your project from being a success?

We have run expeditions in Vanuatu for three years. We have done this by having marine biologists working from member's yachts and also from yachts that have been donated to us to use. If we did not have yacht transport in this way we would not be able to visit the coastal communities that we do.

A serious cyclone, earthquake or tsunami would certainly hinder progress in this project as it would damage both the villages and the reef.

If we could no longer get good quality marine biologists and divers willing to volunteer for us on expeditions this would mean the projects would cost more to run.

## How many people will your project serve annually?

101 1000

## What is the average monthly household income in your target community, in US Dollars?

Less than \$50

## Does your project seek to have an impact on public policy or introduce models and tools that benefit the tourism sector in general?

## Sustainability

### What stage is your project in?

Operating for 1 5 years

### In what country?

, XX

### Is your initiative connected to an established organization?

Yes

### If yes, provide organization name.

OceansWatch

### How long has this organization been operating?

1 5 years

### Does your organization have a Board of Directors or an Advisory Board?

Yes

### Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with NGOs?

Yes

### Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with businesses?

No

### Does your organization have any non-monetary partnerships with government?

Yes

**Please tell us more about how these partnerships are critical to the success of your innovation.**

We partnership with Reef Check: a coral reef monitoring organisation. This is important as this is one of the monitoring tools that we use to assess the health of the coral reefs. Monitoring shows that the marine management plans are working it gives figures and graphs to show the community to guide them in their projects and give them confidence that their fish resources are increasing and the health of the coral is improving. . Our partnerships with the local community groups are important in capacity building among the different stakeholders affected by any changes in the management of marine resources. We assist these groups to become NGO's in their own country. The Vanuatu Fisheries Department does not have the resources to be able to access and monitor all the hundreds of islands that make up this country and so it relies on us and other NGO's to help.

**What are the three most important actions needed to grow your initiative or organization?**

1. OceansWatch needs to work on clear strategic planning with measurable outcomes so that we can assess our effectiveness. We need to build and work more closely with our Board of Trustees so they have a clear understanding of our mission statement and are able to guide us to best achieve our objectives. Each year as a result of our interactions with a community we write a report to guide the strategic planning and to aid the project leader and marine biologists that will work in that community in the following year.
2. We need to engage and be able to pay a fundraising/ marketing/administration person to ensure that we can grow steadily to expand our operations to all developing countries with coastal communities. We primarily market to the cruising yacht community for yachts to work with us and support us.
3. We need to develop our systems and policies so that the work we do is consistent and beneficial to all stakeholders. We have a small home office for administration and by keeping our systems clear and up to date we can minimise our costs and overheads. We are developing clear policies and guidelines on how to interact with the communities so that the work is driven by them and we just partner them. We also need to clarify our marine policies so that they are based on both up to date scientific knowledge and best social practice.

**The Story**

**What was the defining moment that led you to this innovation?**

This innovation of encouraging and facilitating the way the world's cruising yachts can give something back to the communities that they visit was the result of a few factors in the life of Chris Bone. Chris grew up sailing and arrived in New Zealand on a yacht on the day that the Rainbow Warrior was bombed. Always an environmentalist he was moved to work as a skipper for Greenpeace and this led to him sailing around the Pacific on an anti-nuclear promotion tour. This solidified his interest and care for the Pacific Island communities.

Later when he ran a yacht delivery company and worked to promote the town in New Zealand where he lived, to the visiting yachts people, he came to see how many people were sailing around the world and what an untapped resource this was. Often these people were skilled people who had made good money working and were now reaping the rewards. He saw however that they were missing having more responsibility than just maintaining their yacht and sailing. He felt that if he could access some of that resource and energy there would be a way of giving something back to the people in the island communities that so many yachts visited. OceansWatch was founded on this vision and is backed by the support of yacht owners, it tries to facilitate projects that the yachts people can become involved in or benefit from.

Chris's initial encounter with a community that recognised their diminishing fish resources happened in Papua New Guinea when he was delivering a yacht and his crew jumped ship because they were scared of pirates. Chris was stuck for three weeks and in that time visited a small island community that had many needs and asked him to come back and help them. As a result of this and also of taking an overseas businessman on a yacht charter who had a similar idea and had reserved the website [www.oceanswatch.org](http://www.oceanswatch.org) OceansWatch was born. The Trust was set up when a women sailing solo round the world and other sailing friends also wanted to be involved. The final resources fell into place when the owner of a yacht that Chris was delivering donated him the yacht to use for the organisation's mission. When Chris sailed back into that community in Papua New Guinea and said "I've come back to help" and they were so happy, he knew he was doing the right thing.

**Tell us about the social innovator behind this idea.**

Chris Bone spent his early childhood in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and so has always been aware that there are some people who are less well off. He spent his school years near the Thames in England and that is where he learnt to sail. He subsequently led yacht flotillas in Greece and Turkey and finally captained yachts for wealthy yacht owners.

He now lives in a small eco-village in a valley on the coast of New Zealand's North Island. He has a wife and three children and a foster child. The youngest child Sophie is sixteen and spent her 16th birthday with her dad on an island in Papua New Guinea wearing a grass skirt and being taught to dance by the young girls in a youth culture group.

The OceansWatch office is run from his home and is managed by his wife, when he is on an expedition and is manned by a series of young interns. Chris has a special interest in sailing canoes and encourages this dying tradition in the communities that he visits. This year one community had finished a nine metre sailing canoe that he had encouraged them to start making on his last visit. He was very proud to be taken out on the test sail and is now supporting them in their plans to set up a school teaching boat building skills.

He is a big believer in running a transparent organisation based on good values such as equality and trust and he manages OceansWatch on this basis. OceansWatch has since been donated another yacht and Chris feels that if you believe in what you are doing the resources for you to achieve that vision are provided.

**How did you first hear about Changemakers?**

Friend or family member

**If through another, please provide the name of the organization or company**

50 words or fewer

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