

## Project Update: September 2011

The biggest news so far this year is that OceansWatch has signed an MOU with the Vanuatu Ministry for the Environment outlining how we will assist them with the creation of Marine Protected Areas throughout this country.

When the OceansWatch team in Vanuatu visits some of the villages we work with this will have been our fourth visit so they are getting used to a yacht showing up and asking them what needs doing this year. This is also the fourth year that we have had the use of our trusty lead yacht Magic Roundabout and she is still doing Tom Sowerby, her original owner proud.

Here is some news from some of the communities we have visited so far this year. A new yacht club is being built in Dillons Bay on the island of Erromango. This is close to one of our regular Reef Check survey sights and the reef is one of the attractions here. The owner and builder David is very proud of this project and it should help bring a bit of cash to this community through the eco-tourism venture.

Rubbish is a big problem in the Islands as there are few places to dispose of it. A company in Port Vila has just started recycling cans and one of the projects the team was involved with in Pele, an island just North of Efate, was a big can collection for the students at Piliura village school. There was a good prize being offered and the OceansWatch team were the judges. The winning team collected 2500 cans with over 7400 collected altogether!

Also while in Pele we assisted Chris Bartlett who is involved in various Climate Change projects in Vanuatu to collect seedlings to be replanted to prevent coastal erosion. It made a change to be working on land and not in the sea.

The main task around the islands of Nguna and Pele was helping out with Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) removal. The reefs here are infested with these coral eating starfish, We did several COTS clean ups from several different reefs around the area and one reef had a whole army of COTS, maybe 1000 or more, slowly making its way across an acropora field – we wanted to keep going until every COT was collected but we had to call it a day as the canoe was slowly sinking due to the weight of nearly 700 COTS!

After visiting the southern islands the team headed to the island in the north and warmer waters.



