

## INTRODUCTION

---

Here we report the findings from the Marine Rapid Assessment Survey of the coral reefs of the northwest lagoon (Yandé to Koumac) of Nouvelle Calédonie. For the executive summary a brief overview on the Marine Rapid Assessment Program and on New Caledonia is presented first including general information on the inscription of the tropical lagoons and coral reefs of New Caledonia as a World Heritage Site. Further background information is presented for the two communes of Poum and Koumac that lie adjacent to the reef sites surveyed. This is followed by general background information on the survey sites and methods used to conduct the study. Finally, highlights of the results are given and we close with a discussion of conservation recommendations based on the findings.

## OVERVIEW

---

### **Marine Rapid Assessment Program (Marine RAP)**

The Marine Rapid Assessment Program conducts scientific surveys (Marine RAPS)<sup>1</sup> with local and international scientists to fill in data gaps on marine biodiversity in areas where data is lacking or under threat. Surveys provide data on select species of biological and commercial importance, as well as the “health” of the habitats sampled. The *in situ* fieldwork both underwater and on land identifies threats and documents socioeconomic issues regarding marine resource-use patterns, concerns, and beliefs of coastal residents in the particular region. The specific information collected and methods employed are based on local and regional needs as determined by consultation with all local stakeholders including government and other non-governmental organizations.

The information obtained during the Marine RAP is analyzed, synthesized and geo-spatially mapped with other relevant and available data to: a) pinpoint key sites and issues within the region for implementing realistic mechanisms/activities to conserve species and their habitats (e.g. establishing locally managed marine areas) and for mitigating threats to biodiversity (e.g. curtailing destructive fishing techniques); b) identify data gaps and topics for further study (e.g. stock assessments); c) implement further surveys, activities and studies needed for identified species and regions; and d) and address questions regarding biodiversity and the design of Marine Protected Areas.

Findings from the surveys enable informed decision making, especially for the creation of Marine Managed/Protected Areas and for implementation of other conservation “tools” (e.g. limitations on extraction). The surveys also provide exchange between national and international scientists to build capacity. Education and awareness on the importance of marine biodiversity and resources is also raised as a result of Marine RAPS.

---

<sup>1</sup> Marine Rapid Assessment Program Survey(s) are commonly referred to by the abbreviated term, Marine RAP(S).