

# Regulations based on local realities

To ensure that management measures for marine areas and species are appropriate and properly applied, key stakeholders and local realities must be taken into account. New Caledonia's local authorities are experimenting with different approaches to tailor their environmental policies to the social and environmental challenges they are facing.

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Net fishing, one of the main activities of the Kanaks, Bélep archipelago, New Caledonia.

The environmental codes of New Caledonia's North Province (2008) and South Province (2009) include exemption principles for the harvesting of protected species for customary ceremonies. These exemptions recognise the symbolic value of certain species, such as the green sea turtle *Chelonia mydas*. However, applying this right is not a straightforward matter, either for the customary authorities responsible for submitting requests, or for the technical officers in the provinces who are responsible for assessing the requests: what constitutes a customary ceremony? How many specimens can be harvested? Who is entitled to make a request?

In order to provide well-founded answers and stimulate discussion, social science research describes and analyses the symbolic representations that local communities have of their environment. In the South Province, for example, a study by anthropologists and geographers, based on interviews with local residents and officials, was carried out prior to the initiation of local consultations. The study identified which customary events required the use of turtles and for what purpose, and analysed changes in these practices over time. The survey also revealed the wide range of misunderstandings that can lead to conflict. This study was presented to the local residents, along with a biological study showing the fragile nature of the turtle population. These presentations helped to shed light on the debate and subsequently to initiate consultation between the provincial and customary authorities to clarify the regulations and discuss the size of the specimens to be harvested.

The Loyalty Islands Province has taken an even more innovative approach, recently opting to establish the Kanak culture and way of life as the basis of its environmental code. To achieve this, it called

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Customary and Environmental Advisory Committee, New Caledonia

New Caledonian Agronomic Institute, New Caledonia

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... In New Caledonia, approaches involving dialogue between scientists and stakeholders (local authorities, customary authorities and local communities) are being tested to improve the regulation of ways in which the environment is used, both on land and at sea ...

on environmental lawyers and a wide range of scientific experts to reconcile existing local management standards with constitutional and international norms.

Drawing on this philosophy of dialogue and backed by scientific expertise, since 2020, representatives of the authorities, fishermen and other industry stakeholders have been working on an innovative joint management system for four species of commercial sea cucumbers, which has since been made official. The system now makes it possible to adapt fishing pressure according to biological and socioeconomic conditions, balancing objectives for both the conservation and use of biodiversity that may seem at odds with each other in the short term.

By incorporating local knowledge and expertise and jointly developing the rules through negotiation, more sustainable choices can be made, which are based on consensus rather than compromise, and which are accepted and integrated into the lifestyle of local communities.



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Green sea turtles *Chelonia mydas*, a protected species, in the Great South Lagoon, New Caledonia.

# OUR SHARED OCEAN

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Children fishing on a reef flat in Reao, French Polynesia. © IRD/S.Andréfouët

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