



# Towards integrated coastal management in Solomon Islands: Identifying strategic issues for governance reform

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## Abstract

This paper evaluates governance arrangements in Solomon Islands in terms of their ability to achieve the integrated management of coastal environments. The paper uses a modified version of the framework proposed by Ehler CN [Indicators in measure governance performance in integrated coastal management. *Ocean & Coastal Management* 2003; 46: 335–345] for evaluating governance performance. The results point to a systemic failure of coastal governance in Solomon Islands. The paper identifies the strategic issues for governance reform if the management of coastal environments and resources in Solomon Islands is to be improved.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper reports on research that utilises insights from policy and institutional analysis to improve the sustainable management of coastal environments in Solomon Islands and to identify strategic issues for governance reform for achieving *integrated* coastal management (ICM). ICM has become widely used as a comprehensive strategy for managing the coastal zone where land and sea interact, seeking to manage both development and conservation, resolve user conflicts and integrate the concerns of all stakeholders [1]. Integration is essential to coastal management because the coast is a space where multiple environments (marine, terrestrial, estuarine) interact, because coastal areas

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must be managed for multiple use, and because multiple claimants and actors across government, civil society and the market are involved in coastal governance [2]. In the coastal zone therefore, the potential for user conflicts, fragmentation or duplication of policy and, therefore, degradation of coastal resources abounds.

## **2. The governance and environmental context in the Solomon Islands**

The Solomon Islands has a population of over 450,000, most of whom dwell on or near the coast of the many islands that comprise the archipelago. The population is increasing rapidly [3]. The bulk of the population subsist on gardening, fishing and hunting [4]. Exports are limited and are dominated by three industries: forestry, agriculture and fishing [3]. Until recently, commercial logging accounted for 45–55% of foreign exchange and 20–30% of foreign revenue [4]. High rates of logging have been maintained, despite falling log prices, and many regard levels of forest destruction as unsustainable [5]. A small agricultural sector—dominated by palm oil, copra, cocoa and coconut oil—is the only form of cash cropping and has been linked to land degradation in densely settled islands [4]. Finally, an export fish industry, which harvested 30,000 tons in 2003 has never attained the biologically sustainable annual catch level of 120,000 tons [3,4].

Solomon Islands is seeking to recover from the economic, social and political implications of a period of major civil disturbance (commonly referred to as “ethnic tensions”) that erupted in 1998 and only subsided in 2003. Finding a sustainable solution to the conflict and its causes is widely recognised as the overriding challenge facing the country [6]. The conflict was so severe that it posed a threat to the viability of Solomon Islands as a nation state. Some have reported it as a failed state [7]. Three aspects of the conflict were particularly troubling in this respect: the near collapse of law and order, the lack of national unity and state legitimacy and the hijacking of the national treasury [6]. Export income collapsed as a result of the conflict [3].

The subjects of this study—governance and environmental (coastal) management—have been identified as significant ingredients in the causes of these conflicts [8]. The complete list of the causes of conflict have been identified as: land ownership, control of political power, human poverty, access to and use of natural resources, settler-indigenous relations and economic competition [8]. Even at this early stage of analysis, it would be difficult to overstate the contextual importance of these events on the subjects of this study. While multilateral intervention in the form of the Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI) has stabilised national politics, suppressed violence and conflict, and provided some confidence in the economic future of the country, it is also clear that both the political elite and the citizenry of the Solomons are still concerned that the sources of tension have not yet been resolved and are still contemplating the shape of their institutional and economic futures. It is also clear complete economic recovery and development represents a considerable challenge [6].

Responding to the causes of the conflict will, of course, take a long time. Many of the causes identified by the UNDP remain important problems. In terms of coastal management, these interdependent problems pose an enormous challenge. A rapidly growing, natural resource dependant population that is poorly served by existing governance arrangements, seeks economic security and development. Conflicts over land ownership, difficulties in supplementing subsistence economies with cash income, serious weaknesses in the national regulatory and policy regime combine to place enormous

pressures on the natural environment. Systemic degradation or exhaustion of the natural assets of the country would, if achieved, undermine the livelihood of the majority of the population and inevitably catalyse further conflict.

A number of substantial environmental pressures and symptoms of environmental decline have been identified in Solomon Islands, including ecosystem degradation (particularly forests, mangroves and in-shore reefs), land degradation (principally from the intensification of swidden agriculture and logging) and declines in marine and freshwater quality from pollution [4,9].

Improving systems of governance in the Solomon Islands, particularly in respect of accountability, transparency and improved citizen participation, is regarded as a key dimension of recovering from the conflict and addressing its causes [6]. Although there are a number of statements of governance goals, the Solomon Islands Government's *National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan* [3] is the most authoritative. It links the recent national conflict with a long-standing concern "with the system of governance in the Solomon Islands", particularly "the sharing and distribution of power at the national and local levels" [3]. The plan suggests that governance in Solomon Islands needs to be improved in five areas:

1. Inclusive, decentralised development.
2. Maintenance of human rights and the rule of law.
3. Transparency in decision-making.
4. Accountability by public officials and other decision-makers.
5. Efficient allocation and management of public resources.

Given widespread acknowledgement of the need for reform of governance in Solomon Islands [6], it should not be surprising that there is a significant discourse about the need for and substance of Constitutional reform. The essence of proposed reform is to create a federal system of government along with a significant decentralisation of authority and resources to regional government [10]. Reflecting trends in thinking the world over, those advocating reform in Solomon Islands seek significant decentralisation of government authority to regional (provincial) government along with substantial regional autonomy. The thinking here is that decentralisation enables governance and policy to be tailored to diverse regional circumstances, improves citizen access to government and therefore the accountability of government and, as a consequence the efficiency and fidelity of government [11]. Recent experience with decentralisation around the world suggests that unless decentralised government architecture is accompanied by the simultaneous devolution of resources (financial and human) and the deliberate development of the capacity of subordinate (regional or local) government, such efforts can fail [11]. The recent experience of Papua New Guinea with incomplete, and therefore suboptimal decentralisation is an apposite example [12].

### **3. Evaluating governance performance in ICM**

ICM is "a continuous and dynamic process that unites government and the community, science and management, sectoral and public interests in preparing and implementing an integrated plan for the "protection and development" of coastal ecosystems and resources" [13]. ICM differs from traditional approaches in that "success depends on

coordination of effort and effective interorganisational linkages for multiple use management” [2]. “Integration” is essential because the coast is a space where multiple environments (marine, terrestrial, estuarine) interact, because coastal areas must be managed for multiple use, and because multiple claimants and actors across government, civil society and the market are involved in coastal governance [2]. The integration agenda is central to ICM. Knecht and Archer [14] suggest that ICM has four distinctive dimensions: (i) intergovernmental (or horizontal) integration, (ii) ecological processes linking terrestrial and marine environments, (iii) intersectoral (or horizontal) coordination of diverse actors, and (iv) interdisciplinary and holistic approach to management.

Achieving the *integrated* management of coasts is, to a substantial degree, a matter of governance. That is, achieving ICM is a matter of the structures and processes which govern the behaviour of the state organisations, private sector corporations, civil society and citizens who are active in and utilise the resources of the coastal zone [15]. In this sense, ICM is the task of arranging and organising these actors, establishing incentives and parameters for their behaviour, and creating circumstances for collaborative behaviour.

ICM is about *governance*, rather than government, because in the complex, multi-jurisdictional domain of environmental management, government is only one category of actor. Environmental management, as with other policy areas, now involves “a collection of interorganisational networks made up of governmental and societal actors with no sovereign actor able to steer or regulate” [16]. A key challenge for government is therefore to enable these networks and seek out new forms of co-operation so as to achieve particular policy objectives.

To understand which elements of a system of governance need improvement or reform, a comprehensive evaluation is required. Given our interest in the integrated management of coastal resources and environments, the primary purpose of this evaluation is to measure the appropriateness and effectiveness of the management system in terms of predefined policy criteria. Does the system as a whole deliver? If not, where are the gaps and what should be done? This study uses indicators for measuring governance performance in ICM developed by Ehler [15].<sup>1</sup> These indicators closely resemble the framework provided by ISO14001 [17] but are more tightly focused around ICM needs. Table 1, below, presents (an adaptation of) Ehler’s [15] framework for evaluating governance performance in the integrated management of coastal resources and environments.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ehler’s indicators for governance in ICM also include indicators for “environmental and socio-economic outcomes” [15]. These indicators related to substantive goals normally associated with ICM such as, for instance, improvements in water quality or the reduction of conflicts over coastal use. These have not been utilised in this study for two reasons. First, work in Solomon Islands to improve the management of coastal resources is so nascent that an evaluation of substantive progress would be premature, and second, because the substantive goals developed in the Solomon Islands are unlikely to conform to universal prescriptions given the unique context that obtains.

<sup>2</sup>Since governance entails the involvement of both state and non-state actors, Ehler’s [15] framework has been adapted by incorporating indicators for the effective articulation and coordination of both formal and informal institutions in management. In Solomon Islands where the institution of customary land and resource ownership is so important, the indicators incorporated primarily relate to customary landowners.

Table 1  
A framework for evaluating governance performance in ICM

Phase	Feature of Governance	Examples of indicators of output/outcome
Initiation	Authority	Enabling legislation, policy or strategy Authority for national or subnational bodies Delineation of roles among levels of government
	Leadership	Agency leadership identified Leaders of constituency groups identified and developed
	Visioning	Consensus built for common vision Linkages between ICM and national development goals
	Formal–informal institutional linkages	Responsibilities of government and customary land/resource owners delineated Effective communication between informal and formal institutions Mechanism to provide independent advice to customary land and resource owners when making resource decisions
	Institutional capacity	Interagency steering group established Scientific/user groups established Training courses for public officials Interagency process and authority defined clearly Coordination among ICM projects and investment assured
	Human resource development	Development of human resources to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate ICM Identification of necessary leadership skills
	Financial resources management	Scaling of financial resources appropriate to institutional capacity Financial contributions to ICM are coordinated
Planning	Planning capacity	Allocation of adequate resources for planning Appropriate staff hired, trained and maintained Baseline studies completed Problems identified, analysed and ranked Management boundaries defined Measurable objectives identified Ability to adapt and react to change Predictive capacity established Participatory planning process established
	Information management capacity	Adaptive information management system established Information is effectively organised, managed and disseminated Public information to information is assured
	Public participation	Effectives stakeholder participation in all phases of ICM
Adoption	Formalisation and support	Legitimate authority(s) agree to adopt plan of action ICM integrated into national environmental management and development programs Plan of action endorsed by constituencies and users Stakeholders actively seek resources to implement plan of action Long-term financial support for ICM
Implementation	Implementation capacity	Clear authority to develop/enforce regulations Appropriate funding available for implementation activities

Table 1 (continued)

Phase	Feature of Governance	Examples of indicators of output/outcome
	Enforcement capacity	Diverse activities among institutions and projects are effectively coordinated Compliance monitoring program in place Appropriate penalties assessed and collected for non-compliance
	Conflict resolution	Mechanisms for resolution of conflicts among agencies Conflicts among users identified and implemented
	Decision-making	Definitive decisions taken Decision makers held accountable for results
Monitoring	Monitoring capacity	Management performance monitoring is operational Appropriate users and communities are involved in monitoring Monitoring and evaluation of social, economic and bio-physical context is operational
Adaptation and reformulation	Evaluation capacity	Outcome indicators used to evaluate performance Evaluation of success/failure of management action fed back into planning Evaluation results used to reallocate resources Evaluation results used to change goals, objectives, management strategies and desired outcomes

Source: Adapted from Ehler [15].

#### 4. Evaluating governance arrangements for ICM in Solomon Islands

Governance arrangements for coastal management are now considered for each of the six stages in the framework presented above. Note that the adequacy of governance arrangements in Solomon Islands are summarily weighed against the indicators; the emphasis here is on sketching the strengths and weaknesses of the entire system so that the *strategic* governance issues can be identified.<sup>3</sup> A basic Likert scale (1–5) is used to express the evaluation of governance performance against each criterion. In this scale, 1 refers to no work undertaken, a value of 2 denotes that some consideration of the issue has occurred, 3 refers to a partial or incomplete response, 4 refers to a complete, if imperfect, performance against the measure, and 5 denotes complete and effective performance against the criterion.

The research presented here was conducted during an intensive period of fieldwork in late 2004. The author reviewed government documents, including policy statements, legislation and governmental strategies. In addition, extensive interviews were conducted with senior government personnel in all relevant Ministries and with key representatives from donor agencies and non-government organisations.

<sup>3</sup>The thinking here is that there can/will be no moment of fundamental or system-wide reform to governance arrangements facilitating ICM; instead, it is more likely (and practical) that efforts can/will be made, step by step, to incrementally improve governance. If this is the case, the task is to identify those issues where attention should first be directed.

#### 4.1. Initiation phase

The “initiation” phase describes the establishment of the policy and institutional framework, or architecture, through which ICM can be pursued. This phase is therefore important in establishing the degree of national commitment to ICM, developing a comprehensive vision for ICM and adjusting institutional and organisational arrangements in order that ICM can be achieved by the coordinated action of both state and non-state actors.

Table 2, below, indicates the performance of Solomon Islands in initiating ICM. It shows that much remains to be done to achieve an ICM strategy and an architecture through which it can be achieved. There is no enabling legislation, policy or strategy for ICM. While an inter-agency working group has been established by IWP, and a committee to coordinate the advice of diverse government actors and other stakeholders has been established (but never actually convened), much remains to be done in the area of inter-governmental and inter-institutional coordination.

Table 2  
Performance in initiating ICM

Feature of Governance	Indicators	Performance
Authority	Enabling legislation	1
	Authority for national or subnational bodies	1
	Delineation of roles among levels of government	2
Leadership	Agency leadership identified	2
	Leaders of constituency groups identified and developed	4
Visioning	Consensus built for common vision	3
	Linkages between ICM and national development goals	1
Formal–informal institutional linkages	Responsibilities of government and customary land/resource owners delineated	1
	Effective communication between informal and formal institutions	1
	Mechanism to provide independent advice to customary land and resource owners when making resource decisions	1
Institutional capacity	Interagency steering group established	4
	Scientific/user groups established	1
	Training courses for public officials	2
	Interagency process and authority defined clearly	2
	Coordination among ICM projects and investment assured	1
Human resource development	Development of human resources to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate ICM	1
	Identification of necessary leadership skills	1
Financial resources management	Scaling of financial resources is appropriate to institutional capacity	1
	Financial contributions to ICM are coordinated	2

Another strategic issue for consideration relates to the need for a consensus for a common vision for ICM. While there is a widespread appreciation of the need for improved, integrated and effective management of coastal environments and resources, there is simultaneously a considerable discourse about the need for fundamental governance reform in Solomon Islands. This discourse links the recent civil disturbances (1998–2003) to fundamental problems in the design and operation of government, and to a wider crisis of legitimacy experience by the Solomon Islands national government.

#### 4.2. *Planning phase*

The planning phase largely concerns the capacity of government to implement a strategy or policy in a coherent and effective way. Two key issues are manifest here: the capacity of government and its use of planning in response to complex public policy problems. Table 3 reports on performance in the planning phase of ICM. The table shows that performance against all governance criteria is low. In other words, the government's ability to develop a strategy such as ICM is limited and it has not undertaken the necessary planning work required for effective management of coastal environments. These are strategic issues for improving ICM in Solomon Islands. If government is to be able to develop an effective ICM strategy, it will attend to some important matters of public administration, including resource allocation among agencies, development of baseline information and the establishment of intergovernmental planning processes.

#### 4.3. *Adoption phase*

“The adoption phase” principally relates to the ability to make considered and coordinated decisions in relation to (existing) plans and operational strategies for the achievement of ICM.

Not surprisingly given the inattention to planning and strategy development revealed in Table 3, Table 4 shows that there has been no adoption of ICM in the Solomon Islands.

Table 3  
Performance in the Planning phase of ICM

Feature of Governance	Indicators	Performance
Planning capacity	Allocation of adequate resources for planning	1
	Appropriate staff hired, trained and maintained	2
	Baseline studies completed	1
	Problems identified, analysed and ranked	2
	Management boundaries defined	1
	Measurable objectives identified	2
	Ability to adapt and react to change	1
	Predictive capacity established	1
	Participatory planning process established	2
Information management capacity	Adaptive information management system established	1
	Information is effectively organised, managed and disseminated	1
	Public access to information is assured	
Public participation	Effectives stakeholder participation in all phases of ICM	1



Table 4  
Performance in the adoption phase of ICM

Feature of Governance	Indicators	Performance
Formalisation and support	Legitimate authority(s) agree to adopt plan of action	1
	ICM integrated into national environmental management and development programs	1
	Plan of action endorsed by constituencies and users	1
	Stakeholders actively seek resources to implement plan of action	2
	Long-term financial support for ICM	1

This is not to say however that diverse government and non-government stakeholders are unaware of the need for action of coastal management issues. The opposite is true: there is widespread agreement that improved management of coastal environments is required. There has been a good deal of national discussion and debate about the effectiveness of existing natural resource management arrangements, and a host of reports (governmental and nongovernmental) suggesting a need for improved environmental management [4,18].

The strategic issue that emergence from Table 4 relates to the link between ICM and national development planning. In a period when the Solomon Islands government is seeking to recover from the disturbances of 1998–2003, there is a troubling lack of articulation between environmental management and economic development imperatives.

#### 4.4. Implementation phase

Table 5 shows that the performance of the governance system in relation to the implementation of ICM is poor. In fact, there is little evidence that ICM is being implemented in Solomon Islands in a *systemic* way. A number of factors are implicated here. First, implementation is inhibited by the lack of effective mechanisms for inter-governmental and inter-institutional coordination. Second, there is a lack of clarity about the respective responsibilities of central and national government and also about the role and rights of customary landowners. Third, the capacity of the key actors in environmental governance is limited, both in terms of human and financial resources. This also limits the ability of the system to implement a coherent and dedicated management strategy. Finally, these factors probably act synergistically: inducing a fear that the problems are too vast and the impediments to developing an effective response too great. This is sometimes expressed as a “lack of leadership” on environmental management questions—such a view is however simplistic—the problem is better understood as the interrelationship between problems of institutional structure and design and the political culture of Solomon Islands.

#### 4.5. Monitoring phase

Monitoring is, of course, crucial to determine if policies and plans are being implemented effectively and to establish whether the objectives of such activities are being met (in ecological, socio-economic and other terms). Table 6 shows that improved commitment to and capabilities in monitoring is an essential ingredient to improved coastal management in the Solomon Islands.

Table 5  
Performance in the implementation phase of ICM

Feature of Governance	Examples of indicators of output/outcome	Performance
Implementation capacity	Clear authority to develop/enforce regulations	2
	Appropriate funding available for implementation activities	1
	Diverse activities among institutions and projects are effectively coordinated	1
Enforcement capacity	Compliance monitoring program in place	1
	Appropriate penalties assessed and collected for non-compliance	2
Conflict resolution	Mechanisms for resolution of conflicts among agencies	1
	Conflicts among users identified and implemented	2
Decision-making	Definitive decisions taken	1
	Decision makers held accountable for results	1

Table 6  
Performance in the Monitoring Phase of ICM

Feature of Governance	Examples of indicators of output/outcome	Performance
Monitoring capacity	Management performance monitoring is operational	1
	Appropriate users and communities are involved in monitoring	1
	Monitoring and evaluation of social, economic and bio-physical context is operational	1

#### 4.6. *Adaptation and reformulation phase*

Adaptation has become, in recent years, a crucial aspect of effective environmental management. As environmental and social conditions change, and as information changes, mechanisms of environmental governance and plans for environmental management need to adapt in order to remain effective. If governance is to be adaptive, an ongoing commitment to system-wide and organisational evaluation is required. Table 7, below, shows that an important tactical reform required in Solomon Islands is for system-wide and organisational evaluation to be routinely conducted and for the results of that evaluation be used to modify existing arrangements, plans and strategies.

### 5. Strategic governance issues

The analysis provided above shows that governance arrangements in Solomon Islands are insufficiently developed—both in terms of structure and important policy and implementation processes—to achieve effective, integrated management of coastal environments. Much needs to be done to achieve ICM. In which areas might one accord priority to reform? Are there strategic, or overarching, governance issues that demand

Table 7  
Performance in the adaptation and reformulation phase of ICM

Feature of Governance	Indicators	Performance
Evaluation capacity	Outcome indicators used to evaluate performance	1
	Evaluation of success/failure of management action fed back into planning	1
	Evaluation results used to reallocate resources	1
	Evaluation results used to change goals, objectives, management strategies and desired outcomes	1

immediate attention? The analysis that follows identifies seven strategic issues for governance reform in Solomon Islands.

### 5.1. Political and institutional priority accorded to environmental issues

In both political and institutional terms, the current priorities revolve around re-building the national economy. According to the Asian Development Bank, between 1998 and 2003, a period marred by civil strife, the national economy shrank by 26% [19]. According to a number of government and civil society personnel interviewed for this study, economic development is also the major priority of the bi-lateral donors, principally AusAid. Senior government officers report that environment is low on the government's list of priorities. One consequence of this is that environment, environmental protection and environment-development issues are not, in the current political milieu accorded a high degree of priority. Given that (a) natural resource production is the mainstay of the national economy, and (b) that subsistence agriculture and fishing, combined with some more intensive resource extractions, continue to economically sustain more than 85% of the population, failure to link environment with development thinking at this early stage of economic re-building is troubling.

The most important document in this respect is the *National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan 2003–2006* [3]. The overall national development goal is “to enhance and improve the quality of life and the living standards of all people in the Solomon Islands” [3]. Sustainability or effective environmental management is not identified as one of the six immediate objectives of the Plan nor identified as one of the key strategic areas of the Plan. The “fine print” of the Plan later accords some priority to sustainable management of fisheries and forestry but, significantly, emphasises the regulation of commercial resource extraction, such as “continuing to monitor, audit and inspect logging operations and shipments” rather than re-thinking resource use and governance arrangements in a more fundamental fashion [3].

It is easy to appear overly-critical in making remarks such as this; Solomon Islands has undergone seismic economic and political shocks and the Plan's focus on the restoration of peace and economic development in the wake of these events is both appropriate and unsurprising. What is missing however is an analysis that links capital-intensive, industrial resource extraction in, say, forestry, to problems of land alienation and inequitable distribution of money and “development”. At least one influential analysis of the causes of

the recent civil disturbances have linked land and natural resource management decisions in a complex chain of causation to the manifest reasons for the conflict [8].

The tenor of economic development thinking is also noteworthy. The national government and major donor agencies such as AusAid seem to be applying orthodox *modernisation* theory combined with *neoliberal* economic prescriptions. That is, development efforts tend to focus on transforming Solomon Island society so as to enable the widespread establishment of export-oriented, mostly natural resource utilising industry generating high levels of cash income. That such a discourse is prominent is not surprising; what is surprising is the lack of discourse about how such an approach to development might need to be modified to be effective in Solomon Islands or the absence of discussion about alternative approaches (such as *postdevelopment*). In the context of this paper, it should be noted that development thinking relies, to a significant extent on natural resource exploitation. While this is inevitable in any development thinking in a country like Solomon Islands, such an approach also requires a highly capable state apparatus to ensure that natural resources are not harvested unsustainably. As we have seen, the Solomon Islands government does not currently have this capacity. Additionally, an emphasis on GDP growth through commercial/industrial natural resource exploitation is unlikely to benefit the vast majority of Solomon Islanders for whom life revolves around custodial lands, village life and subsistence horticulture and fishing.

Finally the tenor of the Government's thinking suggests the environmental limits to population growth and development are not appreciated. The Government's National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan contends that:

Solomon Islands with its relatively large natural resource base can support a much larger population with higher living standards and human well-being than at present. The challenge for Solomon Islands is to increase opportunities and fairly distribute these opportunities for people to improve their living standards. There is no natural resource constraint to achieving this [3].

Investments in ecological inventory, particularly in respect of forest and marine resources might simultaneously modify this thinking and provide important information for resource management and allocation. The extent of this environmental conundrum is best exemplified by logging. The national government has recorded that:

Annual log cuts from virgin forest have averaged 645,000 m<sup>3</sup>/y since 1994, well above the 398,000 m<sup>3</sup>/y figure now considered to be the sustainable rate. At current extraction rates virgin forest will be *exhausted* by 2015 [3, *emphasis added*].

It should be noted that, according to at least one analyst, high, even unsustainable logging in Solomon Islands over the last decade has occurred during a period of falling world prices for logs [5]. This suggests that rather being a model for economic recovery and growth, extensive and intensive commercial resource extraction reflects an absence of genuinely developmental macroeconomic opportunities and a profound dependence on resource extraction for national revenue.

## 5.2. *The architecture of government: fragmentation and coordination*

The public sector has not delivered adequate services because of a failure at both national and sub-national levels to effectively fulfil core government functions of

revenue administration, public expenditure management, and public administration, and because of the poor performance of SOEs [State-Owned Enterprises] in the electricity, water, transport and telecommunications sectors. Improving the performance of central and provincial administrations and public utilities will be fundamental to generating high living standards, especially in rural areas [20].

Obviously a range of factors must be implicated in such an indictment, including staffing, training, organisational “culture” and so on. The design or architecture of government—across all levels—is also a likely culprit.

There were three tiers of government in Solomon Islands—national, provincial and local—however Local Area Councils have been abolished, and the nine Provincial governments, operating under the auspices of the national Ministry of Provincial Government are starved of operating funds. In addition, Solomon Islands’ Constitution recognises customary land and resource ownership and this system operates alongside formal institutional arrangements [21].

This architecture creates a number of difficulties for effective government in Solomon Islands. Government has become highly centralised [8,22]. Governance is dominated by the national government, which, in turn, overwhelmingly focuses its activities and expenditures in the capital, Honiara [22]. The geographic and political focus on Honiara means, inevitably, that outlying areas are less-well served in terms of service delivery and policy implementation and that the populations in these believe that the national government is not accountable to them [8]. Both represent failures of great importance and both have been implicated as causes of the recent civil strife. In terms of environmental management, the geographic focus of policy activities means that the central government cannot hope to be an active regulator of environmental extraction across a diverse archipelago.

The national government is also highly sectoralised and mechanisms for inter-agency (or ‘horizontal’) dialogue, cooperation, coordination and collaboration are highly attenuated.

All government personnel in major environmental/natural resource agencies interviewed for this study report an absence of effective, routine inter-governmental coordinating mechanisms. As a result, individual departments have become isolated and the advice to Cabinet fragmented. As we have seen, the inter-agency committee established by the Environment and Conservation Department has not yet met. Recent reforms proposed for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet will ameliorate this situation. The department is being restructured and three “policy analysts” will be responsible for coordinating advice to Cabinet from a “cluster” of like Ministries. One of these policy analysts—responsible for the productive sector and infrastructure development—will coordinate advice from all natural resource/environmental agencies. While this is an improvement, particularly in terms of the major policy decisions of Cabinet, it is not a substitute for inter-departmental collaboration and coordination in routine policy development and administrative matters.

In addition, the organisation of the organs of the national government exhibits duplication, policy gaps and programmatic fragmentation. Some departments report a lack of clarity in the delineation of responsibility between departments. In environmental management in particular, it is clear that there is a need for a cross-sectoral analysis of those agencies centrally engaged in different aspects of this policy domain, leading to a re-specification and perhaps reconfiguration of responsibilities.

In summary, these problems represent a major constraint on the ability of the national government to link environment and development strategies; they also obviate any potential for *integrated* coastal management.

The organisation of the *vertical* relations of government in Solomon Islands is also problematic. While the relations between national and provincial government, and the national and local levels, will be discussed below, some comment needs to be made at this point on the design and operation of multi-level governance in Solomon Islands. The balance of authority and resources between national and provincial government is weighted very much in favour of national government. Provincial government is empowered by the Constitution and the *Provincial Act* 1997 to act as an agent in governing provinces on behalf of the central government [22]. However, provincial government authority is largely restricted to town planning and civil affairs and more importantly, its resources are limited to grants from the national government and revenue raising powers associated with licensing natural resource harvesting. A major administrative and fiscal imbalance can therefore be observed in the design of the national and provincial government. Local government was provided by Local Area Councils until 1997 when they were abolished. As a result of this architecture, the “reach” of government in terms of the effective control, regulation and management of environment and natural resources is weak, authority is highly centralised and inappropriately scaled.

### 5.3. *Crisis of trust in government and proposals for constitutional reform*

A number of commentators report that there is a crisis of trust in the national government [6,8,22]. The perceived failings of and declining confidence in government was a crucial—and causal—ingredient in the civil unrest of 1998–2003. Poor levels of service delivery, an inability to ameliorate the inequality of distribution socio-economic projects and uneven sharing of development benefits, corruption, and a widespread perception that government has not been responsive to the citizenry are the oft-cited causes of the crisis of trust. These complaints echo a longer-standing call for decentralised governance in Solomon Islands that, in turn, are a response to the systemic failure of local and provincial government (a matter taken up below).

As a result, there is discourse and a movement in Solomon Islands for reform of the Constitution and re-building national governance in a comprehensive and radical way [23]. The provincial premiers conference held in November 2000 unanimously resolved to reform the National Constitution and to move to a federal system of government. Following the resolution by the provincial premiers, the national government adopted a policy of reviewing and reforming the National Constitution through an extensive public consultation process [3]. A draft Constitution [23] has been prepared, and an officer appointed to Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to prosecute the policy.

The draft Constitution proposes a federal system of government for Solomon Islands [23]. The Explanatory Notes accompanying the draft Constitution suggest that citizens have expressed a long-standing desire for regional autonomy:

[t]hey have done so at various times and intensities both pre and post Independence but more recently noted as a term of the Townsville Peace Agreement, as a resolution of the meeting of Premiers at Buala in 2000, as a recommendation of the State Taskforce Report 2001 and through community consultations in 2003 [24].

The design of the proposed Constitution is an explicit response to the current failings of the current, unitary system of government:

The concept of one supreme law making body, the National Parliament, is perceived inappropriate given the diverse nature of the country, both geographically and ethnically, and given the varied political aspirations of the provinces. What ever residual value the unitary model might possess it is large perceived as a discredited system of government [24].

The thinking behind this movement is impressive. The motives for it are not questionable. However, the bi- and multi-lateral donor agencies appear, at best, agnostic about the direction of change. There are, obviously, significant intellectual, institutional, political and, last but far from least, financial implications of the proposed changes that deserve careful consideration. It is difficult to gauge how committed the national government is to the reform process. A degree of ambivalence can be observed. While the *National Economic Recovery, Reform and Development Plan* appears to provide a commitment to Constitutional reform and decentralised democratic governance, its also commented that:

Whilst the process of constitutional review and reform has proceeded quite rapidly and much attention and effort have been put into it, *there has been less focus on the implication of the federal system and the operational aspects of implementing it.* Furthermore, having a new structure of government does not necessarily solve problems of good governance in the country. These problems are present at both national and provincial government levels and will continue to persist under a federal system of government unless particular attention is given to deal with them and to enforce the principles of good governance [3, *emphasis in original*].

There are then, two reformist agendas being played out in Solomon Islands: the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) is concerned with reforming the organisation and administration of the national government and a broader, national movement seeking Constitutional reform. It is not for this report to predict the outcome or to evaluate the efficacy of either project. Instead, it should be noted that there are alternatives to RAMSI's "machinery of government" approach that focuses on the national government and eschews a concern for *governance* in the broader sense, and the decentralisation proposals currently being discussed. Addressing the vertical fiscal imbalance that impoverishes the Provinces, for instance, would rejuvenate the possibilities of regional government. Additionally, the national government might consider *deconcentration*—i.e. creating a stronger regional presence in order to help it deliver policy and services into all parts of the country. Third, creating local government built on existing cultural institutions is another possible option worthy of consideration.

#### 5.4. Centre—local relations

The efficacy of relations between central and subordinate (provincial and/or local) levels of government (centre—local relations) is a crucial determinant of good (environmental) governance. While there are a number of different approaches to organising centre—local relations, the typical approach is to limit the number of concurrent powers (or responsibilities) so that duplication, waste and the potential for inter-governmental



conflict is reduced. Where there are concurrent powers, the particular functions of each level of government need to be clarified. The principle of *subsidiarity* is widely used to determine the respective administrative responsibilities of each level of government [25]. Subsidiarity is the concept that political decisions and actions should be carried out at the most appropriate level of government and as closely as possible to the communities and citizens affected by that administrative issue. For example, using the subsidiarity principle, urban planning is typically handled by local government because that level of government is closest to the communities concerned about and affected by urban planning decisions. Trade and foreign affairs, by contrast, are typically functions of national government because these are matters of concern for the entire nation.

Centre–local institutional relations in Solomon Islands have been very poorly designed and are barely operational. The failure of centre–local relations has two strategic implications. First, it increases the importance of the national government to deliver most or all of the functions required of government: the establishment and maintenance of the governmental system, the administration of matters of national policy concern *and* service delivery at regional and local scales. Reports of the failures in service delivery are widespread [6,22] and have been linked to the growing crisis of trust in government and, therefore, to the civil disturbance of 1998–2003 [8]. Second, it tends to lead to the centralisation of government that, in turn, tends to make government remote from a diverse citizenry. Communities, particularly in geographically remote communities feel unable to participate in government and perceive that government is not accountable to them. This problem has, in turn, been linked to widespread corruption by government officials, particularly in the areas of environmental management [6,8].

The failings of centre–local relations are three. First, The formal institutions of central government and the informal institutions at the local scale (the system of customary land and resource ownership and social organisation) barely articulate. In terms of institutional design, ensuring the effective articulation of informal and formal institutions of governance is a wickedly difficult problem. However, in the Solomon Islands the problem is of some magnitude, particular in the area of environmental management. In this policy domain, the national government has regulatory ambitions in relation to natural resource management, while customary landowners dispute the legitimacy of such regulation and resist it. There is in other words, an institutional disconnect between the regulatory ambitions of national government and the customary sovereignty of landowners. This is a matter taken up in greater detail below.

Second, the problem of formal–informal institutional linkages is exacerbated by the absence of local-level government. “Local government” in the form of Area Councils, which provided a means of articulation between village-level society and Provincial Government, was abolished in 1998; nothing replaced it. There is therefore is no formal or systemic link between provincial government and the village-living subsistence population. This contributes to the incapacitation of Provincial Government because, in some regions, the provincial centre is as remote to local landowners as Honiara.

The third failing in centre–local relations is the relative impoverishment of Provincial Government. There is a major vertical fiscal imbalance between the national and provincial levels government in Solomon Islands that impedes effective governance at the regional scale [6]. Provincial government is reported to be barely surviving financially through the sale of business licenses for logging and trickle of funds from national government [22]. For a host of reasons, including the limited “reach” of national



government, the culturally and geographically diverse character of the region, the importance of making government accessible and accountable to its citizens, the absence of effective regional government represents a fundamental constraint on effective governance in the Solomon Islands.

### 5.5. *Customary resource sovereignty, government and environmental management*

Sustainable coastal management inevitably entails the tenurial status of coastal land and in-shore marine areas because ownership largely determines where authority for resource management resides. A large proportion (estimated, variously, at between 85% and 90%) of land and (in-shore) marine areas in the Solomon Islands are customarily owned by family groups or clans living in the subsistence, village-living population [4]. This pattern of land and resource ownership is central to the culture and traditions of the society, and also is responsible for providing the population its subsistence economy and a high degree of resilience to withstand economic perturbation.

A typical rendition of resource management rights and responsibilities in Solomon Islands is: “local clan groups led by chiefs hold land and sea areas under customary tenure and are able to control rights of access, use and development of resources” [18]. *Legally* and constitutionally, however, the situation is more complex: natural resources are vested in the people of the Solomon Islands *and* their government [21]. This degree of legal ambiguity does not appear to be widely appreciated—the resource sovereignty of customary landowners is the dominant refrain. This creates a “culture” in which government regulation of customary-held land and resources is limited and in which customary landowners have largely unfettered decision-making rights.

This situation creates some important complexities for good (environmental) governance:

1. The village living, subsistence population is materially poor and in need of a cash income. The natural resources they control constitute their major source of food and their only source of capital. Their (financial) impoverishment and their resource sovereignty create a structural force for unsustainable resource decisions. There is considerable concern in Solomons, and in the grey and academic literatures, that logging and some marine products are being harvested unsustainably: local people are trading their natural assets for cash [4,18].
2. Central government’s ability to *regulate* the natural resource decisions of customary landowners is limited by their perceived resource sovereignty.
3. This creates a situation in which it is widely perceived that government has limited regulatory power and in which the regulatory efforts of the national government are resisted at the local level. In turn, this causes the national government to largely devote its environmental policy and management activities to: (i) raising “community awareness”, (ii) providing frameworks or strategies for improved environmental management by local landholders (community-based environmental management (CBEM), principally), and (iii) licensing extractive industries.

Each of these approaches has disadvantages. First, the transaction costs of the first two approaches are very high and the results likely only to be realised in the long term and hard to measure. Second, work in CBEM is largely restricted to a series of a-systemic projects largely provided by civil society or donors. If CBEM were to be a major aspect

of environmental governance, systemic institutional reforms would be required to: (i) provide legally clear, coordinate rights to “communities”; (ii) distinguish between rights and responsibilities of communities from the responsibilities and powers of the state, and (iii) enable the two domains of governance to articulate. Third, the licensing activities of central and provincial government are bedevilled by a host of problems, including:

- a. Corruption because of wider problems in public administration;
  - b. Government’s knowledge of the extent of a given resource (trochus, forest, tuna) is limited and the harvesting quotas it establishes are therefore not well founded (see Hunnam et al., 2001 [18]);
  - c. Most importantly, the crucial aspect of a licensing regime is the ability to monitor the compliance of the licensee with the terms and conditions of the licence—capability in this regard is very poor. Monitoring is haphazard rather than systematic and it is poorly resourced [18].
4. There is no (formal, systemic) mechanism to ensure landowners contemplating commercial deals with logging or fishing companies have access to necessary legal, environmental and financial advice to assist in their decision-making. The potential for the cynical exploitation of customary landowners by resource extractive industries is therefore significant. As Hunnam and others [18] report: “it is virtually impossible for local communities and artisanal fishers to access advice, training, financing, or other assistance that would be useful for managing and developing sustainable local fisheries and markets, and for managing and conserving sites and stocks” [18].

### 5.6. *Capacity of environmental governance*

Environmental governance and, in particular, coastal governance in Solomon Islands suffers from problems of capacity in government. Staffing levels, expertise, infrastructure and operational budgets in many line agencies of the central government (and in provincial) government are insufficient to cope with dimensions and complexity of the (rising) challenges of coastal management. The salaries of government personnel account the majority of public revenues leaving line agencies with very little to deliver needed services and a poor operational budget to carry out their legislative and programmatic responsibilities [3]. An indication of the limited capacity of government in the area of environmental management is provided by the observation that there is no region- or locality-specific, or sector-specific (e.g. fisheries) integrated planning currently underway or recently completed in the country. There is also an issue with the “capacity” of staff to provide sound advice (legal, social, economic, biological) to government in the framing of new policy.

Additionally, customary land ownership vests considerable decision-making authority in the subsistence, village population of the country. The capacity of these actors to make coherent and considered decisions about the natural resources that they control is undermined by (i) the absence of a mechanism that enables them to access advice (legal, financial, ecological) when making natural resource decisions, and (ii) poor vertical relations of governance which impede the flow of information and other assistance from government to community.

Of course, like other countries, civil society in Solomon Islands is active in environmental policy and management [8,18,21]. The principal organisations include a

series of transnational environmental organisations and the Church. Many of these organisations bring to the country considerable resources, technical assistance and strategic environmental thinking. However, the benefit of their work is undermined by the national government's ability to harness their energy and coordinate their work. This in turn reflects the training needs of key national government agencies such as the Environment and Conservation Department.

## **6. Conclusion**

The “ethnic tensions” of 1998–2003 signalled to neighbours and donors the near-systemic failure of governance in Solomon Islands [8]. In a natural resource economy dominated by (i) subsistence horticulture and fishing, and (ii) resource extraction (logging, fishing, mining), the problems of governance could have grave, long-term consequences for the environment and for social equality and well-being. This paper demonstrates that current governance arrangements are insufficient to achieve the integrated, sustainable management of coastal environments and fisheries. The failure of governance in this respect is systemic.

The research presented here has also sought to identify the major strategic governance issues requiring reform. Efforts to achieve ICM without attention to these strategic problems of governance are unlikely to bear fruit. Attention, therefore, needs to be directed towards:

1. The policy attention afforded environmental management and sustainability in the work of national and provincial governments as well as major donor agencies;
2. A review of the architecture of the national government so as to reduce organisational fragmentation, increase administrative coordination and, therefore, enhance policy coherence and efficacy;
3. A review of the vertical relations of governance; i.e. the relations between the national government and provincial government so as to overcome the current policy and fiscal imbalance;
4. The institutional and administrative relations between government (at all scales) and customary landowners also needs review and reform leading to (i) clarity of respective rights and responsibilities, (ii) improved ability of the government to intervene on matters of national environmental importance, and (iii) a mechanism to ensure customary landowners have access to advice prior to making important natural resource use decisions;
5. These measures must be accompanied by an ongoing national dialogue about the reform of governance so as to improve accountability, transparency, equity and accessibility; failure to do so will exacerbate the existing crisis of trust in government; and
6. The capacity of all actors in environmental governance, but particularly the capacity of government, needs to be improved by additional training and resources.

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