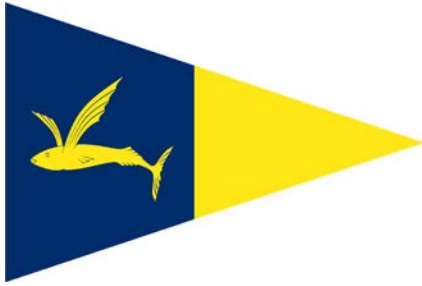


OCC Environmental update



Stormy weather ahead. © C.Speedie/Wave Action

If any reminder was needed, 2015 has already served up two major warnings that should be of concern to OCC cruisers. The first is a worrying heads-up on the state of ocean ecosystems, the second a more direct one in the form of Cyclone Pam that has just devastated the Pacific islands of Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

The recent [publication of a paper in the prestigious US journal Science](#) that has for the first time pulled together data from a variety of disciplines to show how human activity has affected ocean ecosystems, and used that accumulated knowledge to predict how those activities will affect the health of the oceans in the future. And the prediction is that without major remedial action on a widespread scale, we may be on the brink of a mass extinction event in the oceans similar to that seen terrestrially during the industrial revolution.

The existing culprits – overfishing, loss of vital nursery habitat such as mangroves, damage to the seabed from bottom trawling – are well known, but these are being exacerbated by emerging threats such as climate change that may be responsible for the 40% reduction in coral reefs around the world. Looking to the future, warming is likely to cause further damage through changes in ocean chemistry such as increased acidity, and adoption of new technologies that will allow seabed mining on a large scale, may cause serious pollution of previously pristine areas.

However, lead author Dr. Douglas McCauley and his co-authors agree that the situation is not without hope, and there are positive actions that can be taken to slow and even reverse some of the worst effects. As Dr. McCauley says ‘there are a lot of tools we can use. We better pick them up and use them seriously’.

Cyclone Pam began as a tropical depression east of the Solomon Islands, but steadily developed into a Cyclone, eventually reaching Category 5 status with a maximum wind speed of 155 mph. A storm surge battered Tuvalu, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency as 45% of the population was displaced from their homes. Many areas were

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badly affected by torrential rainfall, but the worst effects were felt in the eastern Solomon Islands (the Temotu group) and the tiny nation of Vanuatu.

This is an area in which yacht based NGO OceansWatch [has been active for several years](#), developing community based programmes to manage and protect coral reefs and develop climate change mitigation measures. As such they are well placed to evaluate with the local community on what positive actions to bring life in the islands back to some semblance of normality are needed, and actions are in hand. OceansWatch CEO Chris Bone has just issued the following statement:

OceansWatch to aid cyclone Pam victims

Cyclone Pam has left a huge amount of damage in its wake through the North East Solomon Islands (Temotu) and Vanuatu. Some lives lost, many houses damaged or completely destroyed. Fruit trees gone, gardens washed away or covered in debris, just root crops left in most instances. In Vanuatu the emergency has been big enough to trigger International Aid, so whilst the job is massive, already hundreds of volunteers and many planes are arriving with Aid supplies. Temotu has been affected as badly as Vanuatu, but as less people live there it has not triggered an International Aid effort, leaving the communities there with little help. As I write a week after the cyclone hit them disaster teams have not arrived and OceansWatch are the only group to have done an on the ground assessment. OceansWatch, being a relatively small organisation feels that it would be best to have a larger impact in Temotu than a small impact over the whole of Vanuatu so we are currently concentrating our efforts in Temotu. We will also help the more inaccessible northern group of Islands in Vanuatu if they have unmet Aid needs.

OceansWatch New Zealand is collecting funds for the cyclone relief effort and is being guided as to how the money should be spent by their Solomon Islands directors. To date funds have used to pay for a needs assessment of Fenualoa Island, where we have a good knowledge of all villages and a strong network. Communities there need tarpaulins and emergency food now. They also need chain saws to clear fallen trees from houses and gardens, seeds to replant and some roofing iron for their water tank catchments. We expect other agencies to supply the tarpaulins and the government is arranging emergency food supplies. OceansWatch has decided to provide chainsaws, so that villages can make an immediate start to clearing and replanting. All safety gear and petrol will also be provided. We shall supply a chainsaw mill too so that bigger trees can be utilised for re-building supplies. We are also paying for local seeds to be sent from Honiara so that replanting can begin as soon as possible.

As soon as the cyclone season is over and it's safe to depart New Zealand, OceansWatch yachts and cruising yachts supporting our cause will be departing New Zealand loaded with Aid supplies and specialist teams to help our friends get back on their feet again and to develop resilience to future negative climate change impacts.

In 2015, to support community resilience OceansWatch will:

Undertake marine surveys to gauge the effect of the cyclone and to locate the best possible places for resilient marine reserves. We work closely with local resource owners when doing this work as part of our Reef Guardian Program

Undertake C

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Change community needs assessments and adaptation plans to help these vulnerable communities adapt to the effect of Climate Change and climate induced disasters such as Cyclone Pam.

Assist in the development of Sustainable Livelihood projects so that communities can self fund their own adaptation strategies and development.

OceansWatch needs funds to support our cyclone relief work (ALL donations go directly to fund our aid work, nothing is spent on wages or admin) and we also need people with yachting experience to assist us in New Zealand right.

OceansWatch is a registered charity in New Zealand, the Solomon Islands, the USA and the UK. More information about our work is available at our website www.oceanswatch.org Our cyclone relief fundraiser is here <https://givealittle.co.nz/cause/cyclonepamrelief>

OceansWatch offices can be contacted for comment at operations@oceanswatch.org, Skype skipperchrisbone or phone +64 9 4344066

If any OCC members are able to help with refit work in New Zealand, or assist with skippering OceansWatch yachts he would love to hear from you, and there may also be possibilities for OCC crews planning to visit the affected areas to carry equipment and supplies once the community have established what is required. If you can help, please get in touch with Chris direct via the above contacts.

Colin Speedie

S/V Pèlerin