

is standard practice in many other disciplines such as economics and within day to day living. The environment is relied upon for the survival of the human race. Life would not be possible without air, water and food that all come from and are sustained by natural systems. It would seem obvious then, that these systems would be something to treat with great precaution. All too often however, precaution is not

applied. One reason could be that there is confusion surrounding the application of the principle. If this is the case, then Adrian Deville and Ronnie Harding have produced an important book. More likely however, the reason that precaution is not standard practice is that the environment is not a priority within government policy. Unfortunately this is not a problem that can be solved by books.

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## Tropical Pacific Island Environments

**Christopher S. Lobban and Maria Schefter,**  
**Pen-and-ink drawings by Rick L. Castro, 1997**  
**Guam University Press, Guam**  
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THE Pacific island region comprises a large and ecologically diverse area of the Earth, but is fragile and highly sensitive to environmental change. On some islands 80% or more of the species are endemic. These species are particularly vulnerable due to their geographic and ecological isolation. It is an area where local cultures conflict with Western development, leading to a myriad of environmental and social problems. Impacts affecting the Pacific islands include international mining, rising sea levels, land degradation, logging, toxic waste contamination of land and ocean, and contamination from nuclear testing. The extent of these problems has yet to gain international attention. Low education and communication standards in the region mean that many of the local people are not aware of environmental problems. Island governments have little political will to legislate to protect the environment. An exception is the Sustainable Development Bill that has been drafted recently in Fiji.

*Tropical Pacific Island Environments* is a book about the islands, the people, the ecosystems, and the social, political and cultural issues of the Pacific region. Christopher Lobban and Maria Schefter create a picture of the Pacific islands from a wide number of perspectives which portray the uniqueness of the local environment. They moved to the island of Guam nine years ago where they became teachers at the University of Guam. Maria came with an environmental background and Chris with scientific training that they have combined with their local experiences in writing this book. The book was written as a text for students studying ecology on the Pacific islands, but it is also intended to be a resource for scientists, government, legislators and the private sector. It is particularly useful for students of the Pacific as it uses local examples to illustrate ecological concepts.

Connecting ecology with local issues is the first, but not the only objective. Trying to show how the process of science operates to solve environmental problems was also important. Although the book could be criticized for the simplicity with which it sometimes portrays science, specific problems are well connected with the broader scientific field. The book was "guided in the writing process by both environmental ethics and cultural ethics." The environmental ethic it promotes is of people as part of nature and is therefore one of long-term sustainability. The strong connection with local issues and local people is successful in painting this picture.

The layout of the book gives the reader the impression that they are being taken on a journey through the islands. The journey begins with a series of colour plates that provide a useful overview, helping to see connections between sections. The first part then deals with ecology and the second with environmental issues. A typical chapter begins with an ecological concept, and real-life examples and experiences. It then relates these examples and experiences to the scientific framework.

A comparison to other ecology texts reveals a lack of hard and theoretical ecology and a dominance of applied concepts and examples. The book is therefore useful as a simple ecology text, but not for those seeking a more detailed theoretical understanding. There is also a lack of depth and critical analysis of the sources of information used to write the book. This means that the book is of limited value to scientists and authorities looking for references on Pacific island ecology and environmental issues.

The lack of environmental awareness in the Pacific region is what makes this book important. Increased knowledge of the importance of the environment by government and the local people in the Pacific is the first step to solving the difficult environmental problems the region faces. International attention on the islands should be focused on their value as ecological and cultural refuges, not as nuclear test sites or places to exploit timber and fisheries. Hopefully, this book will encourage the people of the Pacific to realize the importance of their environment and to stand up to protect it.

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