

# VANUATU

## FISHERIES REGULATIONS

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## FOREWORD

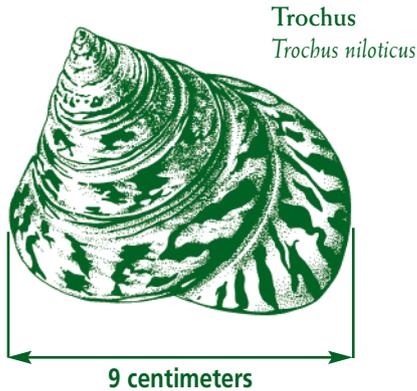
This information is to help acquaint marine resources users with the main national laws pertaining to fishing in Vanuatu's domestic waters.

This document is not a legal text. References to the legal texts are given with each law cited in this booklet. The full text of the laws and rules is available for review at the of Fisheries Department office. This information is current at the date of printing (November 2003) and subject to change. If questions arise concerning this document, please contact the Vanuatu Fisheries Department (see contact on p. 25).

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# Trochus



2 Trochus are marine snails. They live in shallow waters and move very slowly, meaning they can easily be collected and so, overfished. This is why in Vanuatu, this important commercial species has been protected by different regulations for many years.

Trochus are mature (able to reproduce) only when they attain a size of 9 cm (the measure taken across the base of the shell, see diagram); at this size they are approximately three years old. To give trochus a chance to reproduce at least once, Vanuatu fishing regulations protect all trochus smaller than 9 cm in diameter.

Reproduction occurs when males release their sperm and females release their eggs at the same time in the surrounding seawater. A female trochus can produce up to 1 million eggs in one spawning. Eggs drift for three to ten days while going through the different stages of development. Out of the 1 million eggs produced by the female, less than 100 survive and find shelter on the reef.

Trochus graze on the surface of rocks and reefs to feed on algae, primarily green and brown varieties.

Trochus is mainly harvested for its valuable shell (mother-of-pearl), which is used to make buttons for top-quality shirts by the fashion industry in Europe and Asia. Trochus meat is also a food source in Vanuatu.

Because trochus shells can be stored for extended periods of time, they constitute one of the rare cash-income opportunities for fishing communities living in places where transport is scarce. If young trochus are left in peace, this fragile resource will have a chance to survive for future generations, continuing to bring cash income to remote fishing communities.

Also, to further control the trochus fishery, Vanuatu fisheries regulations oblige all people willing to export trochus shells to obtain written permission from the Minister. In recent years, the export of raw trochus shells has not been authorised by the Ministry, in order to help Vanuatu's mother-of-pearl shell button-making industry.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 17

**17.2** No person shall harm, take, have in his possession, sell or purchase any trochus shell which is less than 9 centimetres in diameter when measured across the base.

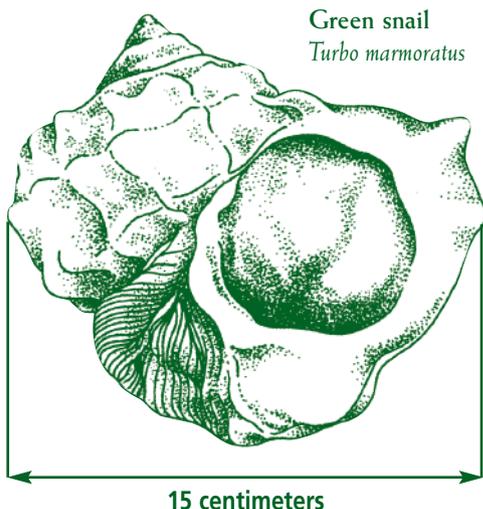
**17.3** No person shall export trochus shells except with the written permission of the Minister and in accordance with the conditions as he may specify.

**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000**.



# Green snail



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Green snails are turban shells, and can be found on reefs in water less than 20 meters.

Green snails grow very slowly. Studies have shown that green snails are mature (able to reproduce) when they are four years old. At this age, their shell length is 13–15 cm. To protect young green snails until they are able to reproduce, Vanuatu fisheries regulations forbid taking green snails less than 15cm long (see diagram).

Reproduction occurs when males release their sperm and females release their eggs at the same time in the surrounding seawater. One female green snail can produce several million eggs during one spawning. After the eggs are released, they drift in the open ocean while going through different stages of development. Only a tiny number of the hundreds of thousands of eggs released survive and are carried back to a reef.

Green snails feed mostly at night, by grazing on rocks and reefs for algae, especially green and red varieties.

Green snail shells are used for decorative inlay work and to make buttons for top-quality shirts. Green snail meat is a food source in Vanuatu.

To control the exploitation of green snails, Vanuatu fisheries regulations oblige all people willing to export green snail shells to obtain written permission from the Minister. In recent years, the export of raw green snail shells has not been authorised by the Ministry, in order to help Vanuatu's mother-of-pearl shell button-making industry.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 16

**16.2** No person shall harm, take, have in his possession, sell or purchase any green snail which is less than 15 centimetres in length when measured in its longest dimension (see diagram).

**16.3** No person shall export green snails except with the written permission of the Minister and in accordance with such conditions as he may specify.

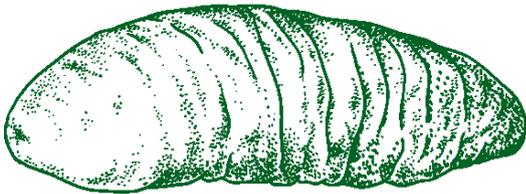
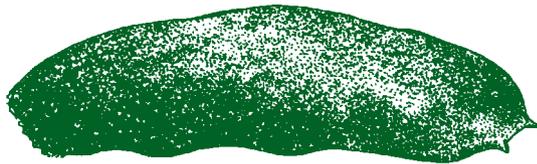
**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000**.

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# Sea cucumbers (beche-de mer)



In Vanuatu, sea cucumbers are mostly found on sandy or muddy bottoms.

Reproduction occurs when males release their sperm and females release their eggs at the same time in the surrounding seawater. It takes many sea cucumbers gathering in the same place for the reproduction to be successful. In Vanuatu, sea cucumber reproduction occurs during the warmer summer months, particularly February.

Sea cucumbers are important to the lagoon environment because they scavenge on the reef and turn over the sand on the lagoon floor, preventing the build-up of decaying organic matter, and assisting in the release of nutrients that would otherwise be locked up under layers of sediment.

Sea cucumbers are easily collected by fishermen. Their overexploitation could have severe consequences for the whole reef.

Sea cucumbers in Vanuatu are exploited and processed as beche-de-mer (dried sea cucumber) for export, mainly to Asian markets. To keep a control on beche-de-mer exports, Vanuatu fisheries regulations require beche-de-mer exporters to obtain written permission from the Minister.

## **FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982**

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 23

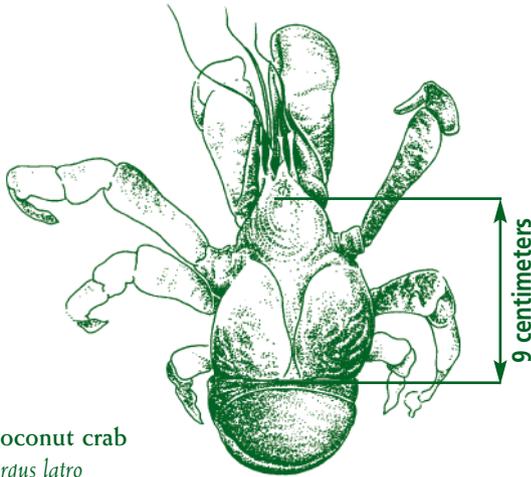
**23.** No person shall export any beche-de-mer except with the written permission of the Minister and in accordance with such conditions as he may specify.

**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000.**



# Coconut crab



Coconut crab  
*Birgus latro*

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The coconut crab is the largest of the land crabs and can grow up to a weight of four kilograms. Adult coconut crabs live almost exclusively on land; however, as with most species of crabs, its larval life is spent in the sea.

In Vanuatu, coconut crab laying occurs between March and December. Females carry approximately 100,000 eggs for three weeks, a time during which they must leave their "normal" habitat to go back towards the shore where they look for a place with high humidity, access to fresh and salt water, abundance of holes and crevices, and protection from sun and wind. The eggs are released in the sea where they drift for several weeks before a very small number of newly formed crabs crawl back to the shore.

Coconut crabs are omnivorous (they feed on plants and animals), feeding mainly on the fruits of pandanus, breadfruit and coconut trees. They have also been observed feeding on dead rats, birds and crabs.

Coconut crabs grow very slowly and have a much greater longevity than most other crustaceans, as they can live up to 60 years. This is why they need to be protected. To give the remaining coconut crab population of Vanuatu the best chances to reproduce successfully, Vanuatu fisheries regulations aim to protect females carrying eggs and individuals with a carapace narrower than 9 cm (see diagram), which may be too young to have already reproduced.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 15

**15.2** No person shall harm, take, have in his possession, sell or purchase:

- a. any coconut crab carrying eggs; or
- b. any coconut crab which is less than 9 centimetres in length.

**15.3** No person shall remove the eggs from a coconut crab or have in his possession, sell or purchase a coconut crab from which the eggs have been removed.

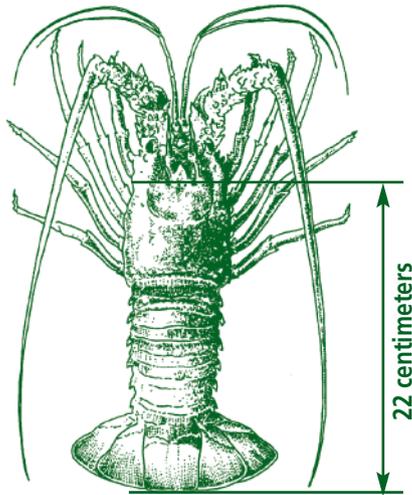
**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000**.

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# Rock lobsters



Rock lobsters live in narrow reef crevices. They feed mostly during the night on animal and plant debris, helping to keep the reef clean.

Rock lobsters reproduce year round, but mostly during the warm season (October to February). After mating with a male, a female rock lobster carries the eggs for three to four weeks before releasing them in the open ocean. Eggs drift for 4–12 months while going through the different stages of development. Only a tiny number of the thousands of eggs released survive and are carried back to a reef.

To help lobsters reproduce successfully, Vanuatu fisheries regulations protect all females carrying eggs and all rock lobsters that are less than 22 cm in length (see diagram) and too young to reproduce.

Rock lobsters should not be speared because the meat of a speared lobster will turn bad very quickly and become dangerous to consume.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 13

**13.2** No person shall harm, take, have in his possession, sell or purchase:

- a. any rock lobster carrying eggs; or
- b. any rock lobster which is less than 22 centimetres in length (see diagram).

**13.3** No person shall spear or attempt to spear a rock lobster.

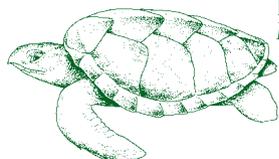
**13.4** No person shall remove the eggs from a rock lobster or have in his possession, sell or purchase a rock lobster from which the eggs have been removed.

**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000**.



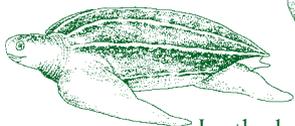
# Turtles



Hawksbill turtle  
*Eretmochelys imbricata*



Green turtle  
*Chelonia mydas*



Leatherback turtle  
*Dermochelys coriacea*

The two most commonly found turtles in Vanuatu are the hawksbill turtle and the green turtle.

The hawksbill turtle is relatively small, weighing around 60 kg. Its shell is about 90 cm, and has plates (called scutes) that overlap each other. The hawksbill has a pointed hooked beak and feeds mainly on soft coral, sponges, crustaceans and cephalopods.

The green turtle is bigger, weighing around 145 kg. The green turtle shell is about 110 cm long, and has well-separated plates (scutes). Young green turtles feed on algae and sea grass, adults mostly feed on small crabs and shellfish.

On very rare occasions, a leatherback turtle can be seen in Vanuatu's waters. The leatherback turtle is the biggest of all sea turtles, measuring 1.7 m and weighing 450 kg on average. It has no visible shell like other turtles; its back looks like leather with black and white spots and seven longitudinal ridges. Leatherback turtles are the most endangered of all sea turtles and should never be harmed or fished.

Fishermen and research scientists around the world have noticed a dramatic decrease in the numbers of sea turtles, which are considered to be in danger of extinction worldwide. In Vanuatu, we are currently at a point where we are in danger of losing the turtles that we value so much. It is therefore essential that the regulations are understood and respected by all.

It takes 20 to 50 years for turtles to mature (be able to reproduce). In Vanuatu, female turtles lay eggs from September to January. The female turtle goes ashore at night to lay her eggs in the sand. The eggs remain there for 7 to 12 weeks before hatching. During the hatching, if the sand is warm, many of the baby turtles will be females; if the sand is cool, there will be more male turtles out of a nest. Young turtles coming out of a nest face many natural dangers: birds and crabs eat them when they are still on the beach, sharks and fish prey on them once they reach the ocean. Out of 100 eggs laid by a female turtle, only one or two will become adult turtles. It is very important that Vanuatu people respect the regulations and do not disturb turtle nests or take turtle eggs.

Sea turtles come back to the place where they were born to lay their eggs. So, turtles born in Vanuatu will come back to Vanuatu even after very long journeys to far distant waters. If Vanuatu people continue to catch female turtles when they are on land, and take their eggs from the nests in the sand, they will put future generations of Vanuatu turtles in great danger of extinction.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

### Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 21

#### 21.1 (1) No person shall:

- (i) disturb, take, have in his possession, sell or purchase any turtles eggs;
- (ii) interfere with any turtle nest; or
- (iii) sell, purchase or export any turtle or the shell thereof of the species *Eretmochelys imbricata*, known as the hawksbill turtle.

### OFFENCES - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

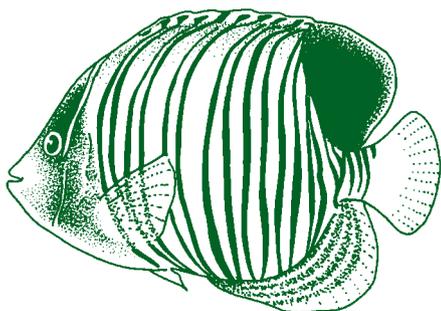
24. Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000.**



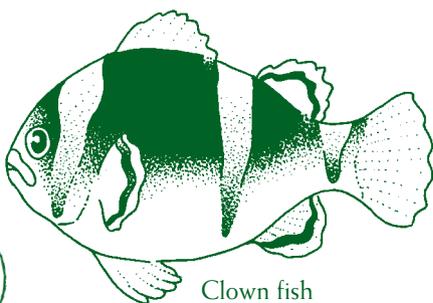
# Aquarium fish



Saddle butterflyfish



Royal angelfish



Clown fish

Aquarium species include dozens of reef fish species but also anemones, jellyfish, sponges, crustaceans and molluscs. They are usually the first species encountered by divers in shallow waters and as such, they are very important to the tourist industry of Vanuatu.

If carefully managed, a sustainable industry based on the collection of aquarium species for export can be developed in Vanuatu. To control the exploitation of aquarium species, Vanuatu fisheries regulations oblige all persons wanting to export aquarium species to request written permission from the Minister. And, as with any other commercial activity done in Vanuatu's nearshore waters, all aquarium species collecting must be done in full agreement with customary land owners.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 20

**20.1** No person shall export marine aquarium fish except with the written permission of the Minister and in accordance with conditions as he may specify.

**20.2** A permission granted under this regulation shall not affect any obligation to reach agreement with custom land owners regarding the use of land and waters for the catching of aquarium fish.

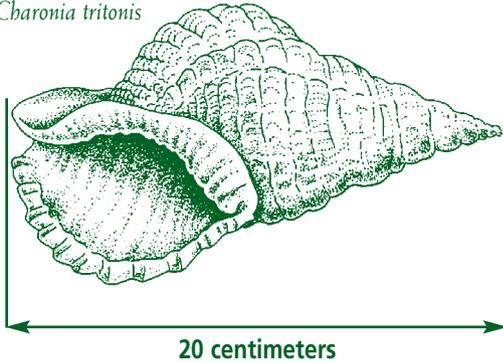
**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000.**



# Trumpet shell

Trumpet shell  
*Charonia tritonis*



## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 18

**18.2** No person shall harm, take, have in his possession, sell or purchase any trumpet shell which is less than 20 centimetres in length when measured along the outside of the shell from one end to the other as shown on the illustration.

**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000**.

16

The trumpet shell is the largest marine snail in Vanuatu's waters. It is collected for its extremely beautiful shell, which can be sold to tourists or used as a traditional musical instrument.

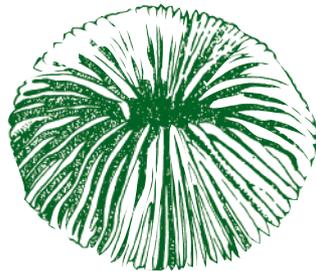
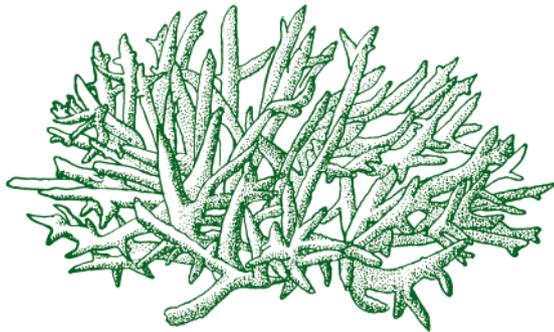
The trumpet shell is a carnivorous shellfish. It is very useful to the reef as it is one of the rare predators of the crown-of-thorn starfish (*Acanthaster planci*), which feeds on live coral and can destroy big areas of reef. It has been observed that in areas where the trumpet shell population is healthy, there are no outbreaks of crown-of-thorn starfish.

To protect the trumpet shells, Vanuatu fisheries regulations forbid the taking of animals that are less than 20 cm long (see diagram); a size below which it is estimated that trumpet shells are still too young to have reproduced.

17



# Reef or corals



Hard corals are formed by tiny sea animals called polyps. Coral polyps extend their tentacles into surrounding waters and feed on microscopic plants and animals. Producing hard outer limestone skeletons over many thousands of years, some hard corals form the very foundation of the reef. Coral reefs are essential to Vanuatu because they:

- protect coastlines and coastal villages from large ocean waves made by storms and cyclones;
- create a place where crabs, lobsters, clams and reef fish can live, which in turn provide food for people;
- break down (over time) to rubble and sand, which helps build up shorelines and beaches;
- attract tourists, thus providing a growing source of income to many local people.

For all these reasons, corals need protection. This is why Vanuatu fisheries regulations limit the taking of live coral to three pieces per day per person and oblige all persons wanting to export corals to obtain written permission from the Minister.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 19

**19.1** No person shall take more than 3 pieces of living coral in any period of 24 hours except with the permission of the Director of the Fisheries Department and in accordance with such conditions as he may specify.

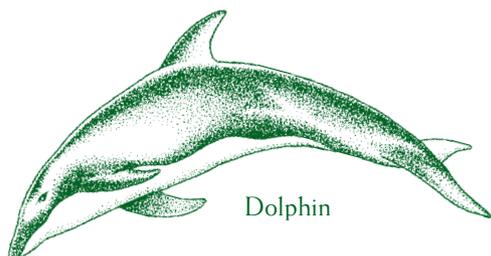
**19.2** No person shall export any coral except with the written permission of the Minister and in accordance with such conditions as he may specify.

**OFFENCES** - Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 24

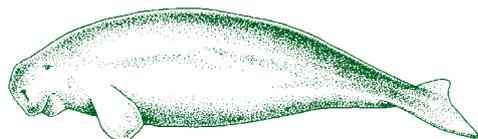
**24.** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of this Part shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding **VT 100,000.**



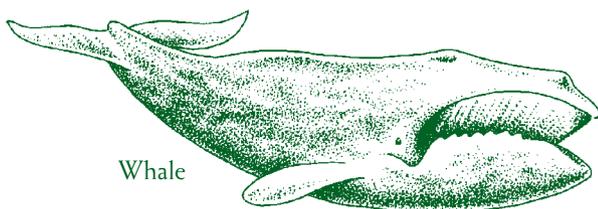
# Marine mammals



Dolphin



Dugong



Whale

Marine mammals, like all other mammals, breathe air, are warm blooded and give birth to live young that feed on their mother's milk. Dolphins, whales and dugongs are marine mammals that can occasionally be seen in Vanuatu waters.

The sight of a live marine mammal in the wild is exciting for tourists. Taking tourists out to sea to show them live whales, dolphins or dugongs could become an economic activity in Vanuatu.

## FISHERIES ACT NO. 37 OF 1982

Subsidiary Act Cap 158 Part 4 Section 18

**18.1** No person shall fish for any marine mammal in Vanuatu waters.

**18.2** Any marine mammal caught accidentally shall be released forthwith and returned to the waters from which it was taken with the least possible injury.

**18.3** Any person who contravenes any of the provisions of subsection (1) or (2) shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding **VT 10,000,000.**



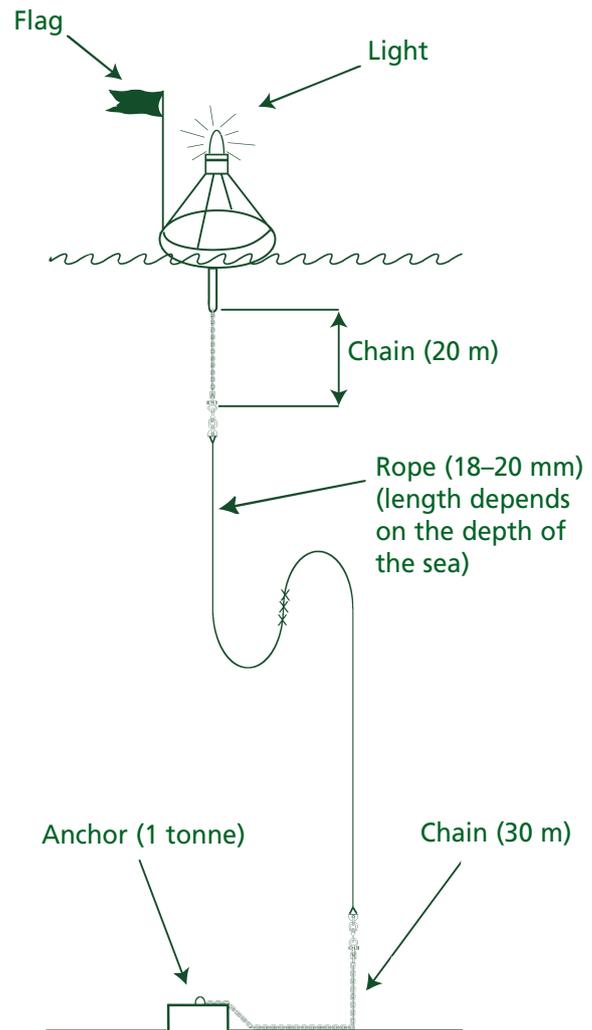
# FAD (fish aggregating device)

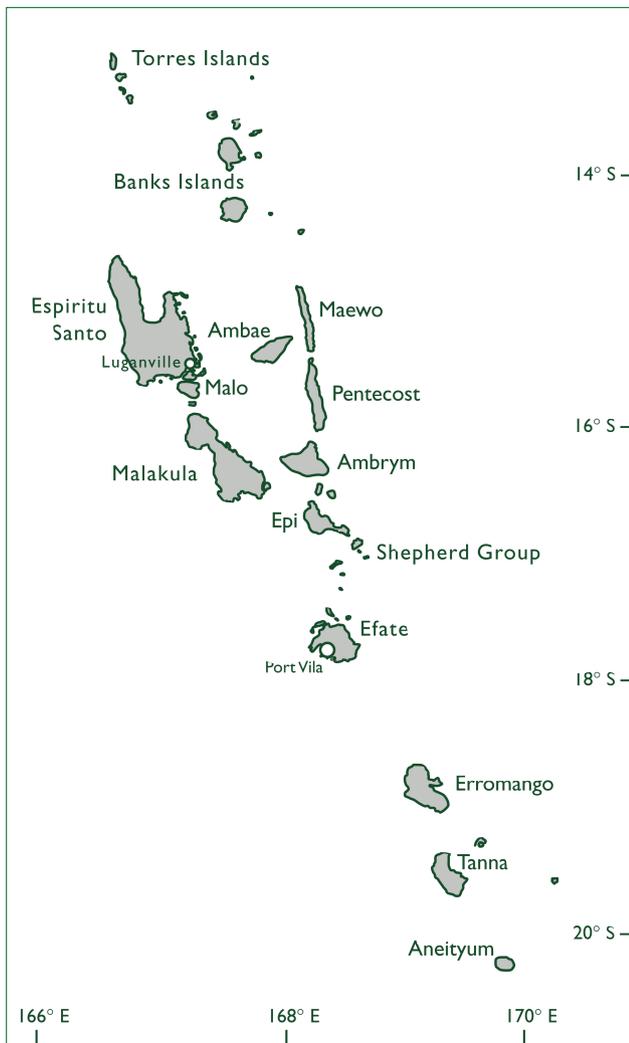
A fish aggregating device is a man-made floating device anchored at some distance from the reef in the open ocean. It is used to attract oceanic fish species such as tuna, marlin, mahi mahi and rainbow runner. The reasons why FADs attract fish are not fully understood, but it is believed that FADs provide a shelter for small fish species, which, in turn, attract the bigger fish targeted by the fishermen.

To control the way FADs are set, and to make sure they don't constitute a danger for navigation, the Fisheries Department regulate the mooring of FADs in Vanuatu's waters:

- No person shall set and anchor a FAD in Vanuatu's waters without the permission of the Fisheries Department's Director. Permission to place a FAD does not confer any exclusive right to fish in the vicinity of the device.
- The Ports and Marine Department must be notified of the exact location, including latitude and longitude, of the FAD.
- All FADs must carry a visible flag and a light so they are clearly visible to ships navigating in their proximity.
- Any person who contravenes these regulations shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to a fine not exceeding VT 100,000.

## FAD





**Vanuatu**  
(the map only shows the main islands)

For more information, please contact:

## FISHERIES DEPARTMENT

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Port Vila

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Fax: 23641

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