

**BARETOA PASSAGE REPORT**

**MARAKEI ISLAND**

by

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and

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October 1986



## BARETOA PASSAGE

### Background and Introduction

1. The case was first reported by Fisheries Assistant Kamatie Kautu as enclosed (see attachment 1)

The report was forwarded to the Kiribati Broadcasting Co-operation and reported in the news..

2. Fisheries Division was concerned about the situation and instructed the Fisheries Assistant to raise the topic to the council. This was discussed on the 2/7/86 council meeting. According to the Fisheries Assistant, the council animously agreed to re-open the Baretoa Passage. However they wanted to refer the matter to the people.
3. The next meeting was not a council meeting but a budget Unimane meeting. The topic was raised and all the councillors said that their people didn't want the re-opening except for the councillors from TEKARAKAN and NORAUEA. The records of this discussion was not in the official minutes of the council.
4. The topic was again raised in the September 1986 Maneaba ni Maungatabu for a further assessment on the impact caused by the enclosure.
5. This paper is thus presented as a result.



## TOUR REPORT

A visit was made to the island from 6/10-8/10/86 by the Senior Fisheries Officer to Marakei Island to assess fisheries division input to the Marakei Island Council on the Baretoa Passage issue. This visit was greatly assisted by the stationed Fisheries Assistant Mr Kamatie Kautu.

A visit was made to the passage plus interviews with the President of the Council, the Clerk, some Councillors plus some individuals.

### Survey Result

#### (1) Interview

- The council had already agreed to leave the passage closed. The major reason was:

1. Historically this was the 3rd passage being closed off naturally. However the last one was more than 100 years ago and this was one of the passed on legend.
2. Naturally by re-opening the passage the wave - action will close it off again and therefore the effort is not worth.
3. The landowners are already claiming the land extension and therefore they will be affected.
4. No reason at all but have agreed already.

However I had an opportunity to visit the councillor of TEKARAKAN plus a few Unimane and we had a discussion over a cup of tea.

He repeated his concern as follows:

- Fish traps getting useless. Fig 1 showed about 38 traps; the majority of which clustered around the entrance of the passage. There are about 30 other traps not featured in Fig 1 for the entire island.
- water heights seems rising and they feared an over flow.
- during heavy rainfall schools of fish were swarming around the entrance but the event stopped during the closure.
- 'te bawe' fishing from the bridge was common around full moon at midnight but this was stopping now.
- fish now moved to Raweai passage and the people of Norauea are advantages while the people from TEKARAKAN are suffering. The fish can move to the fresh incoming water at the only one opening.



## **(2) Visit to the Baratoa Passage**

Immediately after the sandbank closure (refer to Fig 1 & 2) the water was stagnant and the salinity rising. In fact this can drop with heavy rainfall and rise with heavy sunshine. The major fish species seen was TILAPIA with only a few NINIMAI.

The sandbank was measured at low tide and assuming the average height of 1m, an effort is required to remove the 3,000m<sup>3</sup> of sand. A group of hand working men could pave a narrow inlet before the high tide and hopefully the wave just forced itself through provided the current flow is changing. It was confirmed that there was no machinery available on the island for the job.

## **Discussion**

1. Fig. 3 showed the importance of the area of fishing within the villages. Norauea fishing is mainly inside the lagoon with 57.9% and collection fishing, for example "te bun" is mainly done by the people of Bainuna.
2. Fig. 4 showed the major fishery as the ocean with 63.5%. The lagoon fishery was 22.7% and 4 % for the collection.
3. It is quite evident from the above that the majority of the Marakei people are not affected by this closure as they depended mainly on the ocean fishery.
4. In the short term fishing within the passage was affected as described by the councillor from TEKARAKAN. Of a more immediate concern were the nets fish traps which stopped catching since the closure.
5. Norauea fishermen will be the ones most affected in the long term. This affect should not be immediately evident.
6. Fisheries Division had confirmed the Marakei lagoon low productivity since the failure of the seaweed programme on the island. It was a general feeling that the Marakei lagoon is better off with more passages from the ocean to the lagoon opened and thus the support for the re-opening of the Baretoa Passage.
7. There was however a difficulty as the Marakei Island Council decision was already made against the re-opening.



### Recommendation

1. That the matter be brought up again to the Marakei council for re-consideration. The councillor from TEKARAKAN should make the move.

It is important during the meeting that a proper record was made on reasons for and against the re-opening. Reasons against as given in the interview above are not adequate. Our Fisheries Assistant must speak for the re-opening as the present situation has a long term effect on the marine life within the lagoon.

Another strong option was for TEKARAKAN councillor to re-introduce the topic as a requirement for his village. For example, a seawall requirement was requested by the individual villages to become council projects. This is justified by the fact that the traditional stone traps were mainly practised by this village and the enclosure had a drastic effect already.

### Follow-up action

What happened when the councillors agreed to re-open the Baretoa passage?

1. This report must not give the immediate responsibility for re-opening the passage to Fisheries Division.
2. I recommend a Civil Engineer to visit the site and do a proper technical job and whether it can be done manually or it requires a machinery. Also to confirm if it is at all possible to re-open the passage.
3. A project proposal can then be made based on 2, and processed through the Ministry of Home Affairs and Decentralisation.



Fisheries Division  
Tetabuki  
MARAKEI

27th May 1986

Senior Fisheries Officer  
Tanaea

Dear Sir

**BARETOA PASSAGE**

Friday the 23rd marked a sad ending to one of the only two major passage which provides Marakei lagoon with Marine life. The exchange of sea-water inside the lagoon though limited has dropped dramatically causing a sudden drop in salinity.

On observation today, the following species were found dead; ANTHURUS GAHUM, GERRES ARGYREUS, UPENOUS ARGO, MULLOIDICHTHYS, PFIPLAMMA, PRIACANTHUS HAMRUR, SYNANCEICHTHY VERRUCOSUS, PNEUPHELUS MERRA, VALAMUGIL SEHELI, EELS AND OCTOPUS.

The passage is blocked from the ocean side with sand. This was definitely the result of wave action. The once clear blue water of the Baretoa passage has now turned misty with air bubbles taking from the surface. Through my observations I will conclude that this is the end for Baretoa Passage, and a new historical chapter for MARAKEI LAGOON LIFE.

Looking for the best.

EMMETT KAYE  
Fisheries Assistant