

## **PNG Celebrates New Initiatives on Dugong Protection: Launch of UNEP/CMS Abu Dhabi Pilot Project and Pacific Year of the Dugong**

**Daru, 24 March 2011**– The Pacific Year of the Dugong was launched in Daru, Papua New Guinea (PNG), with great celebration on 24 March 2011. Daru was selected as the launch location because of the high cultural significance of dugongs to the coastal villages in the Western Province of PNG. Moreover, the waters of PNG and Australia in Torres Strait share the largest remaining dugong population in the world. Traditional inhabitants from both the Daru region and the Torres Strait Islands have strong traditions based on the use of dugong, a right protected under the Torres Strait Treaty between PNG and Australia.



Attended by senior officials from the South Fly District and Provincial Governments, Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC), National Fisheries Authority, the Secretariat of the UNEP/CMS Dugong MoU, children from all five schools in Daru as well as the general public, the campaign launch marked a long awaited revitalization of dugong protection efforts which has lapsed since the 1980s. Year 8 student Ms Ani Sampson appealed to local participants, neighbouring Torres Strait Islanders as well as the rest of the global community to help the Kiwai people of Daru to save dugongs from overfishing by using traditional hunting methods and by not buying dugong meat. Treaty Chair Person, Mr Sisa Kimia, told the school children that this occasion was for their benefit so “they and their children would continue to know what dugongs are” and he further urged the people of Daru to support control measures to ensure that the traditional use of dugongs is sustainable.

The major highlight of the campaign was the start of new pilot project using financial incentives to address direct hunting of dugongs by changing people’s practices and improving the livelihoods of local communities in Daru. The Deputy Secretary of DEC, Mrs Kay Kalim told the large crowd that the Daru community had worked hard for a long time for this moment – to get the support and resources to address dugong management. She urged all the stakeholders to work together to progress the momentum being generated through the launch of the PYOD and the start of the pilot project.

Traditional dances and stories highlighting the cultural importance of dugongs to the coastal Kiwai communities in the Daru region were performed by school children and local dance groups. Despite the long hours in sun, the large crowd welcomed the largest event ever focused solely on dugong protection.

At a meeting for the pilot project held prior to the launch event, the various stakeholders gave unanimous and overwhelming support for the initiative. In demonstration of the high level of commitment to progressing dugong conservation and management in the Daru region, the Provincial and Local Level Governments, pledged 20,000 Kina (US\$8,000) to the pilot project. Given the considerable commitment from all levels of government, community based organisations and local leaders already demonstrated, the pilot project promises to make a highly successful contribution to progressing dugong conservation and management as well as livelihood improvement to communities in the Daru region.

