

# SOLOMON ISLANDS TO START WORLD'S LARGEST MARICULTURE FARM AT ONTONG JAVA ATOLL

June 20 2017



The Solomon Islands government approved a new mariculture farm and hatchery project, expected to be the world's largest, on June 1 2017.

It will be located in Ontong Java, one of the world's largest and most remote atolls, with over 1,380 square kilometers of natural productive habitat that will be actively restocked, managed, and sustainably harvested.

The new farm has been organized by Dr. Reginald W. Aipia, medical doctor and entrepreneur of the Ontong Java Development Company Ltd., technology provider Erik Wilton Hagberg of Pacific Aquaculture Cooperatives International Inc., with guidance from Dr. Tom Goreau of the Global Coral Reef Alliance and Biorock Technology Inc.



The project has gained full approval of the Solomon Islands Fisheries Department, having satisfied strict technical qualifications to obtain licensing. Fisheries staff will work collaboratively with the program providing further technical assistance, monitoring, and certification of all products resulting from the project.



The mariculture farm will involve the entire community, and focus on production of sea cucumbers, giant clams, and other species, using innovative reproduction methods developed by Hagberg, combined with all the known benefits of Biorock technology such as increased growth rate, survival, larval settlement, and resistance to environmental stresses like high temperature.

Sea cucumbers and giant clams are being rapidly overharvested worldwide due to their high value for food. Sea cucumbers are also a source of naturally occurring pharmaceuticals. Extracts from sea cucumbers are already included in promising treatments for cancer, arthritis, HIV, herpes, and more.

The unprecedented size and productivity of Ontong Java Atoll, coupled with year-round farming activities could result in Ontong Java becoming the first place to provide sustainable sources of pharmaceutical companies with the raw materials needed to commercialize new medical treatments, with significant added value to the people of the Solomon Islands.

The Solomon Islands Government had previously banned export of sea cucumbers due to concern over their rapid decline. Sea cucumbers play a central role in outer island economics, with some communities deriving as much as 90% of their total income from producing dried sea cucumbers. The existing pattern of open and closed seasons, usually 3 months every 3 years, has severe negative economic and human impact on the affected communities. The venture's new comprehensive farming and management approach will normalize activities year-round, providing lucrative sustainable livelihoods for the target communities.



Solar powered Biorock shore protection structures, and a variety of Biorock mariculture enclosures will be grown to increase shore protection, grow back eroding beaches, and ensure sustainable yields of target species long into the future. The entire atoll will serve as a laboratory for developing methods to protect atolls from overfishing, global sea level rise, and economic despair using new technology and ethical business practices.

The Chief Fisheries Officer of the Solomon Islands Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, John Legata, said that “We see mariculture as way of turning vanishing resources into permanent and sustainable income for residents, and hope to expand sustainable mariculture to other islands in the future”. The Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, the Hon. Manasseh Sogavare, said that he would “render full support for the farming to start immediately”.

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