THE STRAIT TIMES

from Ridge to Reef to Ridge of the Somosomo Strait

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COUPS GOT IN THE WAY OF CORALS

Sometime about 1990, the legendary ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau and his son Jean-Michel reportedly described Fiji as the soft coral capital of the world.

BY MARINE STEWARDSHIP DESK | REPORTING FROM NAGARA

Quite a compliment by the Cousteaus. No committee required. No national action plan. Just an extraordinary encounter with what was there, by two curious people dedicated to bringing the undersea to light and sight for all.

And with it global recognition and reputation for here ensued.

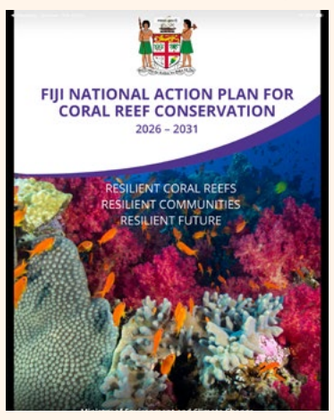
Then, well, Fiji got busy.

There were two coups in 1987. Another followed in 2000. And another in 2006. Governments changed, constitutions came and went, leaders proclaimed. The business of being a nation demanded considerable attention.

Meanwhile, beneath the waves, the coral carried on with its business of being coral.



Not without increasing difficulty. Warming seas, cyclones, crown-of-thorns starfish, fishing pressures and the daily accumulation of human activity have all had their say.



But coral doesn't hold elections. Nor does it get to vote on how yesterday's troubles should be put behind us. Nor read vision statements.

We are here in October 2026, with a newly launched Fiji National Action Plan for Coral Reef Conservation. Eighty-odd pages, 81 actions, and a vision of resilient reefs, resilient communities and a resilient future.

Good words. Worthy intentions. Much needed.

But in the Somosomo Strait, we have a simpler question.

Where are we?

The Rainbow Reef is an internationally celebrated treasure. It supports livelihoods, attracts visitors and gives the communities along the Strait something extraordinary to share with the world.

Yet, as far as we can establish, this famous reef still lacks even the rudimentary formal Marine Protected Area status.

Fiji has committed to protecting 30 percent of its marine waters by 2030. An admirable target. Predictably, the larger ocean areas offer more percentage points for less friction than the Strait.

But percentages are funny things. They tell us how much. Not necessarily what matters.

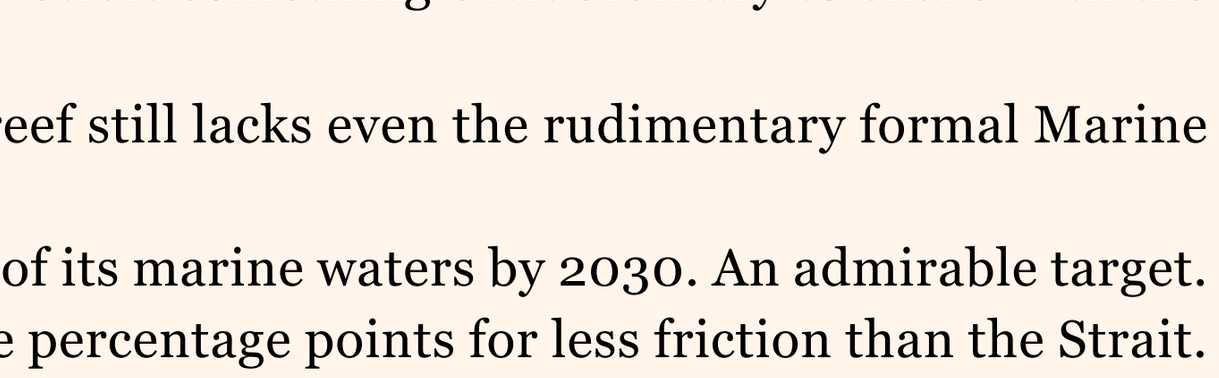
We don't doubt that processes are underway. We simply wonder where Rainbow Reef stands in them. Who is doing what? What remains to be done? And how might those of us living beside the Strait help?

Perhaps the next coup Fiji needs is a coup of the mind.

Not another overthrow. Just a change in what we pay attention to.

Thirty-six years after Cousteaus celebrated observation, perhaps we should ask not simply how to make our reefs resilient, but whether we still see what made them remarkable.

We can put the past behind us.
The coral has to *live* with it.
And surely that's worth a little attention.



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