

Indigenous Approaches to Access, Control and Protect Coastal Resources: A Review of a Philippine Experience

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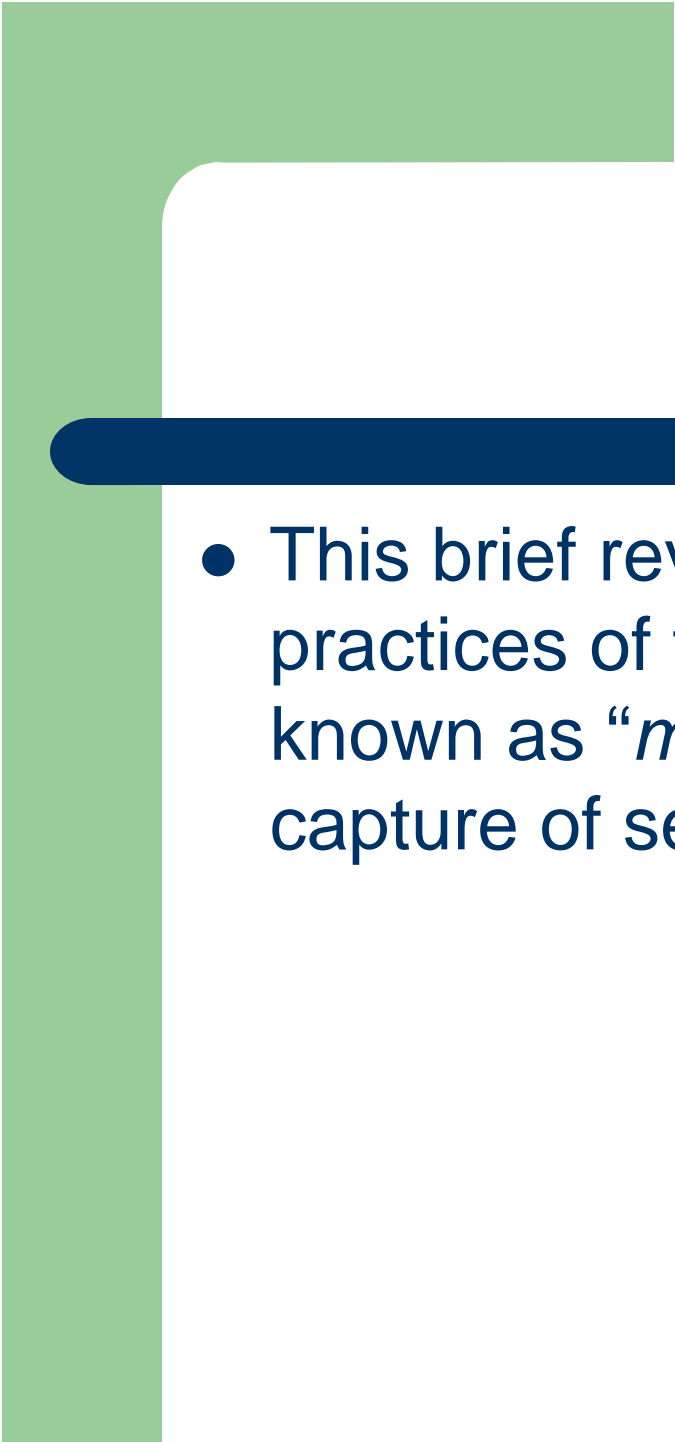

Introduction



This paper will review indigenous practices in a traditional fishing community in northern Philippines in using, controlling and protecting its coastal resources – the “*vanua*” (Mangahas 1994).

The review will examine how a “*mataw*” fishing association in Batanes, northern Philippines try to live in harmony with nature by a) harnessing the ecological knowledge of fishers; b) observance of taboos and the performance of rituals; c) observing economic arrangements to protect environment and the implementation of organizational rules formulated by the association of users.

Project Site

- The site of this study is in the municipalities of Mahatao and Basco, Batan Island, Batanes. The Batanes Islands is composed of ten small islands found in the northernmost part of the Philippines.
- It is bounded by the South China Sea to the west and by the Philippine Sea and Pacific Ocean to the east.

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- This brief review describes the beliefs and practices of fishermen in the Batanes Islands known as “*mataws*” who are engaged in the capture of seasonal flying fish.

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- Mataw fishing is an indigenous fishing tradition - "a particular way of deriving a living from the sea" that integrates i) harnessing the ecological knowledge of fishers; ii) observance of taboos and the performance of rituals; iii) observance of economic arrangements to protect environment and the iv) implementation of organizational rules formulated by the association.

Harnessing the ecological knowledge of fishers

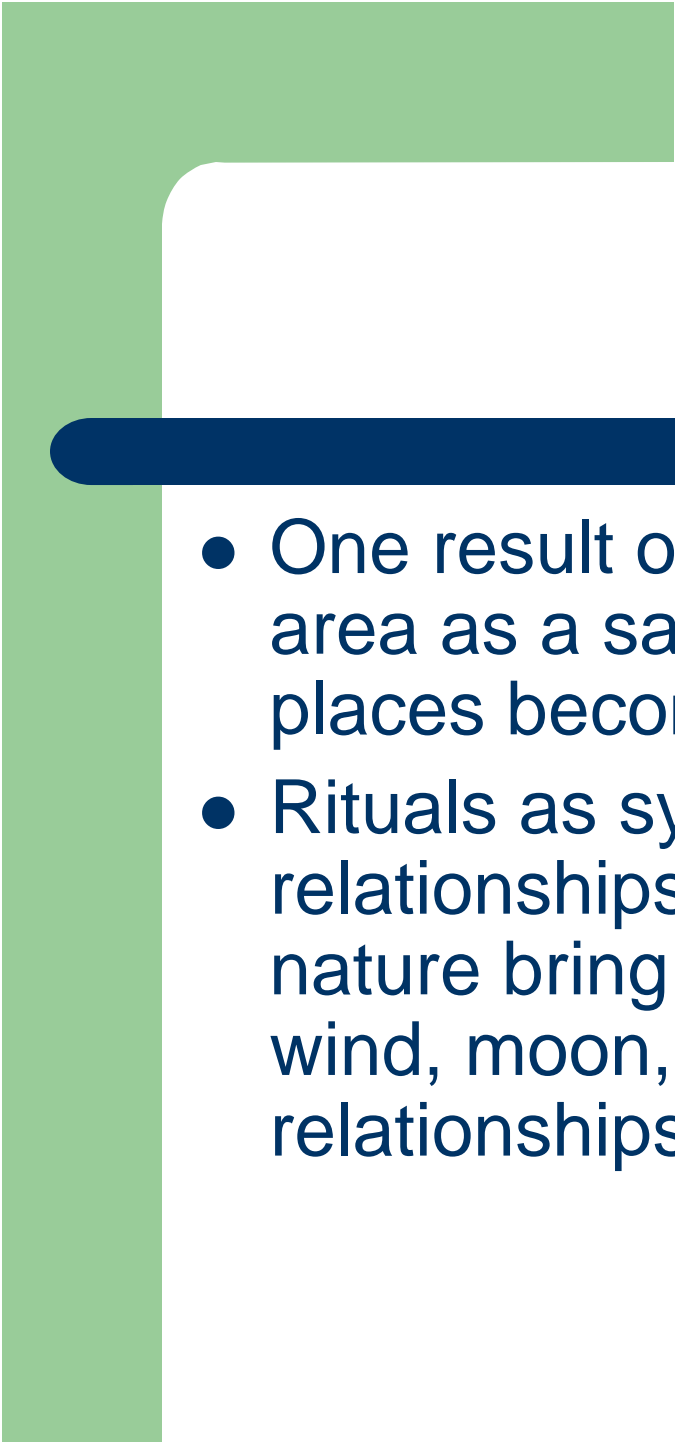

- Local knowledge system of organizing perception of the nature of the relationship between humans and the environment and among members of the community;
 - High respect for the environment
 - Communal cooperation
 - Belief in the sacredness of relationships

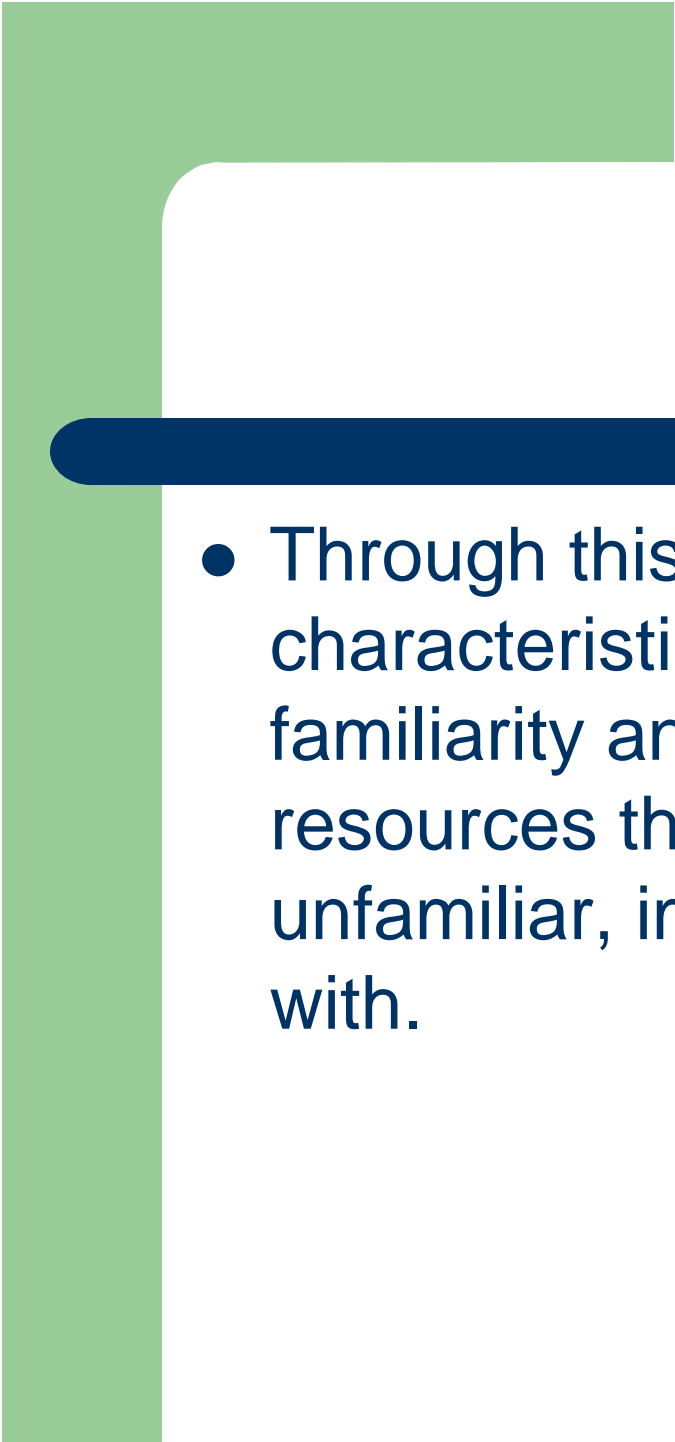

Observance of taboos and the performance of rituals

- The rights to fish and use the “*vanua*” safely are gained by conducting an exchange through ritual sacrifices with the anitu or invisible spirit beings;
- The vanua becomes a sacred area for the duration of the fishing season and fishing success is explained within a framework of purity and pollution;

Rituals as tools for resource management

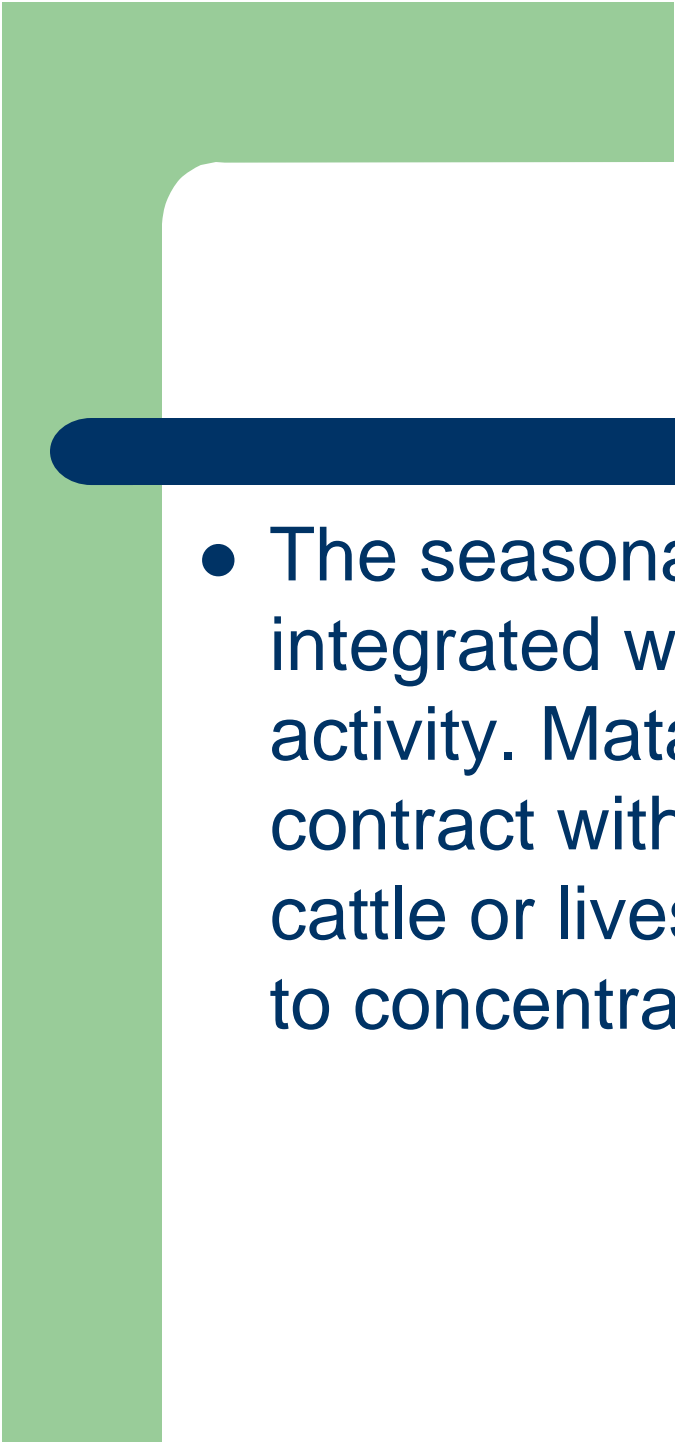

- While natural resources are God's gift, the indigenous peoples consider deities as well as environmental and ancestral spirits as owners of the natural resources. Because of this, users need to consult them.
- Consultations take the form of rituals, which may include chanting, singing, dancing, praying, killing of animals e.g., chickens and pigs, wine drinking, and food sharing during communal meals.

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- One result of rituals is the declaration of an area as a sacred site. As a result, sacred places become “de facto” protected areas.
 - Rituals as symbolic expressions of the relationships between human beings and nature bring people and nature (land, water, wind, moon, stars, etc) into personalized relationships.

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- Through this process, nature take on human characteristics which bring about a sense of familiarity and certainty over natural resources that otherwise would be nameless, unfamiliar, impersonal and difficult to work with.

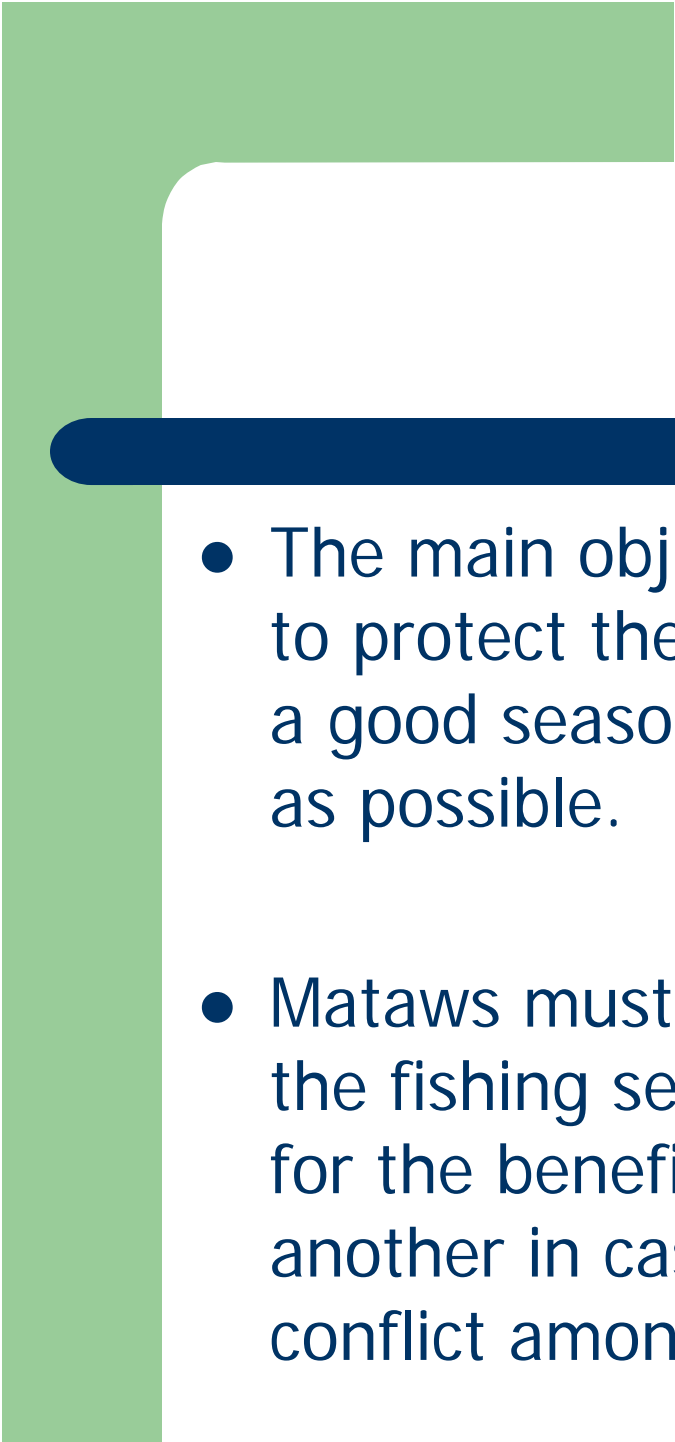

Observing economic arrangements to protect environment

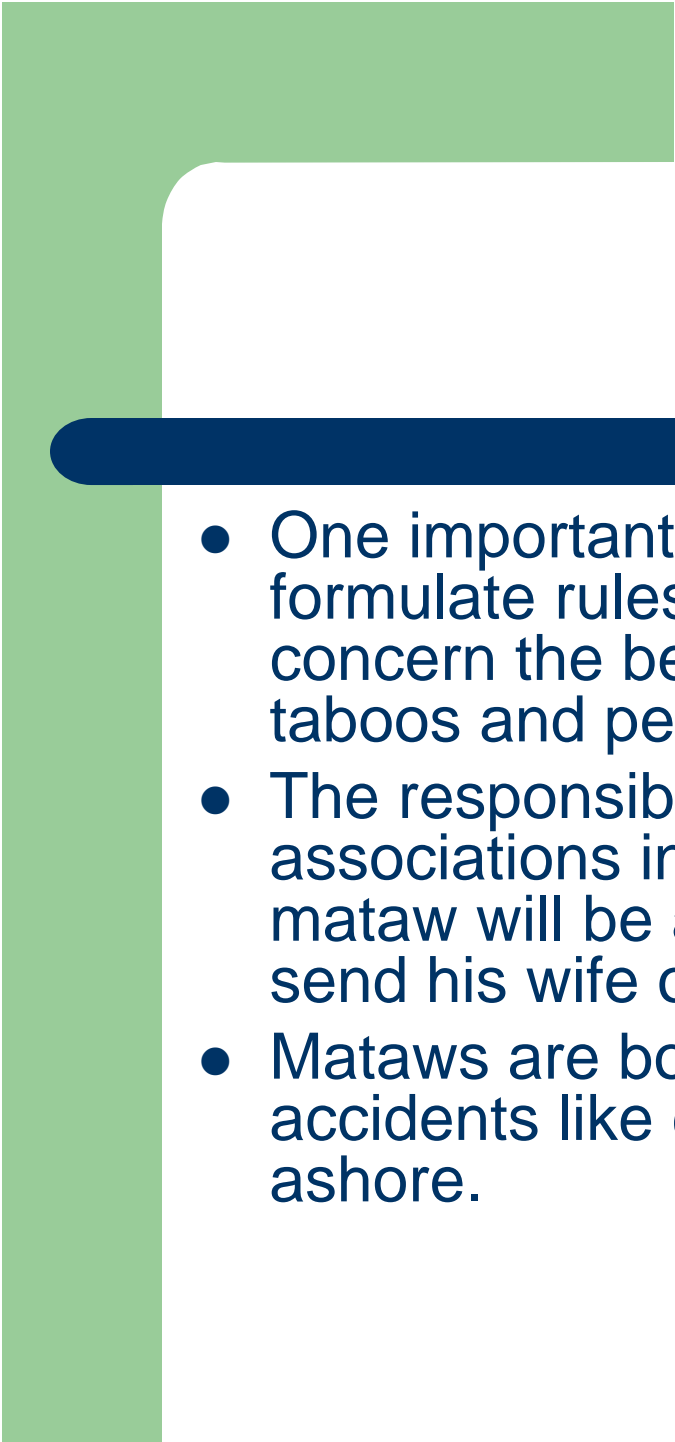

- Reciprocity and mutual help arrangements are the traditional base of Ivatan economy. This is partly because cash is scarce in Batanes.
- A person might give a mataw onions or a sack of rice at the onset of the fishing season which the mataw will try to reciprocate at the end of the season.

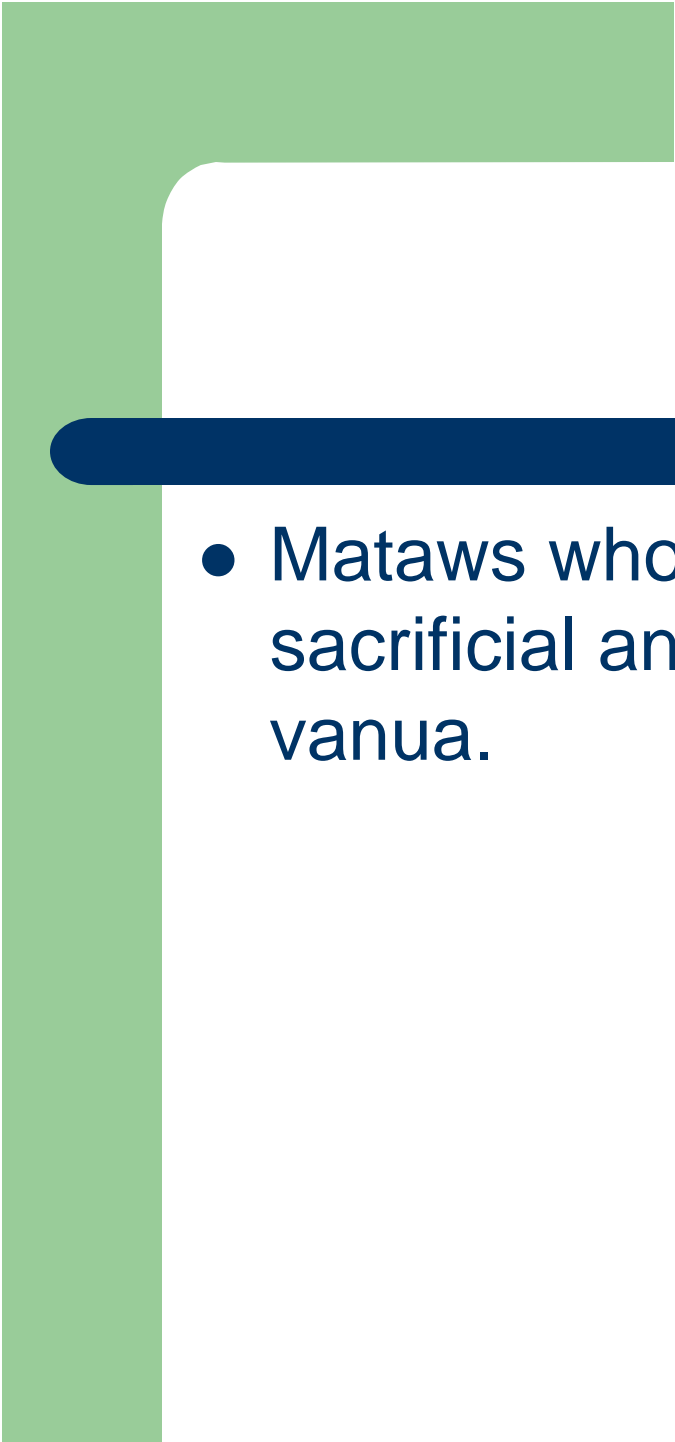

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- The seasonal mataw fishing activity is closely integrated with farming which is a year round activity. Mataws, who are also farmers, contract with individuals to watch over their cattle or livestock and fields to enable them to concentrate on fishing during summer.

rules formulated by the association

- Mataw organizations regulate access and exploitation of resources within the vanua and traditional fishing grounds, under the leadership of the ideal fisherman who makes the first fishing trip for the season and who has the power to ritually set precedents for the season.

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- The main objective of the vanua organization “is to protect the mataw fishing endeavor- to have a good season of fishing with as few accidents as possible.
 - Mataws must organize to prepare the vanua for the fishing season, to perform communal rituals for the benefit of the entire group, to assist one another in case of emergency, and to resolve conflict among members.

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- One important function of the vanua group is to formulate rules and regulations for fishing. The rules concern the behavior of the mataws, many spell out taboos and penalties for violations.
 - The responsibilities of members of vanua associations include participation in meetings. If a mataw will be absent for urgent reasons he must send his wife or some other person to proxy for him.
 - Mataws are bound to help one another in case of accidents like capsizing, and in bringing their boats ashore.

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- Mataws who break taboos has to provide the sacrificial animal to be used in “cleaning” the vanua.

Summary

- In summary, in order to access, control and protect its fishing ground, "*mataw*" fishing an indigenous fishing practice integrates 1) tapping/harnessing the ecological knowledge of fishers; 2) observance of taboos and the performance of rituals; 3) observance of economic arrangements to protect environment and the 4) implementation of organizational rules formulated by the association.