



The Republic of Palau Member's report on activities to ICRI

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Reporting period: October 2005 to October 2006

Summary of Activities

Major activities in support of ICRI in Palau during the period include the following:

1. The Republic of Palau is co-hosting the ICRI Secretariat with Government of Japan from July 2005 to June 2007. Activities relating to the ICRI Secretariat are detailed in the Secretariat Report.
2. At the Eighth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) held in March 2006 in Curitiba, Brazil, the leaders of the five political entities of Micronesia (Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and Guam) put forth to the world the Micronesia Challenge. The Challenge undertakes an expanded commitment to preserve the marine and terrestrial environments through: *"effectively conserving at least 30% of the near-shore marine and 20% of the forest resources across Micronesia by 2020."*
3. Progress on the Palau's Protected Areas Network (PAN) remains ongoing, over the last six months the PAN steering committee, which consists of national and state government agencies, NGOs, and private individuals, have designed and drafted the overall framework for the Protected Areas Network (PAN). The purpose of the Palau Protected Areas Network is to establish a nationwide network of terrestrial and marine protected areas.
4. The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) and JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) are publishing the first comprehensive book on Palau's coral reefs and associated ecosystems. The book entitled "Coral Reefs of Palau" is due to be released in December 2006.
5. Palau hosted the 14th Bi-Annual United States Coral Reef Task Force meeting from October 5-7, 2005 following the ICRI GM in Palau. The meeting provided an opportunity to learn about and take action on key issues related to coral reef science and management strategies in the Freely Associated States.
6. Other on-going activities in Palau include: research projects in partnership with the WB/GEF Targeted Research Workgroups (Remote Sensing, Coral Disease, Coral Restoration and Remediation); Ecosystem Based Management Project; Operation Counter Invasion and Benthic Habitat Mapping. For more detailed activity descriptions see Annex I.

Annex I: Detailed Activity Descriptions

Micronesian Challenge

The President of Palau and other Micronesian leaders launched the Micronesia Challenge in Curitiba, Brazil at Eighth Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). At a High Level Side Event hosted by President Remengesau, Leaders from Island Governments, international donors and NGO partners came together for the announcement this commitment by Micronesian countries and territories to the conservation of their marine and terrestrial resources.

As result of the Challenge, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Conservation International (CI) each committed \$3 Million to the Micronesian region. This money is meant to generate matching funds from other financing sources, including donor countries, the Global Environment Facility and/or regional finance mechanisms. Within this context, TNC and CI committed \$2 Million each to Palau as a match to \$2 Million of the \$3.5 Million in funding from GEF available under the CBD over the next four years to go to Palau's proposed endowment fund of \$12 million for its Protected Area Network (PAN).

In order to begin implementation of the Micronesia Challenge, leaders, resource managers, community representatives, and technical experts from around the region will participate in a Action Planning Meeting in Palau from December 4-8, 2006. Prior to the meeting in Palau, each jurisdiction is holding pre-meetings to prepare for the regional meeting, at which they will identify their current status of near-shore marine and terrestrial conservation efforts, appropriate local conservation targets for meeting the goals and intent of the Micronesia Challenge, and suggested benchmarks for measuring success to propose to the broader group.

Protected Areas Network (PAN)

The purpose of the Palau Protected Areas Network Act (November 2003) is to establish a nationwide network of terrestrial and marine protected areas that will protect areas of biodiversity significance, important habitats, and other valuable resources that are essential to the future social, cultural, economic, and environmental stability and health of Palau. The PAN Act provides a framework for Palau's national and state governments to collaborate on the dual objectives of the PAN Act: (1) protecting the country's biodiversity, and (2) to assist with local management of natural resources through establishing an interconnected network of protected areas. It also provides the framework for implementing the relevant components of the Programme of Work on Protected Areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity, to which Palau is a Party.

The development of the nationwide PAN in Palau is a collaborative effort involving all the locally based agencies and organizations, local communities, state governments, and research organizations. It also involves a number of international agencies and organizations that are providing specific assistance. The four main components of the PAN include: a) effective governance and management, b) building capacity, c) sustainable financing, and d) strong science.

Palau Monographs: Coral Reefs of Palau

The Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) and JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) are publishing the first comprehensive book on Palau's coral reefs and associated ecosystems. The book entitled "Coral Reefs of Palau" will cover a broad range of topics associated with Palau's coral reefs including; coral reef biology, ecology, geology, oceanography, threats, in addition to current scientific research and marine conservation and management efforts. The book will target a wide range of readers, including; marine scientists, conservation officers, university students, tourists and divers. It is hoped that the

book will broaden their perspectives about Palau's coral reefs and conservation efforts. This book is due to be launched in December 2006.

US Coral Reef Task Force Meeting

The United States Coral Reef Task Force (USCRTF) held their 14th biannual meeting in the Republic of Palau November 5-7, 2005. This marked the first time that the Task Force meeting has ever been held outside the United States and clearly reflects the Task Force's commitment to protecting and preserving the coral reefs of the world. It is also a reflection of Palau's commitment to support this regional and international effort.

The purpose of the meeting was to learn about and take action on key issues related to coral reef conservation in the Pacific region, particularly in Micronesia and the Freely Associated States. The meeting provided an opportunity for Task Force Members to share recent accomplishments, existing challenges, and needs in addressing coral reef research and conservation issues globally. The Task Force heard from leading experts on management schemes, scientific research and additional tools utilized to better understand and conserve coral reef ecosystems. The Task Force discussed and acted on ten key decision items. During the meeting, the Task Force also gave a number of awards to several local, regional and national organizations and individuals in recognition of their significant contributions to coral reef science and management.

The meeting featured discussions on Pacific and Micronesian needs for enhancing coral reef conservation efforts. The first day session focused on building financial, human and technical capacity in the Pacific islands, with expert panelists from the United States and other international agencies, and leading conservation organizations. The second session highlighted challenges and opportunities for building marine protected area networks in reef ecosystems in the Pacific Ocean.

Research Projects with WB/GEF Targeted Research Working Groups

The WB/GEF Targeted Research for Capacity Building and Management Program was created to fill critical information gaps for coral reef ecosystems in 4 major regions (Eastern Africa, Mesoamerica, the Philippines, and Australasia) and to link the findings to strengthen management actions and policy. The program involves a network of international scientists to answer critical questions concerning coral reef vulnerability to human stresses and impacts of climate change. In addition, the program integrates scientific information, collaborative research, training and capacity building for young scientists and managers from developing countries.

Targeted research, within six thematic working groups, is being conducted at sites in each region in association with established marine laboratories at four operational centers (or "Centers of Excellence") located in Tanzania, Mexico, Australia and the Philippines. Two satellite study sites are also located in Palau and Belize. Currently Palau marine scientists from Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC) are working with three of the six working groups, which include: Remote Sensing, Coral Disease and Coral Restoration and Remediation.

Ecosystem Based Management Project

A three-year Packard funded project entitled "Developing an ecosystem-based management approach for coastal resources of Babeldaob Island, Republic of Palau", initiated in June 2006. Ecosystem-based management has been identified as a need in Palau because of multiple and diverse relationships between biological, physical, and human processes, as well as the small-scale and vulnerability of the island ecosystems. The overall goals for this project include: (1) fostering healthy coastal communities and ecosystems on Babeldaob, and (2) developing a collaborative process to improve natural resource management for

Babeldaob. To achieve these goals researchers will conduct extensive biophysical and social science studies in order to answer questions about the management of vulnerable natural resources and their uses. The results of these studies will be analyzed to develop a set of environmental and social indicators, conceptual ecosystem models of Babeldaob, and recommendations for management and policy makers. In addition, the project will create avenues for disseminating and sharing scientific information with key stakeholders to foster wide participation in order to build a collaborative process for resource management.

Operation Counter Invasion

Operation Counter Invasion, initiated in August 2006, is a one-year project initiated to implement the Palau National Invasive Species Strategy. Operation Counter-Invasion includes several activities including: the creation and staffing of a National Invasive Species Coordinator; creating and equipping a Quarantine Inspection Room at the Palau International Airport and partial funding for a baseline survey of marine invasive species. In addition, the project will fund 3 key invasive species projects: public awareness of an invasive anemone in the world-famous Jellyfish Lake, eradication of feral pigs from Ngerchur Island to prevent damage to important turtle nesting beaches, and printing of an invasive species calendar.

NOAA Habitat Mapping

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in partnership with Palau are in the process of finalizing the development of shallow-water benthic maps for Palau. These maps will provide useful information needed to support many of Palau's national and state conservation and management objectives along with research activities. The maps are a critical component of characterization, monitoring activities and ecosystem-based management activities. In addition, the maps will be critical for assessing changes taking place in the reef ecosystems of these areas over time. The maps are due to be complete in June 2007.