

# MIMRA

Annual  
Report  
FY2023



Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority

**Marshall Islands**  
**Marine**  
**Resources**  
**Authority**



**ANNUAL REPORT 2023**

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**Front cover:** At Bikini Atoll, a diver surveys the reef, which includes a giant clam (*Tridacna gigas*). The survey of Bikini was part of a four-atoll expedition to uninhabited atolls in the northern Marshall Islands under National Geographic's Pristine Seas program in collaboration with MIMRA. Photo: Andrew McInnis.

**Back cover:** Sharks and fish swim among a coral meadow near Bokak Atoll in the northern Marshall Islands. Photo: Manu San Felix.

**Interior Photo credits:** Andrew McInnis, Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Benedict Yamamura, Beven Wakefield, Chewy Lin, Eve Burns, Forum Fisheries Agency, Francisco Blaha, Giff Johnson, Hilary Hosia, Jesse Goldberg, Karen Earnshaw, Keobel Sakuma, Kiolina James, Kyotak Ishiguro, Manu San Felix, Marie Davis Milne, Melba White, Pacific Community (SPC), Parties to the Nauru Agreement, Sergio Bolasina, Tereapii Mcleod, and Tino deBrum.

# A momentous year

The year 2023 was a momentous year for MIMRA and the region's marine resources for many reasons. At the top of the list of accomplishments is the fact that MIMRA and the region's fisheries leaders completely integrated the climate crisis into fisheries policymaking for the first time during 2023. While the massive threat that climate change and sea level rise pose to the existence of the Marshall Islands and other Pacific Islands is now well known, it wasn't until 2023 that the issue was placed at the heart of fisheries policy and planning work.

At the Forum Fisheries Ministerial Meeting, hosted in Majuro in July 2023, Fisheries Ministers endorsed the priority that the Forum Fisheries Agency is placing on work to respond to the impacts of climate change, and reiterated that climate change is the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific, particularly vulnerable Small Island Developing States and territories. The adoption of the FFA's Climate Change Strategy in 2023 provides the blueprint for FFA members to address the impacts of climate change including in adaptation and loss and damage.

This action by Pacific Fisheries Ministers gave momentum to action by Forum Fisheries members to seek and achieve the approval of a climate change resolution at the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission annual meeting in early December 2023. This was truly a landmark development for the WCPFC with the passage of this resolution that "establishes a solid foundation for a more urgent approach to the threat of climate change," as FFA Director-General Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen said at the time. Action at the WCPFC then segued into a strong delegation representing the FFA and member nations, including the Marshall Islands, to the global climate summit, COP28, in Dubai last December.

The message to the COP28: The

**Message from Tony Muller, Chairman of the MIMRA Board of Directors and Minister of Natural Resources and Commerce.**



global community needs to ensure the continuing sustainability of our fisheries by acting now to get back on track to achieve the Paris commitment of 1.5 degrees by 2030 and ensure that fisheries are embedded in the COP discussions.

From the emphasis on climate action in 2023 we expect to see more detailed studies in the future that document potential impacts of the climate crisis, ocean warming and sea level rise on the Marshall Islands. This includes the WCPFC tasking the United States and the Marshall Islands to co-lead development of a Commission workplan for addressing climate change on WCPFC fisheries.

In addition to the climate advocacy, MIMRA and the FFA made important progress at the WCPFC's annual meeting by strengthening the Tropical Tuna Measure that governs fishing on the high seas and gaining needed revisions to the Compliance Monitoring Scheme used by the WCPFC. I wish to emphasize that stock assessments of all four major tuna species show that tuna in the Pacific is being fished sustainably. This is due to the multi-layers of tuna man-

agement at the domestic and regional level to which MIMRA contributes.

The Third Parties to the Nauru Agreement Leaders meeting was held in Kiribati Island, Kiribati and focused a significant amount of discussion on the business side of the fishery. The Marshall Islands joint venture with American retail giant Walmart was an important part of the conversation. Earlier in the year, PNA leaders requested MIMRA and its joint venture partner, Pacific Island Tuna Provisions, to put together a list of options for possible involvement of other PNA members in supplying tuna to the US market through Walmart. These were part of the discussion among leaders at the PNA summit.

On the domestic front, MIMRA partnered with National Geographic's Pristine Seas program for the purpose of comprehensively surveying and documenting reef health and marine resources at Bikini, Rongelap, Bikar and Bokak atolls. MIMRA staff joined with scientists and marine biologists from National Geographic, The Nature Conservancy, and other institutions on a three-week expedition to the northern atolls. MIMRA and the nation will benefit from these detailed surveys of marine life at Bikini Atoll and neighboring Rongerik, which was doused with fallout from the 1954 Bravo hydrogen bomb test, by better understanding the ability of coral reefs to bounce back decades after the most extreme human impact second only to global warming — nuclear tests. The expedition to Bikar and Bokak was of great importance as it allowed for follow up to MIMRA's 2019 initial survey of those uninhabited atolls in the northern Ratak Chain. This scientific work will help us understand how these largely untouched atoll environments are withstanding climate change, ocean warming, natural predators and invasive species.

From MIMRA's perspective, the most important aspect of our fisheries management — whether it relates to the commercial tuna fishery or coastal fisheries resources — is effectively managing these resources for long-term sustainability.

**Tony Muller**

# How MIMRA is reaching

The marine resources development and conservation work that MIMRA is engaged in is comprised of hundreds of small, moving parts — all of which contribute to the bigger picture of sustainability of our ocean resources.

Every activity our Coastal Division staff conduct with local governments and local communities on the outer islands in the eight-step Reimaanlok (Looking to the Future) Process establishes the foundation of sustainable management of resources at the local level. The collaboration of multiple marine experts and conservation managers in the Coastal Management Advisory Council plays a crucial role in evaluating and advancing the Reimaanlok Process and advising MIMRA policy on coastal fisheries. The Protected Area Network continued to expand its important conservation work for remote communities in the Marshall Islands. Coastal vessels that regularly collect fish and other outer island products for sale at the two fish markets in Majuro and Kwajalein provide both an important supply of food for urban populations and an income stream for fishers on remote islands in the country. Our aquaculture and fish hatcheries in Majuro provide stock for grow out on the outer islands, supporting the hatchery operations on Arno and Likiep atolls. These hatcheries directly contribute to sustainable growing and harvesting of giant clams and other marine species and income generation for communities on these remote islands.

Ongoing installation of fish aggregating devices (FADs) for the benefit of local fishers around the Marshall Islands continued in 2023. MIMRA's engineers and maintenance team keeps vessels operating, vehicles running, and facilities, including the MIMRA headquarters building and the local fish markets, operational. The annual World Tuna Day event that grew in size and interest in 2023, along with increasing community engagement in local fisheries activity, are positive signs of effective collaboration and outreach.

Every Port State management activity — boarding of fishing boats by Fisheries Enforcement Officers, tuna transshipment



## Message from Glen Joseph, Executive Director, Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority.



monitoring by Enforcement Officers and Fisheries Observers, longline port sampling of fish, the behind-the-scenes electronic tracking of every fishing, carrier and bunkering vessel active in the Pacific region and in Marshall Islands waters by Oceanic Division Monitoring, Control and Surveillance personnel — shows that the Marshall Islands has functioning and effective fisheries management in its ports and in its exclusive economic zone, effectively monitoring and combatting illegal, unreported and unregu-

lated (IUU) fishing. MIMRA's cadre of Fisheries Observers who go on dozens of fishing trips annually on both purse seiners and longliners are MIMRA's ears and eyes in the tuna fishery, effectively monitoring fishing activity in Marshall Islands waters and in the wider region. It is MIMRA's active and effective MCS program that prompted the International Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Network, a Halifax, Canada-based global organization, to recognize MIMRA with an award for its world class Port State Measures. The award not only recognized the excellence of the systems in place and the work of MIMRA's Oceanic Division fisheries officers but also MIMRA's outstanding level of transparency and mutually beneficial collaboration with technology providers as part of a multi-layered monitoring, control and surveillance program.

The participation by our Oceanic and Legal Division staff in regional and international workshops, and annual and technical meetings of the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Western and Central Fish-

# its goal of sustainability



Far left, offshore fisheries advisor Francisco Blaha at MIMRA's Monitoring, Control and Surveillance center. Left, a FAD ready to be deployed.

charters, fish markets and other areas, and ensures MIMRA accounts are transparently managed and audited.

MIMRA's collaboration with outside donors and entities both domestically and internationally allowed MIMRA to make important gains in 2023: Internally in improving management operations in all divisions, upgrading the equipment used by Fisheries Observers and Enforcement Officers so that all on-vessel monitoring is now paperless and carried out using tablets, conducting marine resource surveys of our atolls to better inform our policies and conservation management practices, expanding visits to remote outer islands as part of the Reimaanlok Process, and other work. Among these organizations with which MIMRA had ongoing and effective collaborations in 2023: The World Bank Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program for Economic Resilience (PROPER), the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the FISH4ACP program that is implemented by FAO with funding from the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, the Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation of Japan, National Geographic Pristine Seas, Pacific Community (SPC), FFA, PNA, WCPFC, the College of the Marshall Islands, and the Coastal Management Advisory Council.

From our perspective, the essential words that guide our work are collaboration and partnership for the sustainable management of the marine resources of the Marshall Islands. We start from the foundation that guides MIMRA for ensuring we meet the objective of sustainably managing our coastal and oceanic marine resources. Our partnerships with multiple entities helped us to advance this objective in 2023 — and to continue to effectively study, survey, manage and develop our marine resources into the future.

**Glen Joseph**

eries Commission and the Parties to the Nauru Agreement leads to essential policy development that affects our country and our region. The proof of the results of this engagement is in the fact that tuna is sustainability fished in the Pacific region. While improvements are always needed to ensure continued sustainable fishing of tuna, the fact that stock assessments for the region confirmed again in 2023 that tuna is being fished at sustainable levels is a credit to MIMRA, and our fisheries policy leaders and managers domestically and regionally who are ensuring effective management of the tuna fishery.

The Oceanic Division's ongoing and active engagement with the PNA has opened the door to the Marshall Islands becoming the first island nation to supply tuna to the United States market through an agreement with Walmart. The PNA system of effective management of the purse seine tuna industry affords multiple opportunities for member countries, including the Marshall Islands, to gain new footholds in the tuna value chain that historically have been controlled by nations and companies outside the island region.

Our Competent Authority grew in experience and expertise as it worked with the domestic tuna processing industry to

## BOARD MEMBERS

Minister Tony Muller, Chairman;  
Glen Joseph, Secretary;  
Dennis Momotaro, Member;  
David Kramer, Member;  
Danny Wase, Member;  
Mayor Ladie Jack, Member;  
Robert Muller, Member;  
Tony Paul, Member.

uplift standards for hygienic handling of fish products and conditions for those in the workforce, as well as improving fish processing infrastructure. These are steppingstones to the Marshall Islands meeting strict requirements of countries globally to gain access for our fish products in these offshore markets. This is another area of the tuna value chain the Marshall Islands hopes to enter in the coming years based on the work of the Competent Authority and domestic fish processing companies.

MIMRA's Finance Division staff manages fisheries revenue from the PNA Vessel Day Scheme, sale of fishing licenses, tuna transshipment operations, vessel



# OCEANIC

A MIMRA Fisheries Observer monitors the unloading of tuna from the Federated States of Micronesia-flagged purse seiner Mathawmarfach to the carrier ship Cherry Star in Majuro lagoon.

## Division expands on existing initiatives in sustainability

### Summary

The Oceanic Division developed and expanded many ongoing initiatives for sustainable management of the commercial tuna fishery during 2023.

The year included the official opening of the Parties to the Nauru Agreement Office headquarters in Majuro in February. Later, MIMRA hosted the Forum Fisheries Committee Officials Meeting followed by the Forum Fisheries and the Regional Fisheries Ministers Meetings. Later in the year, President David Kabua, Director Glen Joseph and members of the Oceanic and Legal Division participated in the third PNA Leaders summit held in Kiritimati Island, Kiribati. This brought many heads of state from the participating PNA member

islands together for a high-level policy dialogue. Participation by Oceanic and Legal staff in the annual Western and Central Pacific Fisheries annual meeting in December helped bring about the adoption of important tuna conservation measures. The FFA, PNA and WCPFC meetings all involved significant developments for the Marshall Islands and the region in terms of sustainable fisheries management and development.

The refusal by Thailand in March to allow a fish carrier vessel, suspected of illegal activity in Kiribati waters, to offload tons of tuna for processing in Thai canneries was based on monitoring and investigation work performed by fisheries enforcement staff at MIMRA. The development highlighted new and expanding capability for monitoring and enforcement by the Oceanic Division.

As part of the Oceanic Division's upgrading and expanding its monitoring, control and surveillance capabilities, MIMRA acquired a subscription to the Starboard monitoring system, an automatic identification system-based vessel monitoring system that provides useful capabilities that complement the Oceanic Division's other surveillance systems.

In a related development, late in 2023, the Oceanic Division was called to honor for its world class Port State Measures in a ceremony during the 7th Global Fisheries Enforcement Training Workshop organized by the International Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Network (iMCSn) in Halifax, Canada. The Port State work is designed to monitor and control transshipments in Majuro, one of the



# OCEANIC

## Growing with our digital partners

world's busiest tuna transshipment port. The award not only recognized the excellence of the systems in place and the work of MIMRA's Oceanic Division but also MIMRA's outstanding level of transparency and mutually beneficial collaboration with technology providers as part of a multi-layered monitoring, control and surveillance program.

A tablet app for boarding and inspections was completed in 2023, resulting in all boarding and inspections being paperless. New projects under the World Bank-funded PROPER project include improving port state tools like real time data transmission from boardings and port monitoring.

An innovative element of the Oceanic Division's tuna transshipment management included the ongoing training and rollout of crane scales to document exact weights of tuna being transhipped from purse seiners to carrier vessels and unloadings at dockside. Different electronic scales were trialed in Majuro in 2019 and 2020, making Majuro the first transshipment port in the Pacific to launch use of electronic scales during transshipment operations. Oceanic Division staff are aiming for use of electronic scales during all tuna transshipment operations. While this goal wasn't met in 2023, use of the scales increased significantly, moving toward that goal.

The business partnership between MIMRA and The Nature Conservancy



Various weighing scales tested for the job of recording superior data.

"An innovative element of the Oceanic Division's tuna transshipment management included the ongoing training and rollout of crane scales to document exact weights of tuna being transhipped from purse seiners to carrier vessels and unloadings dockside."



Walmart's house brand Great Value canned tuna.

joint venture company, Pacific Island Tuna Provisions, and the United States retail giant Walmart continued to grow in 2023. Walmart executives visited Majuro for the opening of the PNA Office headquarters in February and later in the year for further tours of processing facilities, a visit to Arno Atoll to meet the community, and meetings that led to signing an extension of the contract for Pacific Island Tuna Provisions to continue providing Marine Stewardship Council-certified sustainably caught tuna to Walmart for its house brand Great Value canned tuna.

Numerous other initiatives involved Oceanic Division and the Competent Authority Division in fisheries management developments. These included numerous fisheries skills workshops and technical meetings. Among them were an aerial surveillance workshop conducted by the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), fisheries labor standards workshop, fish inspector training conducted by MIMRA's Competent Authority, a reefer container maintenance and repair training sponsored by the FISH4ACP Project, a Tuna Data Workshop conduct-



Deputy Director General Pio Manoa, Chairman Glen Joseph and Director General Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen at the Forum Fisheries Committee Officials annual meeting in Majuro in June, 2023.

# Outcomes of WCPFC meeting

ed by the Pacific Community (SPC), a Regional Observer Coordinators workshop with FFA, the FFA-sponsored 18th Management Options Consultation, a regional climate meeting sponsored by the FFA, and a Fisheries Information Management System train the trainers workshop with the Parties to the Nauru Agreement. The year also included the launch of the Marshall Islands Gender and Fisheries Assessment Report and Training. Among the technical meetings in which Oceanic Division staff participated were the WCPFC's Science Committee (SC19) and the WCPFC's Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC19).

## WCPFC annual meeting

Important outcomes were achieved at the 20th annual meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission in December held in Rarotonga,

Cook Islands. These involved conservation management measures for tuna. Most are ongoing measures within the WCPFC framework, but require renewal and improvement on a regular basis. The four significant developments at the WCPFC annual meeting included:

- The adoption of a revised Interim Target Reference Point (iTRP) for South Pacific Albacore. Target reference points are essential conservation measures for protecting the albacore stock.
- Strengthening and amending the Tropical Tuna Measure. This is the most important WCPFC measure that has been in place for the past several years and is considered essential to sustainably managing the tuna resource in the Central and Western Pacific Ocean. This measure is intended and designed to support fisheries for skipjack tuna, bigeye tuna, and yellowfin tuna in the Convention Area that benefit Members, Cooperating Non-Members and Partici-

pating Territories and their communities, and to do so in a way that is fair to all Members and addresses the special requirements of developing States and Participating Territories. It was extended to February 15, 2027.

- Revising the Compliance Monitoring Scheme measure. This measure was first approved in 2010 and implemented from 2011-2015 as a trial. Since then, it has undergone various revisions and updates. The purpose of the Compliance Monitoring Scheme is to ensure that Members, Cooperating Non-Members and Participating Territories implement and comply with obligations arising under the Convention and conservation and management measures adopted by the Commission. The purpose of the Compliance Monitoring Scheme is also to assess flag action by Members, Cooperating Non-Members and Participating Territories in relation to alleged violations by its vessels, not to assess compliance by individual vessels. The



# Big party for the PNA HQ opening

measure was updated and extended through December 31, 2026.

- The US and Marshall Islands were tasked to co-lead development of a workplan for the WCPFC to address climate change on WCPFC fisheries. This is an outgrowth of the region's focus on the climate crisis and its potential far-reaching impact on the tuna fishery.

## PNA PARTICIPATION

### Official opening of the PNA Office

The official opening of Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) Office in Majuro was held February 13. The long-awaited official opening was accomplished with food, gifts from the participating islands, hugs and handshakes from island leaders, and a fireworks display that lit up the Uliga skyline from atop the PNAO headquarters building.

The festive occasion brought fisheries ministers or their representatives from around the region to Majuro for a series of events that included two days of PNA meetings following the opening. "PNA is in the driver's seat of the fishery," Natural Resources and Commerce Minister John Silk said at the opening. "We've managed to accomplish many goals of which the PNA Office is one." The eight countries that are Parties to



The PNA Majuro headquarters pictured from Uliga Dock.

"There were some who doubted or pushed back against the establishment of a PNA Office in Majuro, but 'as the Vessel Day Scheme went from strength to strength, those questions were soon silenced'."

the Nauru Agreement (PNA) and Tokelau control the world's largest sustainable tuna purse seine fishery.

The word "unity" or variations was in regular use by nearly every speaker at the opening.

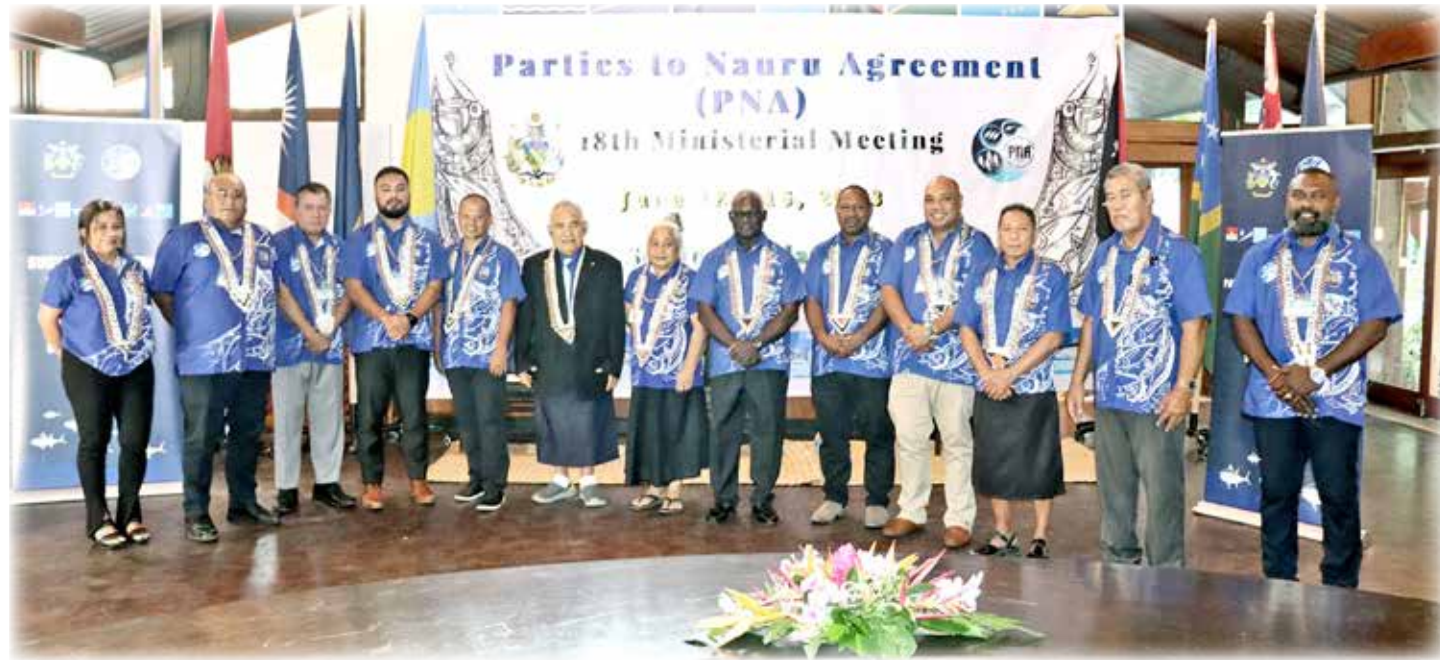
"We wouldn't be here without the commitment of PNA members and the Marshall Islands for hosting it," said PNA Office CEO Dr. Sangaa Clark, who also recognized the landowners for supporting the headquarters building. PNA Chairman from Tuvalu, Minister

Kitiona Tausi, praised the current CEO and the previous two, Dr. Transform Aqorau and Ludwig Kumoru, for their work, saying they are "talent from our PNA countries."

He said there were some who doubted or pushed back against the establishment of a PNA Office in Majuro. "But as the Vessel Day Scheme went from strength to strength, those questions were soon silenced," he said, adding that the VDS management of the purse seine fishery has transformed island economies, including that of Tuvalu. Minister Tausi observed that Christian values make the PNA venture a success. It's about working together, treating our neighbors well, and being honest, he said.

Minister Silk's wife Mary and Minister Tausi's wife Maike cut the ribbon for the building to much applause from those gathered. Everyone enjoyed dinner, followed by a gift ceremony in which visiting delegations explained their various gifts ranging from a storyboard from Palau to specialized fishing gear from Nauru to a canoe, paddle and fans from Tuvalu.

"The PNA Office officially set up



Minister John Silk, PNA Chief Executive Officer Dr. Sangaa Clark, and Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare joined Pacific ministers and ministerial representatives at the PNA annual meeting in Honirara.

## Praise from PM on resilience

here in Majuro in 2010,” Dr. Transform Aqorau told PNA leaders during meetings after the PNA Office opening. “There were just three of us. We had no contracts and we were in a very small office. But it wasn’t about the size of the office. This was an expression of self-determination. The opening of the PNA Office headquarters is an occasion to be very proud. Most new buildings in the Pacific are handed over to us by donors. The PNA Office was self-funded by us.”

### PNA Ministers annual meeting

Ministers from Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Tuvalu, Tokelau, and Solomon Islands met in Honiara from 15-16 June 2023 for their 18th Annual Meeting, with the theme “Sustainable Tuna Fisheries for our Economic Growth & Development.” The Federated States of Micronesia was represented by a Senior Official. The meeting was chaired by Nestor Giro,

Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources for Solomon Islands.

Ministers had the opportunity to travel to Noro before their meeting to visit the center of the Solomon Islands tuna industry, including the Soltuna processing facility, on the 50th anniversary of the operation of the tuna industry in Solomon Islands. In a powerful opening address, the Prime Minister of Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare commended the Parties for their tremendous leadership in ensuring the region’s tuna stocks are managed and sustainably harvested and for providing economic and social benefits to the people of member nations since the organization’s inception. The Prime Minister encouraged the Ministers, as custodians of the world’s largest sustainable tuna fisheries, to remain vigilant and innovative in view of threats transpiring from climate change and other external events. He also called on the Ministers to show that PNA know how to catch, process and market their own fish and to become self-reliant in

those areas in the same way that PNA has shown how to manage tuna fisheries to generate revenue and conserve stocks.

During the meeting, it was noted that the PNA Vessel Day Scheme and other management arrangements had generally proven resilient to some major impacts. The purse seine fishery and the VDS revenue from it had been stable through the Covid pandemic and a very strong La Nina period. These achievements were built on close collaboration among the Parties to ensure that PNA tuna management and development arrangements were successful. PNAO officials confirmed that the pay levels at the PNA Observer Agency for observers would substantially increase from the start of the 2024 fishing year. The increase was recognition of the importance, quality and increasing complexity of the work of observers and that the observer payrate had not been increased for some time.

Ministers welcomed updated scientific advice from the Secretariat of the

## Catch stability seen as a positive

Pacific Community that the four major tuna stocks in PNA waters continue to be reported as healthy and none are assessed as overfished or subject to overfishing.

The stability of catches, effort and catch rates in the purse seine fishery were viewed as a good sign of the health of the tuna fisheries in PNA waters.

They noted that the Western and Central Pacific remains the only ocean region in the world where the tropical tuna resources are being fished sustainably. They expressed their appreciation to all those participating in these fisheries for contributing to this shared outcome through the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Ministers affirmed their strong continuing support for the WCPFC in its work on conservation of regional tuna resources and management of regional tuna fisheries.

They welcomed the adoption by the Commission of the skipjack management procedure and looked forward to similar progress for other key tuna stocks. They also encouraged the Commission to focus on continuing to strengthen the control of longline fishing in the high seas, including recognition of the PNA longline VDS.

Ministers welcomed the development of the Pacific Islands Tuna Provision Initiative as an innovative and mutually beneficial approach to collaboration between Walmart and PNA tuna resource-owning islands and thanked the Marshall



### Third PNA Leaders’ Summit

“Ministers expressed support for the development of a climate change strategy for the PNA to respond to the challenges posed by the effects of climate change on their shared tuna fisheries, including a focus on climate justice.”

Islands and The Nature Conservancy for leading this initiative.

Ministers expressed support for the development of a climate change strategy for the PNA to respond to the challenges posed by the effects of climate change on their shared tuna fisheries, including a focus on climate justice. This will provide the appropriate platform for the PNA to take action to address the challenges posed by climate impacts on PNA tuna fisheries caused by the actions of others.

Ways to expand the involvement of the Marshall Islands and PNA members in the multi-billion dollar tuna value chain was a key point of discussion during the Third PNA Leaders Summit held in Kiritimati Island, Kiribati. The theme of the summit was: “Charting the Course: Economic Independence through Collaboration in Sustainable Tuna Fisheries.” The Summit was hosted by Kiribati President Taneti Mamaau. President David Kabua was among the heads of state participating along with Minister John Silk, MIMRA Director Glen Joseph and other MIMRA Oceanic and Legal division staff.

In 2022, MIMRA and The Nature Conservancy — through their joint venture company Pacific Islands Tuna Provisions — began implementing an agreement with Walmart to supply tuna from PNA waters to the American retail giant. By the time of the PNA Leaders Summit in Kiritimati Island in October 2023, Pacific Tuna Provisions had sourced tuna from PNA waters that pro-



# Manu: 'We are one Pacific'

duced over 20 million cans of Walmart house brand canned tuna.

“Obviously with the opportunities, come many challenges and this is what our leaders discussed with the obvious question, ‘what’s next?’” said Director Joseph. “How can we value add our collective strength to harness more economic gains on the regional tuna stock? The success of the Vessel Day Scheme is a model for continuing opportunities.”

The two major initiatives of PNA nations to expand their participation in the tuna industry is Pacific Islands Tuna-Walmart agreement and Papua New Guinea’s New Britain hubs and spokes initiative for tuna processing development. These are both pathways for PNA members to value-add benefits. PNA Leaders discussed ideas and strategies to have more fish caught in PNA waters landed and processed in PNA ports adding to onshore employment and economic spinoff benefits. The Leaders discussed the fact that most of the engagement in the tuna industry is done at the domestic level with individual members. But, the Leaders acknowledged, the effort lacks a regional direction as they continue to work individually. “It is clear what the leaders want in terms of the regional direction and so as officials, we have our marching orders,” Director Joseph said.

## Forum Fisheries Agency engagement

The Marshall Islands hosted the annual Forum Fisheries Commission officials meeting in May in the lead up to hosting the annual meeting of fisheries ministers from FFA nations in early July.

FFA Director General Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen highlighted the importance of continued partnership among island nations to advance sustainable fisher-



At the Forum Fisheries Ministers Annual Meeting in Majuro RMI Minister John Silk, right, receives the the FFA paddle from Kiribati Minister Ribanataake Tiwau. The event was held at Jiftak En in Majuro.

“FFA Director General Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen highlighted the importance of continued partnership among island nations to advance sustainable fisheries management by pointing out: ‘We are Pacific. One voice. One voyage’.”

ies management by pointing out: “We are Pacific. One voice. One voyage. It’s about the people, the people, the people.”

The FFA members focused on everything from the health of tuna stocks to monitoring and surveillance to prevent

illegal fishing. Climate change was an important part of the discussions as the Ministers considered strategies and policy options for addressing the climate crisis and the looming impacts on the tuna fishery.

The meeting combined the 20th annual FFC ministerial meeting and the fourth regional fisheries ministers meeting. During the July Ministerial Meeting, Minister of Natural Resources and Commerce John Silk received the symbolic paddle from outgoing chairman for the Ministerial Forum Fisheries Committee Minister Ribantaake Tiwau of Kiribati.

## Walmart extends contract

After eight deliveries of skipjack tuna to Walmart in 2022, the first year of a new supply deal between the US retail giant and the Majuro-based Pa-



MIMRA Director Glen Joseph talks with senior representatives of Walmart, top right, as part of a tour by the US retail giant of Marshall Islands Fishing Venture and PII Dock.

# Walmart signs two-year deal

cific Island Tuna Provisions company, Walmart is looking to accelerate the volume of fish being delivered for processing under Walmart’s house tuna brand, Great Value. The signing of a two-year extension of the initial one-year tuna supply agreement in June 2023 was another milestone for the Marshall Islands, demonstrating the opportunity for fishing nations in the Pacific to engage in the tuna value chain outside of selling fishing days and licenses.

This is a development of major significance in the Pacific. For decades, island nations have been limited to selling licenses to vessels from distant water fishing nations to fish in their exclusive economic. Never before has the Marshall Islands or any other small island nation been involved in the supply

of tuna in the multi-billion dollar tuna value chain.

In January 2023, Director Glen Joseph and representatives of PITP and its joint venture partner The Nature Conservancy met with top Walmart executives at their Bentonville, Arkansas headquarters.

The meeting reviewed the first year of the tuna supply deal and plans for the future. It was quickly followed by Walmart dispatching Sean Reber, the company’s senior director for Sourcing and Procurement, to Majuro in mid-February to meet Parties to the Nauru Agreement (PNA) officials who were holding their first in-person meeting in Majuro since the border opened in August 2022 as part of the official opening of the PNA Office.

“Walmart is actively supporting this project,” said Reber. He explained that Walmart identified 20 commodities that the company wants to ensure are being sourced sustainably. Tuna is one of these products.

“The change is good for the company, good for our customers and good for the planet,” he said. What this translates to is that Walmart, which was ranked as the number one company in the Fortune 100 list of US businesses — above Amazon, Apple and Exxon Mobil — in 2022, is putting its buying weight behind tuna that is caught using the PNA system for sustainably managing tuna in the western Pacific.

The MIMRA-TNC partnership led to establishment of Pacific Island Tuna Provisions, a Marshall Islands registered





Walmart's Brandon Nikolish and MIMRA chair John Silk at the signing in June. Inset, Walmart representatives at MIFV.

## Walmart signing a 'big deal'

corporation set up as a tuna supply company. Using the PNA system as a foundation, "we have already ticked all the boxes for standards and requirements Walmart is looking for," said Director Joseph. "We are not only meeting the standards, we are now putting a face and story behind the tuna." He added: "It is a first for the Marshall Islands and the Pacific region to engage directly with a retailer to supply tuna."

After a year of tuna deliveries to Walmart by PITP, other PNA countries are showing interest in the PITP-Walmart arrangement. At the mid-February PNA meeting, Kiribati Fisheries Minister Ribanataake Tiwau expressed interest in the PITP-Walmart arrangement. Director Joseph said PNA leaders from the nine participating islands asked the Marshall Islands to provide a list of options for expanding the supply of tuna being sold to Walmart and the US market. The Nature Conservancy's Mark Zimring pointed out that PITP was established to be scalable to the wider PNA membership.

"The Walmart group met with President David Kabua and his Cabinet, and then proceeded to tour tuna processing facilities in Majuro."

During 2023, 15 purse seiners signed up with PITP to supply tuna to Walmart. Free school-caught tuna — caught without the use of fish aggregation devices (FADs) — together with 100 percent fisheries observer coverage and PNA's chain of custody rules, meets sustainable fishing rules established by the globally recognized Marine Stewardship Council.

A much-anticipated visit by Walmart representatives happened in June. They met with a high-powered gathering of Marshall Islands tuna industry players,

US government officials, MIMRA officials and its two partner organizations — The Nature Conservancy and Pacific Island Tuna Provisions. Among the local industry players at the meeting with Walmart were Pacific International Inc., Pan Pacific Foods and Koo's Fishing Company.

"The fact that Walmart is here in Majuro is a big deal," said Director Joseph. He also pointed out participation in the Walmart visit by US government officials from important overseas development and aid entities. One representative each from the International Development and Finance Corporation and from USAID joined US Embassy representatives in meetings and tours with Walmart officials.

Following the initial meeting with tuna industry players, the Walmart group met with President David Kabua and his Cabinet, and then proceeded to tour tuna processing facilities in Majuro. "We're excited by this opportunity," said Walmart's Director of Global Sourcing Brandon Nikolish while visit-



## MIMRA honored for port measures

ing Majuro. He told the tuna industry players that Walmart is committed to the next two years with the Marshall Islands tuna supply company, Pacific Island Tuna Provisions. Nikolish said Walmart is also looking farther down the road for this partnership. A key part of sourcing tuna from the Pacific is giving more ownership to people who are catching and processing the tuna, he said. Over time, Walmart expects to see change in the industry and Nikolish said his company is happy to be a catalyst for these changes. "We're excited to be a partner and to change the status quo," Nikolish said.

During the visit in June, Nikolish signed a two-year extension of a tuna supply contract with Minister of Natural Resources and Commerce John Silk. The tuna supply deal is between Walmart and the Marshall Islands company, Pacific Islands Tuna Provisions. "The signing was an historic moment and for a giant retail store buying direct from the Marshall Islands," said Minister Silk. "This partnership with Walmart is beneficial to our economy as more jobs would be available as we progress in this special relationship."

### US Pacific Tuna Treaty

The Pacific signed a new Economic Assistance Agreement with the government of the United States securing



International Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Network officials honored MIMRA's Glen Joseph, Francisco Blaha, and Beau Bigler for IUU prevention work.

funding of \$60 million per year for the next 10 years. FFA Director General Dr. Manu Tupou-Roosen signed the agreement in Majuro in the margins of the Forum Fisheries Ministerial meeting in July.

The Economic Assistance Agreement promotes economic development in the Pacific region. Under the agreement, FFA maintains an economic development fund from which payments are made to the Pacific Island States party to the Treaty on Fisheries between the Government of Certain Pacific Island States and the Government of the United States of America — better known as the US Tuna Fisheries Treaty.

In 2022, Fisheries Ministers led negotiations with the United States to successfully increase the funding under the Economic Assistance Agreement from \$21 million to \$60 million per year for the next 10 years.

On signing the new agreement, Dr. Tupou-Roosen said, "The historic increase in the US assistance under the Economic Assistance Agreement will significantly benefit all FFA Members. I warmly congratulate Members for this milestone achievement and acknowl-

edge in particular the leadership of Fisheries Ministers in the negotiations."

### Oceanic Division honored for IUU prevention

The Oceanic Division was honored in August with an international award recognizing its prevention work against illegal fishing. In a ceremony during the 7th Global Fisheries Enforcement Training Workshop organized by the International Fisheries Monitoring, Control and Surveillance Network (iMCS) in Halifax, Canada, MIMRA was recognized for its world class Port State Measures. The Port State work is designed to monitor and control transshipments in Majuro, which has been since the mid-2010s the world's busiest tuna transshipment port.

The award not only recognized the excellence of the systems in place and the work of the Oceanic Division fisheries officers but also MIMRA's outstanding level of transparency and mutually beneficial collaboration with technology providers as part of a multi-layered monitor-



## Total Catch Purse Seine Fleets\* in the Marshall Islands EEZ 2014-2023

Year	SKJ	YFT	BET	OTH	Total
2014	66,196	3,477	668	18	70,359
2015	21,293	4,295	126	0	26,344
2016	72,329	5,790	648	0	78,767
2017	22,765	2,901	788	65	26,519
2018	26,424	2,168	253	58	28,903
2019	4,806	65	410	11	5,394
2020	28,915	7,000	871	55	36,841
2021	35,842	18,270	514	14	54,640
2022	38,655	1,918	523	28	41,123
2023	39,435	1,484	3,228	67	44,232++

Figures are metric tons. \* RMI, Taiwan, FSM, South Korea, Kiribati, Nauru, Japan, Tuvalu, China, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and PNG (listed in order of catch tonnage). **Key:** SKJ=Skipjack Tuna, YFT=Yellowfin Tuna, BET=Bigeye Tuna, OTH=Other. ++ 2023 tonnage is provisional.

## Total Catch Longline Fleets\* in the Marshall Islands EEZ 2014-2023

Year	ALB	BET	YFT	OTH	Total
2014	172	4,680	2,346	680	7,878
2015	122	2,286	1,380	359	4,147
2016	67	1,522	1,127	420	3,136
2017	71	1,698	1,389	445	3,603
2018	52	2,210	1,262	316	3,840
2019	134	1,974	1,699	410	4,269
2020	21	1,640	1,282	256	3,199
2021	122	1,677	1,136	331	3,265
2022	233	1,636	1,347	368	3,584
2023	160	2,018	949	284	3,411++

Figures are metric tons. \*Longline: Marshall Islands chartered, FSM, Japan and China (listed in order of catch tonnage). **Key:** ALB=Albacore, BET=Bigeye Tuna, YFT=Yellowfin Tuna, OTH=Other.

## Total Catch Pole-and-Line Fleet\* in the Marshall Islands EEZ 2014-2023

Year	BET	SKJ	YFT	Total
2014	3	3,317	21	3,341
2015	0	615	2	617
2016	0	429	1	430
2017	0	72	0	72
2018	0	1,017	1	1,018
2019	0	1,022	2	1,024
2020	0	2,223	9	2,619
2021	2	761	14	777
2022	0	880	13	893
2023	0	516	0	516++

Figures are metric tons. \* Pole-and-line fleet is exclusively Japan. **Key:** BET=Bigeye Tuna, SKJ=Skipjack Tuna, YFT=Yellowfin Tuna.

Source: MIMRA Oceanic Division

# RMI's leading role in fisheries in the region



ing, control and surveillance program.

“This is a culmination of the good hard work, cooperation and collaboration over the years with Majuro port as a major transshipment hub,” said Director Joseph, who was on hand to receive the award with Oceanic Division staff. Director Joseph singled out the monitoring, control and surveillance “practioners” as well as “the industry, whom, fair to say, have led us to this moment.”

The award recognized the long-term collaboration and the leading role that the Marshall Islands has with regional fisheries monitoring, control and surveillance institutions such as the Forum Fisheries Agency and the iMCS, on which Joseph serves as vice chair. The award also honored MIMRA for its work at the bilateral level with many partners such as Thailand’s Department of Fisheries and in particular, with the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade that has supported the work of a fisheries advisor working with the Oceanic Division since 2018.

“This award and recognition is a testament that despite our small administration and limited technical and financial capacity, it can be done,” said Director Joseph, adding this was possible “with the right network and tools available in the region. Now let’s continue building on the good work.”

MIMRA’s Chief Fisheries Officer Beau Bigler was one of the presenters at the workshop. During the award ceremony, the chairman of the iMCS, Gary Orr, highlighted MIMRA’s contribution to the fight against illegal, unregulated



## Provisional purse seine transshipments & uploads in Majuro in 2023

Flag	Number of PS Transshipments	SKJ	YFT	BET	Total
Federated States of Micronesia	57	33,150	7,380	1,094	41,624
Korea, Republic of	1	870	308	5	1,183
Marshall Islands	47	27,734	5,248	546	33,438
Nauru	71	56,038	5,614	972	62,624
Papua New Guinea	8	6,346	69	30	6,445
Solomon Islands	1	180	0	140	320
Spain	3	3,569	482	787	4,838
Taiwan	98	61,965	10,692	1,264	73,921
Tuvalu	7	2,924	622	3	3,549
Vanuatu	1	1,163	137	0	1,300
<b>Total</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>193,938</b>	<b>30,551</b>	<b>4,750</b>	<b>229,242</b>

**Note:** The numbers listed under different tuna species are metric tons.

**Key:**  
SKJ: Skipjack;  
YFT: Yellowfin;  
BET: Bigeye.

# FISH4ACP now in high gear

and unreported (IUU) fishing globally:

- Leading national and regional anti-IUU activities through its world-class Port State Measures best practices.
- Supporting a rights-based management approach to the world’s largest tuna fishery.
- Ensuring robust, efficient, and effective collaboration amongst all FFA and PNA member countries.
- Sustaining regional focus to promote uniform and transparent Monitoring, Control and Surveillance.
- Using innovative and cutting-edge information technology solutions, including electronic monitoring and reporting.

iMCS Chairman Orr further recognized MIMRA for encouraging women to work at the fisheries department, and for the authority’s unmatched levels of transparency and open information available on its website <https://www.rmimimra.com>.

“A top priority of the FAO’s FISH4ACP is to increase the amount of tuna that is exported through freezer containers because this brings the tuna onto land, increasing employment opportunities...”

## Tuna transshipment and FISH4ACP

The FISH4ACP project moved into high gear in 2023 with numerous activities to develop support for onshore tuna unloading into reefer containers with the goal of increasing benefits from tuna

containerization to the domestic economy. The FISH4ACP project is implemented in collaboration with MIMRA by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization with funding from the European Union and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. It is focused on adding value to the tuna containerization operation in Majuro.

A top priority of the FAO’s FISH4ACP is to increase the amount of tuna that is exported through freezer containers because this brings the tuna onto land, increasing employment opportunities and economic activities in the local economy.

New studies conducted by the FISH4ACP in late 2022 and early 2023 show the potential for converting the Marshall Islands into a Pacific hub for tuna containerization, provided that significant investments are made in cold storage and tuna loading facilities. The



# Creating jobs by landing the tuna

studies established a framework for an ambitious strategy to upgrade the Marshallese tuna value chain over the next 10 years. It aims to expand local containerization to 30 percent of tuna catches, estimating that this would generate \$33 million of direct value added to the economy and create over 1,000 jobs. Expanding the use of renewable energy would keep the ecological footprint of developing the tuna hub under control.

During 2023, the FISH4ACP project pulled together representatives of domestic tuna processors, government officials, financial partners and affiliated organizations for multiple meetings to discuss and develop plans for expanding the tuna transshipment onshore. Dozens of tuna industry stakeholders met with FISH4ACP and MIMRA representatives in 2023 and one outcome was to establish a platform known as MI-FISH to provide input and oversight during implementation of the transshipment expansion work.

The FISH4ACP strategy focuses on the three aspects of sustainability: economic, environmental and social. Technical and financial feasibility studies were completed in late 2022 and early 2023 on the use of onshore “tuna loaders” and for the possible construction of a cold storage facility in Majuro. In the case of tuna loader, from an operational perspective, considering the fact that it will take time to gradually increase con-

Number of foreign longline, pole-and-line and purse seine vessels licensed to fish in RMI EEZ, by year and flag, from 2019 to 2023.	Flag	Gear	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	China	LL	22	20	18	22	29
		PS	9	9	9	10	12
	FSM	LL	9	10	12	11	10
		FSMA'	PS	54	70	83	79
	Japan	LL	9	2	2	1	6
		PL	20	21	25	3	13
		PS	26	28	29	22	25
		Kiribati	PS	7	3	4	2
	South Korea	PS	25	25	21	20	22
		Nauru	PS	0	0	0	0
Philippines	PS	10	15	15	15	6	
	Taiwan	LL	1	0	0	0	0
	PS	24	18	21	23	22	
	Tuvalu	PS	1	0	1	1	1
USA	PS	6	25	0	0	0	
	<b>Sub-total</b>	LL	41	32	32	34	45
<b>Total/Year</b>		PL	20	21	25	3	13
		PS	162	190	183	95	181
		<b>223</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>239</b>	



Trainees in the reefer maintenance program sponsored by FISH4ACP.

tainerization, and in conjunction with the financial analysis, it was proposed that investing in a single shipper initially is feasible. An FAO grant scheme for this equipment was prepared during 2023.

In relation to the social strategy of this program, studies were carried out on occupational safety, cultural and gender sustainability of the onshore facilities.

In addition, a participatory communication strategy was being developed to increase the interest of the Marshallese in the fishery.

Another identified need was the training of shore-based personnel in the repair and maintenance of refrigerated containers in line with the anticipated increase in exports of tuna by freezer containers. To meet this need, a five-day training



Workers concentrate on their Australian reefer instructor Daniel Allen, who works with RMS Eastern.

# Trainees interested, dedicated

program was sponsored by FISH4ACP at the end of 2023 on the basic functions, maintenance and repairs of reefer containers focusing on local tuna processing plants and service provider personnel in the tuna containerization process. A total of 12 trainees from Pacific International Inc., Marshall Islands Fishing Venture and Pan Pacific Foods participated in the training and as part of the program, six reefer containers were fixed, said Sergio Bolasina, who is coordinating this program for the FAO.

Daniel Allen from RMS Eastern company, based in Australia, delivered the maintenance training to the local technicians. The training consisted of a general introduction of the main parts and function of reefer containers, and practical sessions to resolve the main failures that affect these containers. The training was not only productive for the students: during the first day, two containers that normally had to wait to be returned for servicing were repaired. This avoided losing valuable cargo.

“It is worth highlighting the interest and dedication of the trainees, who re-

“Currently, both Pacific International Inc. and Pan Pacific Foods handle tuna unloaded at dockside for export in freezer containers. But the volume being unloaded at dockside is miniscule compared to the tonnage being handled by carrier vessels in the lagoon.”

ally appreciate this type of initiative, as well as the commitment of the companies that are a fundamental part of this strategy,” said Bolasina.

“In addition to the training, meetings were held with stakeholders in order to establish the main needs of the sector,” he said. “In addition to qualified and registered technicians, it is necessary to have someone responsible for the re-

ception of spare parts and an inventory. Work is being done on this and on the possible continuation of more specialized courses.”

Currently, both Pacific International Inc. and Pan Pacific Foods handle tuna unloaded at dockside for export in freezer containers. But the volume being unloaded at dockside is miniscule compared to the tonnage being handled by carrier vessels in the lagoon.

## Tuna transshipment operations increase

Tuna transshipments in Majuro in 2023 increased over 2022 by 13 percent. The 294 transshipments in 2023 was strong for the post-Covid period, but nowhere near the pre-Covid period 2015-2019 when Majuro averaged 466 transshipments annually. Nevertheless, the three-year average of 283 transshipments from 2021-2023 showed a strong rebound from the Covid interrupted year of 2020 when only 175 transshipments were performed, the lowest number in a decade.



The transshipment vessel CherryStar uploading fish from a purse seiner in Majuro Port.

# Taiwan leads transshipment

The vast majority of the transshipment activity remains purse seiner to carrier vessel in Majuro lagoon. Despite greater emphasis on bringing a high volume of tuna for unloading onshore into freezer containers, the dockside unloading remained minimal in 2023. The six purse seine vessels that unloaded their catches into freezer containers was double the three in 2022. But on the flip side, the 10 purse seiners that split their catch of-flooding between carrier transshipment and unloading to freezer containers was less than one-third of the 35 split transshipments/unloadings the previous year. The planned purchase in 2024 with joint FAO-Pacific International Inc. funds of specially designed tuna loading equipment for efficient unloading of tuna from purse seiners to freezer containers is expected to reduce the time involved and increase the number of vessels that choose the freezer container option over transshipment to carriers.

Once again, Taiwan-flagged vessels accounted for the largest percentage

of the 294 transshipments — 98 or 33 percent. Nauru-flagged essels were next with 71 transshipments, followed by FSM-flagged vessels with 57, and Marshall Islands-flagged vessels with 47. S. Korea, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Spain, Tuvalu and Vanuatu each had between one and eight transshipments.

Although transshipments overall increased by 13 percent in 2023, the average tonnage for each transshipment declined below the record-setting average in 2022 of 851 tons per transshipment. In 2023, purse seiners averaged 780 tons transhipped per vessel.

In late 2022, fisheries observers returned to active duty on purse seiners and longline fishing vessels after a two-and-a-half-year hiatus due to Covid border lock downs. 2023 represented the first year since 2019 when 100 percent observer coverage for purse seiners returned. MIMRA fisheries observers only went on a small number of longline fishing trips. But after three years of

virtual total disruption of fisheries observer work by Covid, 2023 proved to be a rebound year for the 45 observers on MIMRA's team. Fisheries observers went on 94 purse seine fishing trips and 23 longline trips in 2023 for a total of 117 trips. This remains lower than pre-Covid years when observers averaged 186 trips annually from 2015-2019. But 117 trips in 2023 represented a solid rebound from the Covid-constrained years when observers averaged only 21 trips a year, 2020-2022, including a low of nine in 2022.

**• Pole-and-line catches:** A total of 13 pole-and-line vessels were registered to fish in the Marshall Islands during 2023. These vessels caught 516mt of tuna, the lowest total in five years, which generally reflects the small number of this type of vessel fishing in Marshall Islands waters. The estimated 516mt caught in 2023 compares to 893mt caught by pole-and-line vessels in 2022. In 2023, skipjack tuna accounted for the entire 516mt of tuna caught.

# RMI fleet catches 67,520mt in WCPO

**• Longline catches:** Catches by longline vessels in the Marshall Islands remained relatively consistent from 2020 through 2023, ranging from a low of 3,199mt in 2020 to a high of 3,584mt in 2022. During 2023, the 45 vessels licensed to fish in Marshall Islands waters caught a provisional total of 3,411mt. The 45 vessels included the 29 chartered by Marshall Islands Fishing Venture (China-flagged), 10 FSM-flagged and six Japan-flagged longliners.

Bigeye tuna accounted for over half of the 2023 total catch at an estimated 2,018mt. This was followed by 949mt of yellowfin tuna caught by longliners. Albacore tuna accounted for an estimated 160mt and “other” species rounded out the total with 284mt.

The domestically based foreign longline fleet comprises vessels from China and FSM are managed and operated under Marshall Islands Fishing Venture, Ltd., which is a subsidiary of Luen Thai. These longline vessels accounted for nearly 70 percent of the total catch estimated at 2,336mt. Federated States of Micronesia-flagged longline vessels caught an additional estimated 812mt tons, while Japan vessels caught an estimated 175mt and Chinese vessels 87mt.

In contrast to the purse seine fishery, which is mostly concentrated in the southern waters of the Marshall Islands' EEZ, longline fishing is more widely dispersed through the EEZ.



Tuna being moved to a reefer container at PII's dock in Delap.

**• Purse seine catch:** Available logsheet data indicate that total catch by purse seine fleets operating in the Marshall Islands EEZ increased from 41,123mt in 2022 to 44,232mt in 2023. A total of 23 percent of this tonnage — 10,055mt — was caught by the Marshall Islands-flagged fleet. The next highest tonnage was Taiwan-flagged purse seiners, that caught 9,856mt, followed by FSM-flagged vessels that caught 9,165mt. Other purse seine fleets accounting for catches in Marshall Islands EEZ in 2023: S. Korea 6,179mt; Kiribati 4,036mt; Nauru 2,222mt; Japan 1,233mt; Tuvalu 610mt; China 415mt; Vanuatu 295mt; Solomon Islands 120mt; and Papua New Guinea 45mt.

The catch rates in the Marshall Islands EEZ are usually influenced by the prevailing environmental conditions, with higher catches recorded during or immediately following strong El Nino periods. Skipjack tuna continues to be the dominant catch, accounting for 89% of the total catch in 2023.

## Catch in the WCPFC area

In 2023, the 11 Marshall Islands-flagged purse seine vessels caught an estimated 67,520mt throughout the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). This is lower than the three previous years, when catch levels ranged from a lot of 81,913mt to a high of 89,435mt.

Skipjack is the prominent species caught comprising 88 percent of the total followed by yellowfin at 10 percent and bigeye tuna accounting for less than one percent. The changes in tonnage reflect many factors, including location of tuna, environmental changes and activity of the domestic fleet.

There were 29 foreign long-liners chartered in 2023 whose catch in the Marshall Islands EEZ was estimated at 2,314mt. This compares to the previous three years when chartered vessels caught 1,599mt, 1,733mt, and 2,446mt for 2020, 2021 and 2022, respectively.



## OBSERVER PROGRAM

### Fisheries Observer trips by flag and gear 2023

Flag	Purse Seine	Longline
Taiwan	73	0
FSMA/FM	16	0
FSMA/Nauru	3	0
China	2	0
MIFV/CN	0	19
MIFV/FM	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>23</b>

Key: FSMA=FSM Arrangement vessels; FM=Federated States of Micronesia; CN=China; MIFV=Marshall Islands Fishing Venture.

# Observer team expands

In 2023, the MIMRA Observer program marked its first full year of normalcy post-Covid border lockdowns that had dramatically curtailed observer operations in the region. This year saw MIMRA's fisheries Observer Program rebound from the attrition caused by the pandemic.

The program not only rebounded, it ended 2023 with the most-ever active female observers in the program. At the start of 2023, there were 33 active observers. By the end of the year, the number had increased to 45. Of those, 39 were male and six were female.

As it has for many years, in 2023 MIMRA's observer program partnered with the College of the Marshall Islands to successfully recruit new observers. The new group trained involved 12 people, split evenly among men and women.

The Observer Program benefits from experienced observer staff, including three who are certified Pacific Islands Regional Fisheries Observer (PIRFO) debriefers. During 2023, the program added two trainee debriefers but is in need of additional debriefers, particu-

larly as the program grows in size and the number of observer trips increases in the future.

Two PIRFO observer trainers conduct new and refresher trainings at the College of the Marshall Islands campus in Arrak Majuro.

Observers and program staff attended a number of workshops and during the year, including:

- Debriefers Assessor Workshop
- Regional Observer Coordinators Workshop
- International Fisheries Observer and Monitoring Conference
- Debriefers Workshop
- Marine Stewardship Council Chain of Custody Re-Validation Training
- Fisheries Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division
- Observer Critical Report Analysis Workshop

After averaging 186 observer trips annually from 2015-2019, the extended Covid border lockdowns from 2020 through 2022 severely impacted the program and resulted in few trips. Observers were able to perform only 64 trips in

three years, with just nine conducted in 2022 after the border opened in August 2022.

In 2023, MIMRA did not return to pre-Covid observer trip numbers. But the rebound was strong, with observers making a total of 97 trips on purse seine vessels and 23 on longline vessels for a total of 117 fishing trips monitored. The observer trips on purse seiners were in two categories: bilateral trips, 75, and FSM Arrangement trips, 19. Combined, the 94 purse seine trips accounted for 2,852 days at sea or an average of 30 days per trip. The majority of the purse seine trips were on Taiwan-flagged vessels (73). It also included 19 on FSM Arrangement vessels (Nauru and FSM-flagged) and two on China-flagged vessels.

The 23 longline trips were mostly on China-flagged vessels (19) associated with the locally based Marshall Islands Fishing Venture fish base operation in Majuro. The other four were on FSM-flagged vessels also associated with MIFV. The 23 longline trips involved 350 days at sea for an average of 15 days per trip.

### Fisheries Observer trips 2015-2023

Year	PS	LL	Total
2015	182	0	182
2016	175	28	203
2017	153	39	192
2018	145	34	179
2019	141	33	174
2020	20	12	32*
2021	0	23	23*
2022	9	0	9*
2023	94	23	117

\* Observer coverage restricted due to Covid.  
Source: MIMRA Oceanic Division.



Far left, the completion of the Observer Assessor Workshop. Above, trainers and observers at the Observer Trainer Workshop.

# with most women ever



Above, an observer takes measurements of a purse seiner's net. Right, an observer at work on board the FSM purse seiner Mathawmarfach as fish is transferred to the CherryStar carrier in Majuro lagoon.





# Oceanic highlights

## Vessels tonnage

There was a total of 294 tuna transshipments in Majuro port in 2023. The transshipments accounted for an estimated 229,239 metric tons of tuna. The number was 14 percent higher than the 257 transshipments in 2021. The average tuna tonnage per transshipment wasn't as high as the all-time record established in 2022 at 851mt per transshipment. In 2023, the average transshipment amounted to 780mt. Taiwan-flagged purse seiners accounted for the highest number at 98, followed by Nauru fishing vessels with 71, FSM vessels with 57, and RMI vessels at 47. The breakdown of the transshipments in 2023: There were 278 transshipments to carrier vessels in the lagoon, 10 split between transshipments and unloadings at the dock, and six unloadings at dockside.



## VDS success

After a two-year decline, purse seine Vessel Day Scheme revenue showed a small increase in 2023 compared 2022. VDS revenue totaled \$25,198,926 in 2023, a one percent rise compared to the \$24,986,929 in 2022. Fishing rights revenue declined by 53 percent, from \$3,617,510 in 2022 to \$1,882,120 million in 2023. Licensing fees were 13 percent lower in 2023: \$1,684,293 in 2023 compared to \$1,936,700 the previous year. Total net operating revenue at \$32,776,950 increased two percent over 2022.

## Vessel licenses

A total of 239 purse seine, longline and pole-and-line vessels were licensed to fish in Marshall Islands waters in 2023, a slight drop from the 244 licensed the previous year. The breakdown was 181 purse seine, 45 longline, and 13 pole-and-line vessels. As is the case each year, not all licensed vessels actually fished in the Marshall Islands EEZ during the year.

## Tuna transshipments Majuro 2014-23

Year	Number	Metric Tons	*Average	
2014	382	158,065	414	*Average metric tonnage per transshipment. ** Provisional tonnage estimate. Source: MIMRA Oceanic Division.
2015	504	368,323	731	
2016	551	403,809	733	
2017	424	292,754	690	
2018	403	307,164	762	
2019	449	362,454	807	
2020	175	118,743	679	
2021	298	221,609	743	
2022	257	218,759	851	
2023	294	229,239**	780	

## Funding to RMI

MIMRA transferred \$25 million to support the national government's budget in 2023, five percent less than the \$26.2 million in 2022. The \$25 million amounted to about six percent of the national budget.

## National fleet

The Marshall Islands-flagged purse seine fleet of 11 vessels caught an estimated 67,520mt of tuna, down from the 85,984mt caught in 2022. In addition, the provisional catch of the 29

chartered longline vessels associated with the Majuro-based Marshall Islands Fishing Venture-operated fish base totaled 2,314mt, a decline of 35 percent from the 3,582mt caught the previous year.

## Observer action

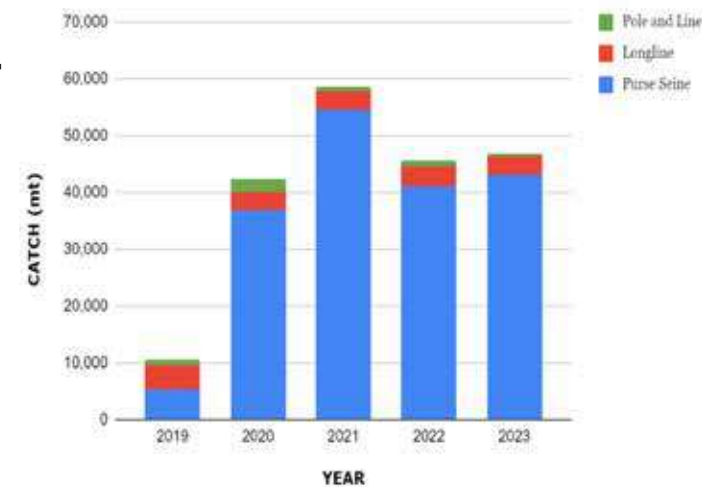
MIMRA's 45 active fisheries observers carried out 94 purse seine trips and 23 longline trips during 2023 for a total of 117 trips — the first full year without Covid border closure restrictions, which limited purse seine trips in 2022 to only nine.



# for MIMRA in 2023



## Total catch by different fishing gear-types operating in the RMI EEZ from 2019 to 2023



In 2023, the average transshipment amounted to 780mt. Taiwan-flagged purse seiners accounted for the highest number at 98, followed by Nauru fishing vessels with 71, FSM vessels with 57, and RMI vessels at 47. Pictured is the purse seiner Micronesia 102 alongside the transshipment vessel Syota Maru.

Source of tables: MIMRA Oceanic Division.

## PII vessel service

This year saw a big increase in PII fisheries operations compared to the Covid-restricted years. For 2023, PII handled 12 unloadings of the tuna from purse seiners into freezer containers for later shipment to offshore canneries. The total volume of the 12 unloadings was 3,746mt filling 145 containers. PII's net yard handled net repairs for 18 purse seiners compared to three in 2022. It also assisted four vessels with repairs, eight vessels with loading salt, and three with bunkering and fresh water.

## Onshore processing, exports

Pan Pacific Foods (PPF) loining plant continued operations in 2022 but these were limited to cold storage and containerization of fish. The company again did not produce processed fish as in 2021. PPF, PII and the Marshall Islands Fishing Venture combined to export to offshore canneries 9,196mt tons of whole tuna in freezer containers. The largest volume of these exports, 5,749mt, went to Thailand. A total of 2,345mt was ex-

ported to Vietnam, 1,077mt to the Philippines, and 24mt to Japan.

## RMI EEZ tonnage

An estimated 45,600mt of tuna was caught in the Marshall Islands EEZ by purse seine, longline and pole and line vessels. Most of this volume — 90 percent — was caught by purse seiners, while longline vessels accounted for eight percent of the total catch and pole and line vessels picked up two percent. The provisional purse seine catch of 44,232mt was up slightly from 2022.

# COMPETENT AUTHORITY

## Making progress towards achieving accreditation

The last quarter of 2022 saw continued progress in the Competent Authority's work toward achieving accreditation from the European Union for the export of marine products from the Marshall Islands. CA staff updated domestic tuna processing on the EU accreditation process, which has been developing over the past several years.

The next step for both the CA and the industry was to demonstrate that at least one facility and one or more vessels complied with Marshall Islands standards and that the CA has records to show proof of compliance. There was constant cooperation in 2023 between both parties to ensure efforts were ongoing in these areas so that the Marshall Islands continues its momentum of moving closer to its EU accreditation status. As work progressed and grew, the CA also sought new team members to contribute to the wide-range of areas involved in this regulatory work.

Among the activities carried out in 2023:

- **Interviews for CA auditors and managers:** The month of October resulted in interviews for CA Officer and the CA Manager. As the Competent Authority moves closer to receiving EU accreditation, the team must grow, necessitating additional personnel.

- **Food Safety training with the Ministry of Health and Human Services:** The CA participated in the virtual food safety training on laboratory requirements for food imported and exported in the Marshall Islands with the Ministry of Health and Human Services. As they control industrially fished tuna goods that are exported as Marshall Islands products, MOHHS is expanding its task



The FFA conducted training for the RMI, FSM and Samoa Competent Authorities on understanding international market access.

force on food safety by adding the CA to the task force.

- **Regional training on requirements to access global markets:** Jope Tamani, from the Forum Fisheries Agency, and advisor Cushla Hogarth conducted training for the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia and Samoa Competent Authorities and industry representatives to fully understand international market access. There are multiple markets for fish exporters to export to, but this training focused mainly on the large markets for tuna which are the US, EU, and China. The main market for CA staff and the industry representatives who participated in the online training is the EU, which requires the Competent Authority as the regulatory and certification entity. The training explained why the Competent Authority must comply with standards that are deemed equivalent to the EU market. These standards in turn

produce two types of certificates: the Health Certificate and the Catch Certificate, which verify that illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) activity was not involved with catching the fish intended for export to the EU. Jope and Cushla emphasized the CA's job to assure the safety of products being produced in facilities and establishments under the full control of the CA of that country. This training was great for the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, and Samoa as they were newly established CA in the process of working toward a fully operational CA. The participation from industry representatives gave an opportunity for them to understand the new market changes and requirements.

- **Labor Standards on Fishing Vessels:** CA Officer Tatiana Shoniber attended the labor standards for fishing vessels workshop in Nadi, Fiji. Normal working conditions on fishing vessels



Top, the Forum Fisheries Agency held a three-week training course for Competent Authority Officers and industry officials. Above, CA officers inspect a purse seiner unloading and tuna processing at MIFV.

in the Pacific can be characterized by long hours, high levels of risk, poor living conditions, low pay, and extended time at sea. The workshop focused on upholding internationally-recognized standards for safe working conditions in Pacific Island Countries. Tatiana, from her time observing how other countries deal with fishing vessel labor issues, remarked: "I've learned from this workshop that many PICs are unsure of which labor rules apply to fishermen on fishing vessels. Foreign-flagged vessels are not subject to national labor regulations, and these labor laws do not apply to fishing vessels. The management of the fishing industry has not adequately addressed the working conditions on fishing vessels for both domestic and foreign crews. The crews of fishing vessels fall into a wide gray area where there is little coordination between government entities. These organizations were brought

together for this session to start collaborating on ways to safeguard ship crews and make it appealing to work on them."

- **CA Regional Training:** The Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) conducted a three-week training course for Competent Authority Officers and industry officials in the region. The objective of the course was to provide the fundamental technical and practical knowledge and competencies required for Competent Authority Officers on the topics: Background to the Competent Authority, the Roles and Duties of CA officers, Code of Ethics for CA officers, CA services, tools, and equipment, CA Documentation, Health Standards for Fish and Fishery products, Certification Reporting, EU Rapid Alert Crisis Management, Internal Audit and Review of CA systems, Food Safety Management, Good Hygiene Practices, Seafood Hazard Analysis and Critical

Control Points (HACCP), Fishing and Processing Techniques, Understanding Processors, Implementation of verification, approval and surveillance, Understanding key legislation, requirements, and standards with a specific focus on EU, US, China, and New Zealand markets.

The training also included practical sessions on Inspection and Auditing that included a factory visit to observe structure and compliance. Other areas covered were: Non-compliance and corrective actions inventory, control and traceability, leadership and people skills, and conflict resolution. The training was timely for the newly recruited CA officer to build capacity. It was also a good opportunity for the new CA Manager to renew commitments for continued cooperation and technical support from FFA and Pacific-European Union Marine Partnership Program, and to network with other

# COMPETENT AUTHORITY

## Sweeping vessel inspection

CAs from within the region.

- **Documentary review for Marshall Islands-flagged fishing-vessels:** During February, the Competent Authority conducted a documentary check/review for 11 Marshall Islands-flagged fishing vessels that submitted their HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) plans and Prerequisite Program Manuals, which are mandatory under the Marshall Islands Fish Processing and Export Regulation 2020 and the Marshall Islands Industry Standards. The objective is to establish and enforce proper

hygiene, handling, and food-safety practices for all establishments exporting fish and fishery products from the Marshall Islands. Once these documents are fully compliant with the Regulations and Standards and endorsed by both the CA and the operators, the CA will conduct training for the crew on these vessels to ensure proper implementation of their HACCP plans and Prerequisite Program Manuals, which then should enable their products to meet EU, US or China market standards. The development of these HACCP plans and Prerequisite Program Manuals has been an ongoing effort for some time now, for all parties involved, with much-appreciated technical support from Forum Fisheries Agency counterparts. This development in 2023 is a major step forward in the Competent Authority's efforts to secure Marshall Islands access to the EU and other markets.

- **Vessel Inspection:** During April



Competent Authority Officer Dexter Martinez inspects a Marshall Islands-flagged purse seiner.

2023, the RMI Competent Authority conducted Full Verification Audits of Marshall Islands Fishing Venture and Pan Pacific Food's processing plants. The scope of the audits covered the necessary documentary checks, including: Implementation of HACCP, prerequisite programs identified and documented, Critical Control Points Ability to trace products, inspection of structural, temperature control, and water requirements, all other requirements stipulated under the Marshall Islands Industry Standards, the National Control Plan, and the Marshall Islands Fish Processing and Export Regulations of 2020. For MIFV and PPF, the audits were able to identify their areas of strength and weaknesses that require improvement to meet national standards and importing market requirements.

The CA commends the cooperation received from both Marshall Islands Fishing Venture and Pan Pacific Foods,

and their willingness to take the necessary measures to improve their establishments.

- **Vessel Inspections from May to July:** The Marshall Islands Competent Authority conducted Full Verification Audits on five Marshall Islands-flagged purse seine fishing vessels, three belonging to Koo's Fishing Company and two belonging to Pan Pacific Foods.

Similar to the scope for verification for land-based establishments, the full audits entailed: Verification of HACCP and prerequisite program implementation on board

each vessel, availability of documented records, inspection of structural requirements, and particular emphasis on hygienic conditions of fish handling and storage areas, temperature control capabilities and requirements for water used on board. The audit is part of an ongoing effort to have all 11 Marshall Islands-flagged vessels audited to determine their capability of meeting the national standards and to provide a baseline for vessels and companies interested in future opportunities to export their products directly to the EU and other potential international markets.

Despite challenges of managing a schedule for vessel inspection due to the varied vessel movements, cooperation with fishing companies allowed for audits of the following five vessels to take place: F/V Lometo (PPF), F/V Lajabwil (PPF), F/V Koo's 108 (KFC), F/V Marshalls 201 (Marshall Islands Fishing Company) and Koo's 102 (KFC).

# LEGAL



Partners in the Blue Pacific held a workshop on illegal fishing in Honolulu in January, 2023.

## Upholding the rule of law and conserving resources

The Legal Division provided advice to the MIMRA Board of Directors and management regarding fisheries legal issues at the national, sub-regional, regional and international levels during 2023. All legal work carried out by the Legal Division is based on the principles of upholding the rule of law and conserving the nation's marine resources for the benefit of the people of the Marshall Islands.

The Legal Division advises both the Coastal and Oceanic Divisions. For the Oceanic and Industrial Affairs Division, the Legal Division is tasked to review national fisheries laws that may require review against regional and sub-regional measures that are binding on the Marshall Islands as a member of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, Pacific Islands

“For the past five years, most cases have been settled out of court by way of summary proceedings, which is allowed under the Fisheries Enforcement Act.”

Forum Fisheries Agency, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Parties to the Nauru Agreement, and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In addition to these duties, the Legal Division assisted MIMRA in legal representation in court for prosecution against fishing vessels or companies alleged to have engaged in unlawful acts in violation of national fisheries laws

and regulations of the Marshall Islands. This includes illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, contravention of conditions of fishing licenses, obstruction of fisheries observers, misreporting, and other infractions. For the past five years, most cases have been settled out of court by way of summary proceedings, which is allowed under the Fisheries Enforcement Act.

The Legal Division provided in-house training for compliance and enforcement officers within MIMRA on an “as-needed” basis for capacity building and understanding of the laws of the Marshall Islands. The Legal Division also handled legal drafting of bills, resolutions, regulations, bilateral access agreements, and local government ordinances in support of safeguarding marine resources in the Marshall Islands.



# LEGAL



Above and above right, the Pacific Community (SPC) sponsored a “Legal Drafting: Coastal Fisheries Law Competency Assessment Workshop” from February 21-24, 2023, which Legal Counsel Laurence Edwards, II, participated in. Right, Combined annual meetings of the Forum Fisheries Committee Offices (FFC129) and the FFC Ministers Meeting (FFCMIN22) and East New Britain Meeting held September 1-5, 2023 in East New Britain, Papua New Guinea. Marshall Islands Minister of Natural Resources and Commerce John Silk is sitting at the head table, third from right.

# LEGAL



Above, at the Pacific Tuna Forum 2023 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea September 6-7, 2023 were MIMRA Legal Counsel Laurence Edwards, II, left, and Majuro Mayor Ladie Jack. Right, Laurence also participated in the workshop “Strengthening Shared Understanding Among the Partners in the Blue Pacific and Pacific Islands: Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing and Maritime Domain Awareness”. It took place in Honolulu from January 24-26, 2023.

## Coastal Fisheries Law a

The Legal Division also assisted management in the negotiation of fishing day sales under PNA’s Vessel Day Scheme. Fishing days are sold to bilateral fishing partners and to domestic partners (in line with the FSM Arrangement which provides for preferential treatment to purse seine vessels flagged in island nations, including the Marshall Islands).

Before fishing vessels are issued licenses to fish in the Marshall Islands EEZ, they are required to have an access agreement with MIMRA. This is required before commencement of fishing prior to January 1 of each New Year. These license conditions are outlined in access agreements required under the Fishing Access and Licensing Act.

Coastal Fisheries Law is still a fairly new landscape, especially for the Marshall Islands. The Legal Division performed a lot of the work in successfully promulgating certain regulations within Coastal Fisheries in 2023. The regulations that were certified by the Marshall Islands Cabinet were the PAN Regulations 2020 and Fish Harvest Regulations 2020.

However, there are more upcoming regulations — either by amendments or introducing new Regulations — that will be forthcoming in the next fiscal year 2024.

Current coastal legislation focuses on regulating the licensing process; regulating and conserving certain species that are used for commercial purposes;

and regulating the import and export process for sea cucumbers and aquarium fish. There is interest in developing a new law focusing on the special management area of Bikar and Bokak Atolls, in line with the PAN requirements and also to preserve the pristine atolls in general. The Legal Division participated in a range of meetings and workshops involving MIMRA staff during 2023. These included:

- Strengthening Shared Understanding Among the Partners in the Blue Pacific and Pacific Islands: Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing and Maritime Domain Awareness.
- Opening of PNA Office, SPNA Ministers Meeting14 and SPNA74, February 9-15.

## new focus for division

- SPC Legal Drafting: Coastal Fisheries Law Competency Assessment Workshop, February 21-24.
- Forum Fisheries Committee, FFC126, February 22-25.
- PNA42 Officials Meeting, March 13-17.
- FFC129, FFC Ministers 22 and East New Britain Meeting, September 3-5.
- Pacific Tuna Forum 2023, September 6-7.
- 4IA and E-Reporting Industry Consultation and Training, September 11-12.
- MCRO SAP, September 15-17.
- Pre-WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee meeting, pre-TCC19, and TCC19 Meeting, September 15-26.
- Pacific Island Tuna, Walmart,

Sam’s Club, The Nature Conservancy and MIMRA Consultations, October 10-13.

- PNA Leader’s Summit, October 26-27.
- FFA MOC, October 30-November 2.
- FFC128 Meeting, November 3.
- FFA and PNA Pre-WCPFC20 meetings and WCPFC20 annual meeting, November 27–December 8.

Other Legal Division developments included support of Coastal Fisheries Land Surveys of the fish bases at Jaluit, Wotje and Likiep atolls.

MIMRA continued active enforcement of Marshall Islands fisheries laws and regulations.

Over the past several years, this has resulted in court filings and out of court

settlements against a number of fishing vessels which led to \$1,475,000 in fines collected from 2018 to 2023. There is zero tolerance for fisheries violations in the Marshall Islands. MIMRA, with the support of the Marshall Islands Police Department/Sea Patrol and the Attorney-General’s Office, actively monitors commercial tuna fishing operations in Marshall Islands waters.

In 2023, there were no cases filed against fishing boats or companies as there were no allegations of violations that occurred in the Marshall Islands EEZ. Despite the lack of allegations in 2023, there is no room for complacency as MIMRA officers are continuing to vigilantly monitor fisheries activity and any alleged infractions.

# PROPER

## Focus on economic resilience

The Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program for Economic Resilience (PROPER) began implementation from June 21, 2023. It is the second phase of the original PROP program funded by the World Bank through MIMRA.

The development objective of the Project is to strengthen regional collaboration and national capacity for the management and the sustainable development of the oceanic and coastal fisheries sector in the Marshall Islands. Sustainable fisheries are essential for food security, economic development, and cultural traditions for the people of the Marshall Islands. PROPER provides support in ensuring that these vital resources are managed sustainably for the benefit of future generations.

PROPER kickstarted in 2023 with the implementation of activities under four project components:

- Strengthening Policy and Institutions
- Strengthening Regional Collaboration and National Capacity for Oceanic Fisheries
- Strengthening Regional Collaboration and National Capacity for Coastal Fisheries and Conservation of Critical Coastal Habitats
- Project management.

The World Bank conducted the first project Implementation Support Mission (ISM) for the Marshall Islands Pacific Islands Regional Oceanscape Program – Second Phase for Economic Resilience (PROPER) in person and via videoconference between Majuro and Sydney on February 5–9, 2024. The first ISM mission achieved its objectives to:



MIMRA Director Glen Joseph speaks at the official launch of the second phase of the World Bank supported PROPER program in Majuro.



From left, PROPER Task Team Leader Iretomiwa Olatunji, RMI Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Kalani Kaneko, PROPER Task Team Leader Xavier F. P. Vincent, RMI Member of Parliament representing Arno Atoll Gerald Zackios, and PROCTEAM's Aimee Terese Hall.

(i) officially launch the Marshall Islands PROPER; (ii) assess the overall status and performance of Project implementation; (iii) review the Project's half-year report, progress against the agreed work plan and budget, and programmed activities for the next months and the remaining project implementation period; (iv) assess fiduciary and environmental and social risks management, monitor compliance to date with corresponding obligations and identify corrective actions as applicable; and (v) discuss potential support to fisheries activities included in the National Adaptation Plan which was launched at COP28 in Dubai at the end of 2023.

The PROPER Project was officially launched by the Minister for Foreign Affairs Kalani Kaneko in the absence of the Natural Resources and Commerce Minister Tony Muller, who was away on official travel. The World Bank Task Team was able to meet with NRC Min-

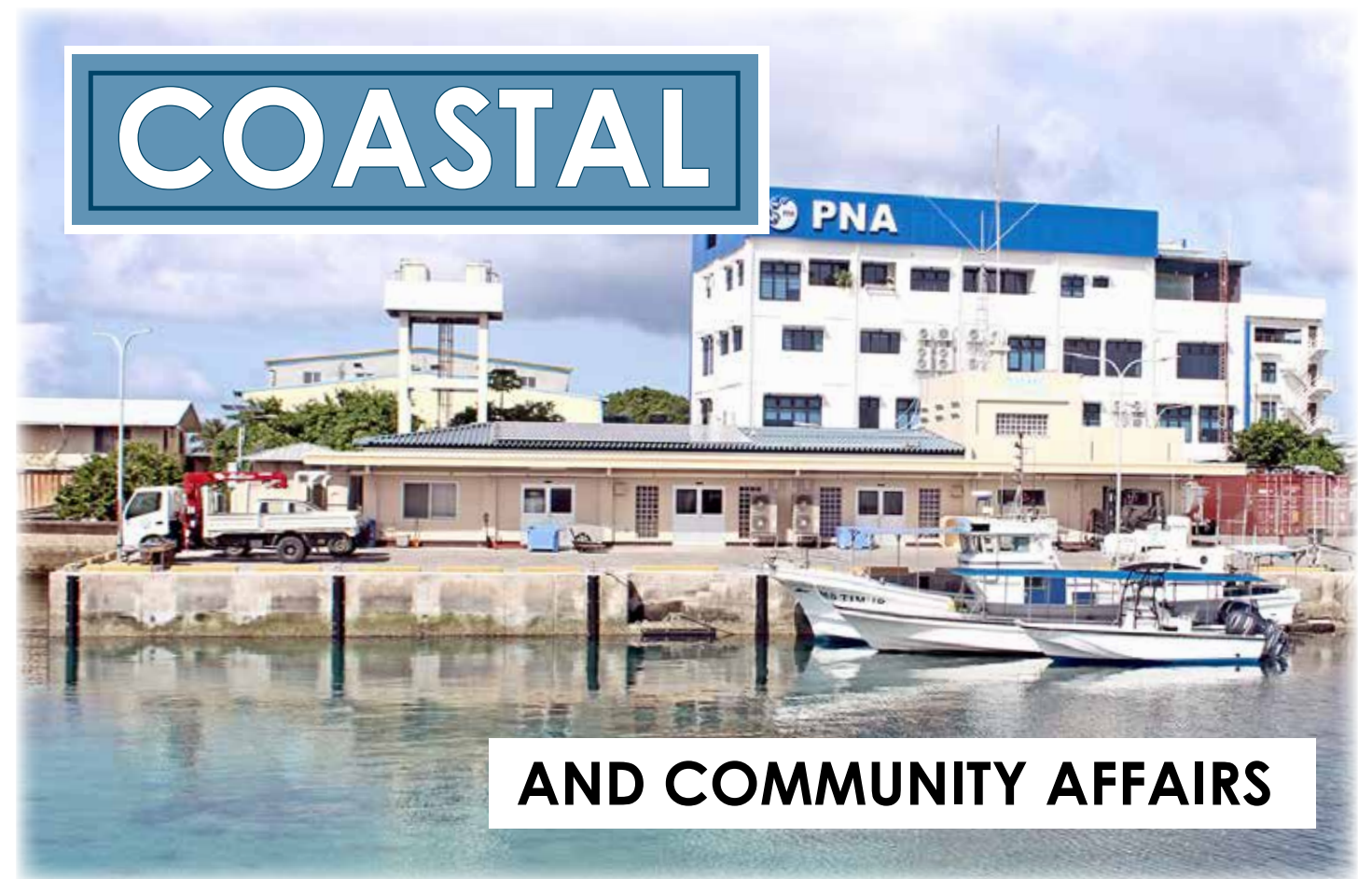
ister Muller during the latter part of the mission.

Notable progress was made since the PROPER Project was launched in June 2023. The MIMRA team and the PROPER Project Management Unit developed tentative programs and schedules for rolling out engagements with outer island communities on coastal and oceanic programmed activities such as a Monitoring, Control and Surveillance training and awareness, Reimaanlok (Looking to the Future) Toolkit Training, and other activities.

Additionally, PROPER is looking into a big project of rehabilitating and renovating selected outer island fish bases including providing "greening" infrastructure during this phase.

The project is expected to accelerate with the implementation of activities in 2025 and reach its peak by 2027 before it moves to its closure phase by September 30, 2029.

# COASTAL



## AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

The Outer islands Fish Market Center opposite the domestic dock in Uliga.

# Outer islands programs move into recovery phase

## Summary

The first year post-Covid without a closed international border saw the Coastal Division move into a recovery period. The Marshall Islands experienced Covid just as the new fiscal year was getting going, a period that was fortunately relatively brief, allowing for Coastal operations to begin getting back on track.

It remained a slow recovery from the after-effects of Covid for the Fish Collection and Distribution Program. Despite the difficulties in procuring much needed parts and equipment — a combination of the significantly increased prices and slow delivery due to supply chain issues — for the aging MIMRA

## FISH MARKETS

vessels, the Coastal Division continued to service participating atolls and communities in not only providing a market for outer island fishers, but also providing a source of fish and seafood to the populations of Majuro and Ebeye. The program also supports local initiatives such as linking with Likiep Atoll Local Government's annual fishing tournament and initiated the first fish collection trip with the community of Utrok in support of their community-owned fishbase center.

During FY2023, the Outer Islands Fish Market Center (OIFMC) on Maju-

ro purchased fish from eight outer atolls that were sold in Majuro. The Kwajalein Atoll Fish Market Center (KAFMC) collected fish and local produce and food products from four outer atolls as well as from fishers in Kwajalein Atoll. Maintenance and spare parts availability proved a challenge for the Coastal Division's fleet of vessels, particularly at Kwajalein, and limited fish collection trips to a certain degree during 2023.

## OIFMC

The Majuro-based Outer Islands Fish Market Center received fish from outer island fishers continuously during 2023. This continued to provide fishers on eight outer atolls with income by pur-



# Arno the biggest supplier of fresh fish

chasing fish and fish products. These were later sold through the OIFMC to residents in Majuro Atoll.

Coastal Division made 62 fish pickup trips to outer islands, the majority of which were to Arno Atoll. Of the 52 pickup trips to Arno, 27 were to Ine Island and 25 to Arno Island. Aur received three trips, Maloelap two and Namu, Wotje, Utrok, Ailuk, and Likiep one each.

For the Arno fishers, a total of 17,737.31 pounds of fish were purchased at a value of \$34,862.53. Arno Atoll, given its proximity to Majuro, has always been the largest supplier of fish to the OIFMC. In addition, 4,376.96 pounds of fish were purchased from Aur fishers at a value of \$8,789.32; Ailuk fishers received \$2,192 for 711.81 pounds of fish; Likiep fishers received \$3,856.14 for 1,495.06 pounds of fish; Maloelap fishers received \$9,209.10 for 3,689.4 pounds of fish; Namu fishers received \$3,411.99 for 2,214.8 pounds of fish; Utrok fishers received \$3,875.45 for 1,361.25 pounds of fish; and Wotje fishers received \$3,562.22 for 989.86 pounds of fish.

The total monetary benefits that the fishermen of these eight atolls received directly was \$73,871.24 for the 32,576.45 pounds of fish purchased. This amount of money injected into these community was a 72 percent increase compared to the \$42,999.87 in 2022.

The OIFMC enforced quality and size limits on the fish that are pur-



## FISH MARKETS

chased from the outer islands. In addition, with fuel costs remaining high in the \$6-\$7 per gallon range, OIFMC continued grouping atolls in one trip to maximize the amount of fish per trip landed on Majuro.

In addition, for fishers from Arno with boats who could deliver their own fish, direct purchase on Majuro continued.

In addition to selling fresh fish from the outer islands, the OIFMC produced many value-added products for sale. This included various types of fish jerky and various other fish products produced by OIFMC staff.

## KAFMC

Outer island transportation issues continued as the main limiting factor for the Kwajalein Atoll Fish Market Center. A combination of vessel maintenance, which is performed on Ma-

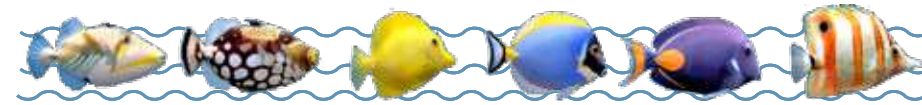
juro, and significantly higher fuel costs than Majuro, limited fish pickup trips. Fuel on Kwajalein was often \$10 or more per gallon.

The F/V Laintok has been the KAFMC's primary vessel used for picking up fish and local produce on nearby outer atolls. Still, due to limited availability and high cost of fuel on Ebeye, trips remained limited and inconsistent in 2023. In addition, vessel repairs needed require the vessel to be transported to Majuro for maintenance.

Nevertheless, KAFMC continued supplying limited amounts of fish to the Ebeye community through direct purchase of fish and local produce from Namu, Ailinglaplap, Ailuk, and Likiep atolls, and from purchase of fish from Ebeye fishers.

KAFMC also provided assistance in fuel and ice provisions. In 2023, due to mechanical issues with the boat, limited fishing trips were conducted as F/V Laintok waited for parts to arrive from off-island.

It was used only on trips within Kwa-



Opposite page, Saurara Lewa shows local participants how to fillet tuna during the post-harvest training at the Outer Islands Fish Market Center in Majuro. Above, participants in the pelagic tuna fishing techniques training show off their certificates of completion outside the OIFMC.

jalein Atoll. Outer atoll fish pickup trips made by F/V Jebro and F/V Timur from Majuro helped to supply the KAFMC. For the fiscal year 2023, KAFMC was able to directly inject to the communities \$16,138.95 for 7,232.96 pounds of fish and \$3,495.00 for local produce for a total of \$19,633.95.

## OFCF partnership continues paying off

MIMRA and the Coastal Division have benefited for over three decades from a many-layered partnership with Japan's Overseas Fisheries Cooperation Foundation. The Fisheries Development Assistance for Pacific Island Nations (FDAPIN) started in 1992 through the Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation of Japan (OFCF). The FDAPIN VII Project initiated in 2020 continued the collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Marshall Islands through MIMRA.

Due to the Covid pandemic, the FDAPIN VII Project requests for

## FISH MARKETS

"In addition to facilitating the annual visits by OFCF experts, the maintenance team addressed a range of electrical, mechanical, and carpentry job orders to maintain smooth operations."

FY2023 were discussed and agreed upon during a Zoom meeting, and the memorandum of understanding and implementation plans were signed remotely by MIMRA and OFCF Japan. The projects for FY2023 include the replacement of a crane truck for KAFMC, maintenance and repair of the Arno Giant Clam Hatchery, maintenance and repair of MIMRA transport vessels,

maintenance and repair of MIMRA ice plants and facilities, and maintenance and repair of MIMRA community fishing boats and outboard motors.

Due to the opening of the Marshall Islands border at the beginning of FY2023, it was possible later in the year for OFCF engineers to visit and work with MIMRA maintenance team members as they did prior to Covid. This allowed for renewed training opportunities for MIMRA maintenance staff.

Specific issues and actions taken during the implementation include the procurement and delivery of a new crane truck, replacement of generators at the Arno Giant Clam Hatchery and maintenance and repair of MIMRA transport vessels and ice plants. In addition to facilitating and supporting the annual visits by OFCF experts, the maintenance team addressed a range of electrical, mechanical, and carpentry job orders to maintain smooth operations of our facilities.

This year, the regularity of power outages heightened MIMRA's reliance on



# Keeping up with the many repairs

backup generators, particularly in facilities situated on Majuro. This resulted in a notable surge in fuel consumption and maintenance requirements. Furthermore, the maintenance team encountered extended delays in acquiring essential parts and equipment, exacerbated by lengthened shipping times from off-island companies.

Despite this, the maintenance team continued general inspection and assessment of equipment of the outer island fishbases and compiled equipment issues needing service on site, as well as sending some equipment back to Majuro for major repairs.

## Maintenance and repair activities in FY2023:

- Transport vessels: Yearly dry-dock and maintenance service and repairs of all MIMRA fish transport vessels (Jolok, Timur, Jebro, Lentanir and Laintok) including topside and hull maintenance.
- Community boat repairs on outer islands. One was ongoing.
- Maintenance and repairs on Wotje and Jaluit Fishbases, including ice machine maintenance and backup generator maintenance at Wotje.
- Maintenance and repairs on Arno Fishbase and Ine sub-Fishbase, including building repairs and ice machine



The colorful Kwajalein Atoll Fish Market Center.

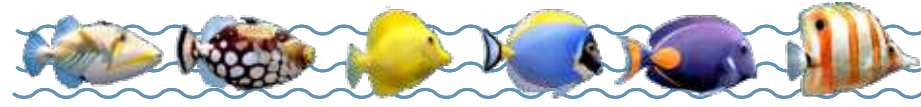
## FISH MARKETS

Below, the Woja Hatchery, which needed maintenance, including work on the backup generator.



- Maintenance and repairs at OIFMC, including ice machines and equipment maintenance and inspection.
- Maintenance and repairs at KAFMC, including ice machine maintenance, inspection and replacement of ice plates; maintenance and inspection of other KAFMC equipment; and F/V

- Laintok mid-year engine check.
- MIMRA vehicle maintenance and repairs for the Authority's 22 vehicles.
- Maintenance and repairs on Woja Hatchery in Majuro, including backup generator maintenance.
- Maintenance and repairs on Ajeltake Hatchery in Majuro, including backup generator maintenance.



# How the process works



A Coastal Division staff member conducts a reef assessment as part of the Reimaanlok Process.

## REIMAANLOK PROCESS

The eight step Reimaanlok (Looking to the Future) Conservation Area Management Planning Framework helps communities in the Marshall Islands think globally and act locally. It employs community-based tools and approaches to articulate local objectives that translate to national, regional and international goals for conservation management of local resources.

The Reimaanlok eight step process, when triggered by a community's leadership (Step 1), includes a scoping and budgeting exercise (Step 2), site visits by Reimaanlok facilitators to build awareness on the need for resource planning by the target atoll community (Step 3), followed by the gathering and analysis of various natural and social resource data parameters (Step 4) in

"...The process itself is an empowering experience for atoll communities and a vehicle for national cohesion and shared purpose among members of CMAC."

order to design (Step 5) and ultimately legislate (Step 6) an integrated atoll resource management plan inclusive of programs to ensure ongoing monitoring and adaptive management (Step 7) and

local commitment retention (Step 8). Given the specific needs and unique circumstances of atoll municipalities, the Reimaanlok facilitation consortium known as the Coastal Management Advisory Council (CMAC) may follow these eight steps in a linear or iterative process. This helps foster a sense of trust and shared purpose within the community and the Reimaanlok facilitators, so that the process itself is an empowering experience for atoll communities and a vehicle for national cohesion and shared purpose among members of CMAC.

Among the many noteworthy atoll-appropriate features of the Reimaanlok



Above, a Coastal team prepares for a dive to document lagoon and reef resources in Majuro Atoll. Right, Harvesting pearl oysters in Namdrik Atoll's lagoon. Below, some of the pearls harvested in Namdrik during 2023.



# Uniting the atoll communities

process, in Step 3, a Local Resource Committee is established by the local government, which then oversees the development of the resource management plan in that atoll or island. Step 4 is also noteworthy in that it entails gathering rich datasets along socio-economic, ecological, and physical parameters. The information collected feeds into the ConservationGIS database that has been developed and is constantly updated by CMAC.

Some communities using this approach are finding early success as they proceed in the step-by-step process of articulating threats and their needs and priorities, codifying these into a management plan with various short, medium, and long-term meas-

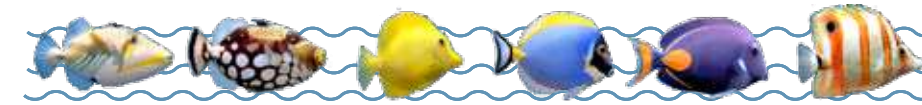
## REIMAANLOK PROCESS

ures including in enhancing their ecosystem and socio-economic resilience to climate impacts. Moreover, these communities remain engaged in the process of implementing and monitoring these measures as a unifying activity for their community.

At the national level, the Reimaanlok Framework is finding success as it becomes increasingly embedded within national government legislation, governance, and financing systems. The most important of these is its inclusion within the Marshall Islands Protected Area Network (PAN)

legislation.

In addition to smaller grants from funding partners such as Seacology, GEF Small Grants Program, and the Micronesia Conservation Trust, there are a few large multi-million dollar initiatives that advance the Reimaanlok Framework including: World Bank-funded Regional Oceanscape Project for Economic Resilience (PROPER), United Nations GEF-5 Ridge-to-Reef Project, German BMUB International Climate Initiative Project, and the US Department of Interior Coral Reef Initiative.



# The Reimaanlok steps

- 1 Initiation**  
A need to develop a community-based resource management plan is identified either at the local government level or at the national level.
- 2 Project Scoping and Setup**  
Establishment of a project work-plan, a team of facilitators, and identification of budget and resources.
- 3 Building Commitment**  
An initial visit is made by the national team to carry out education awareness about the benefits of conservation and resource management, and to build trust with the community.
- 4 Collecting and Managing Information**  
Further visits focus on collection and documentation of local knowledge and use of resources, socio-economic information, and baseline scientific information.
- 5 Developing the Management Plan**  
Several visits are made to the community to develop, draft, and revise a detailed management plan.
- 6 Sign-Off**  
Achieve commitment to the plan through sign-off of management plan.
- 7 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Management**  
Monitor achievement of the objectives — both biological and socio-economic. Adapt the management plan accordingly.
- 8 Maintaining Commitment**  
Ensure community has adequate support for ongoing management.



A Namdrik resident grafts black lip pearl oysters being grown in Namdrik's lagoon.

## REIMAANLOK PROCESS

### Where are they now?

- Step 1** Erikub, Jaluit, Jemo, Kwajalein (Jebro Island), Lib, Majuro (Buruon, Bokelatulik)
- Step 6** Ailinglaplap, Aur\*, Jabot, Likiep\*, Majuro (Ajeltake), Mejit\*, Wotho\*
- Step 7** Ailuk, Arno, Bikar, Bokak, Ebon, Lae, Majuro (Bikirin, Bokanbotin, Drenmeo, Ene Kalamur), Maloelap, Mili, Namdrik, Namo, Ujae, Utrok, Wotje
- Step 8** Namdrik
- Pending:** Rongerik, Rongelap, Rongelap (Mejatto), Ailinginae, Bikini, Enewetak, Ujelang, Taka, Kili, Majuro (Woja)

\*Ridge to Reef (R2R)/Marshall Islands Conservation Society.



# Nitijela enacts the National Sanctuary category

## Summary

The Protected Areas Network (PAN) Office continued to fulfill its mission of providing financial and technical support to the protected areas within the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Applicants seeking PAN site status must undergo assessment within the Reimaanlok framework. There are four focal areas that the PAN Office focuses on: protected areas, sustainable livelihoods, capacity building, and education and awareness.

In fiscal year 2023, only one application, from Namdrik Atoll, received funding. The funding covering supported capacity building and sustainable livelihoods. There were other interested Reimaanlok sites that applied. Review processes for other atoll applications have been paused for further assessment by the Coastal Marine Advisory Council (CMAC), with final assessment to be conducted by the MIMRA Board of Directors. An important highlight in 2023 was the enactment of the PAN Amendment Act 2023 by the Nitijela (parliament). It lists a new protected area category, Type V: National Sanctuary. These areas, designated by the government, hold significant ecological importance and are subject to stringent conservation measures, safeguarding expansive natural habitats for future generations.

## Distribution of PAN funding to local communities

Ebon and Namdrik atolls successfully completed their PAN-supported projects. The project on Namo Atoll is still in progress. To achieve comple-

## PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

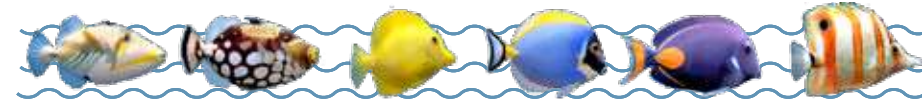


Ebon women gather together to work on their handicrafts, such as these beautiful necklaces.

On Ebon, the Jerbal ko Bwinnid Project outcomes have empowered local women to revive a handicraft tradition previously lost, providing them with the chance to train future generations. Furthermore, the women of Ebon plan to incorporate in their Resource Management Plan the regeneration and monitoring of land and marine-based raw materials used for handicrafts.

The Namdrik Atoll Development Authority black lip pearl oyster project yielded notable outcomes, particularly by creating job opportunities for the lo-

tion status, successful applicants are encouraged to submit progress reports to enable monitoring by the PAN office. Project funding allows for a period of up to two years to complete projects. This ensures that initiatives are carried out effectively and within the allocated time frame, promoting accountability and transparency in the process.



Pacific Island Tuna Provisions LLC and Walmart representatives were welcomed by residents of Arno.

# Sharing portions of the profits

cal community, enhancing awareness of climate change and its effects on the blue economy, capacity building for locals in pearl harvesting, maintenance, and operation of pearl farming, procurement of essential equipment and supplies for pearl farming, and fostering improved economic growth. It is anticipated that profits from this project will supplement the pearl project moving forward.

## Community Marine Monitoring Toolkit

The development of the Community Marine Monitoring Toolkit aims to strengthen the Reimaanlok Framework by offering resources and tools for community-based marine monitoring. Comprising five survey modules, including Fish Catch Survey, Intertidal Invertebrate Survey, Coral Reef Survey, Mangrove Survey, and Seagrass Meadow Survey, this toolkit equips local communities with the necessary guidance for effective monitoring efforts. During 2023, three Reimaanlok sites suc-

## PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

cessfully started using the Community Marine Monitoring Toolkit. This training is exclusively provided to registered marine protected areas (MPAs) under the Reimaanlok framework and at the seventh step of the process. The objective is to empower community members to monitor their resources effectively, aligning with their Resource Management Plans to stabilize protected areas for long-term goals.

The toolkit modules enable participants to assess reef health, identify impacts, and develop skills to gauge the abundance of marine invertebrates. An overview of the monitoring process is presented before hands-on surveys commence. The marine environment of the sites features gentle slopes with diverse coral formations. Trainees were

equipped with marine invertebrates and reef health survey modules based on site descriptions. Trial assessments were conducted in nearshore reef areas of Drenmeo, Bikirin, and Ene Kalamur Islets in Majuro Atoll, revealing insights into reef health levels and the presence of key marine invertebrates. Other survey modules were not practiced due to the absence of resources such as mangrove and seagrass in the area. Currently, there are 18 eligible sites for participation in the community marine monitoring toolkit. The PAN Office anticipates training members from all Reimaanlok sites in resource monitoring.

## Walmart revenue awarded to Arno

Pacific Island Tuna Provisions (PITP) LLC operates as a supplier of sustainably sourced tuna products headquartered in Majuro. Among its objectives is making sustainability distributions, providing a portion of its profits to island communities for conservation, sustainable economic growth, and climate



# Council propels local action

resilience efforts. Arno received the first distribution of \$100,000 during a visit by PITP and Walmart officials to Arno. The profit comes from the supply of sustainably caught tuna to Walmart, the biggest retail company in the United States. The funding will support the objectives of the Arno Atoll Resource Management Plan, overseen by the PAN Office. Utilizing the Reimaanlok Framework, the Arno Atoll Local Government collaborated with MIMRA and CMAC to formulate their Resource Management Plan, outlining their conservation goals. As the first sustainability distribution recipient of the PITP, it is crucial for Arno Atoll to utilize this allocation prudently to pave the way for other atolls in the Marshall Islands to potentially receive similar support in the future.

## Coastal Management Advisory Council

The Council's revitalized mission aims to foster collaboration, cooperation, and coordination across various sectors, focusing on supporting communities through initiatives like the Reimaanlok and the Protected Areas Network, alongside other national priorities addressing emerging environmental concerns. Each member of the Council is either represented by their



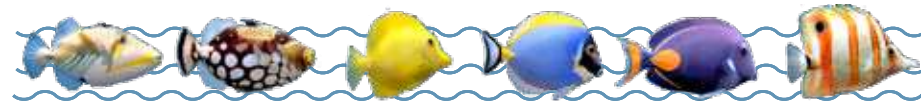
## PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

respective Head of Office or by a designated representative appointed by the Head, with the authority to vote on their behalf during meetings. Presently, the Council is comprised of seven leaders from key offices including the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce, Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority, Ministry of Environment-Climate Change Directorate, Marshall Islands Environmental Protection Authority, Ministry of Cultural and Internal Affairs-Cultural and Historic Preservation Office, Marshall Islands National Disaster Management Office, and the Marshall Islands Conserva-

tion Society. During 2023, the Chair for the Council was EPA General Manager Moriana Phillip, with Marshall Islands Conservation Society Director Dolores deBrum-Kattil serving as the Vice Chair, and MIMRA Director Glen Joseph as the Permanent Secretary.

Due to the demanding nature of their individual responsibilities outside CMAC, the council members found it challenging to convene regularly as mandated.

Nonetheless, despite these constraints, they have made significant strides in advancing key initiatives, including the review of PAN applications, amending the PAN Act, and continuing Reimaanlok efforts, thus propelling progress forward. In addition, during 2023, the Council restructured the CMAC working group. The working group involves experts aiding in the Council's tasks. The subsequent step involved the Council's finalization of the CMAC working group.



The launch of the Gender Analysis report of the Fisheries Sector in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

# Promoting women in fisheries

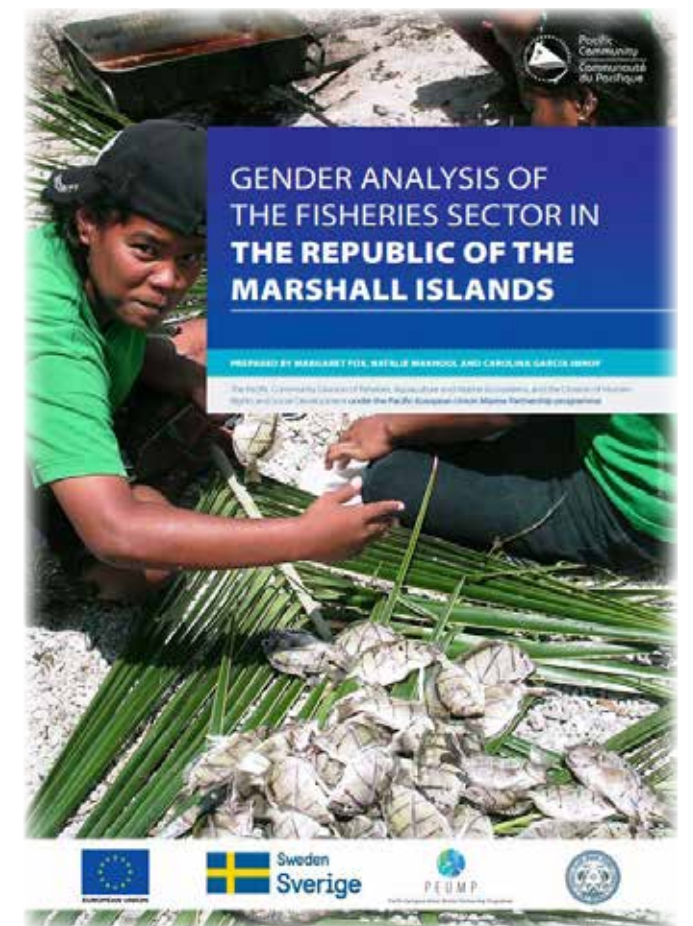
## ENHANCING GENDER EQUALITY

The Gender Analysis of the Fisheries Sector in the Marshall Islands was a joint initiative of SPC's Fisheries, Aquaculture, Marine Ecosystems program and the Human Rights and Social Development Division, and the Pacific European Union Marine Partnership Program, in collaboration with MIMRA. The gender analysis focused on understanding the roles and needs of women and men in the fisheries sector, particularly in coastal fisheries and aquaculture. The aim was to integrate gender perspectives into planning, design, and operational activities within the fisheries sector.

The analysis assesses the institutional and capacity framework of relevant organizations like MIMRA to identify gaps and opportunities for strengthening gender mainstreaming. It examines gender dynamics in fishing, harvesting, processing, marketing, and trade, seeking to enhance women's economic empowerment and promote gender equality. Key focuses include addressing barriers to women's participation and advancement, promoting gender equality in decision-making, strengthening partnerships with women's machinery and educational institutions, and building capacity to operationalize gender mainstreaming within the sector.



SPC Coordinator Martin Chong, with Minister John Silk and MIMRA Director Glen Joseph.



Link to the report: [https://rmimimra.com/images/2024/gender\\_analysis\\_fisheries\\_sector\\_marshall\\_islands.pdf](https://rmimimra.com/images/2024/gender_analysis_fisheries_sector_marshall_islands.pdf)



NATGEO EXPEDITION



Pristine ecosystems found

National Geographic Pristine Seas embarked on an expedition from August 29 to October 2, 2023, to the Republic of the Marshall Islands as part of a five-year Global Expedition.

The visit to Marshall Islands was in collaboration with MIMRA. Joining the scientific survey to the uninhabited atolls of Bikar, Bokak, Bikini, and Rongerik were MIMRA officials Bryant Zebedy, Kyotak Ishiguro, Beven Wake-

field, and Andrew McInnis, Sea Grant officer at the College of the Marshall Islands.

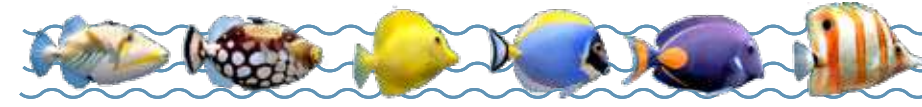
NatGeo Pristine Seas collaborated with local scientists to assess the ocean health of these atolls, supporting the community-based Reimaanlok conservation approach to achieve ocean protection goals. The comprehensive scientific report, accompanied by a film, will premiere in 2024.

This combination of visual and

written documentation will provide in-depth insights into the findings from the expedition, offering a detailed overview of the ocean health of the surveyed atolls and supporting the community-based Reimaanlok conservation approach.

Key findings about the current biodiversity of Bikar and Bokak atolls:

- Bikar and Bokak atolls harbor some of the most pristine ecosystems in the central and western Pacific.



in Marshalls' northern atolls

- They contain the largest green turtle nesting colony and seabird colonies in the Marshall Islands.

- The atolls have mature Pisonia forests in excellent condition.

- They have the highest coral cover and giant clam densities in the central and western Pacific.

- The coral reefs in Bikar and Bokak have high resilience.

- The atolls have the highest reef fish biomass in the tropical Pacific Ocean.

- They have a large abundance of vulnerable species such as large groupers, Napoleon wrasse, and bumphead parrotfish.

- Rare fish spawning aggregations and shark mating have been observed in the atolls.

- There are numerous little known deep-sea communities with potentially new species of fishes and invertebrates, as well as an abundance of deep-sea sharks.

**Pictured top, left to right: Humpback whales cruise past at Bikar Atoll. Sharks at Bikar. A Napoleon Wrasse with sharks at Bokak. A Bigeye trevally at Bikar. Pictured above, left to right: Bumphead parrotfish at Bokak. A table coral at Rongerik. Masked boobies on Bokak. Team members Bryant Zebedy, Andrew McInnis, Eric Sala and Kyotak Ishiguro and Beven Wakefield on Eniu, Bikini.**





FAD PROGRAM

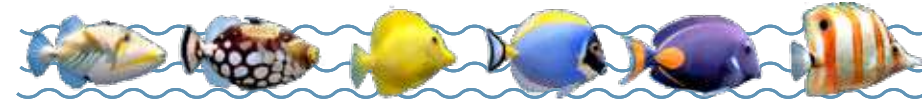
Above, the MIMRA team and trainees deploy a Fish Aggregating Device at Utrok Atoll. Below, the handover of some of the equipment at Utrok, including a number of coolers.

# FADs, fishing and making



During early 2022, MIMRA and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) signed a memorandum of understanding on the sustainable use of nearshore fish aggregating devices (FADs) to support coastal and small-scale tuna fishers, as well as post-harvest activities and alternative preservation methods for processing and storing catches. More than 40 individuals, comprising both men and women, participated in a robust Training of Trainers program facilitated by the FAO FishFAD project, generously funded by the Government of Japan.

This initiative was meticulously crafted to fortify coastal fisheries and livelihoods. A pivotal component of the training was centered on tuna processing and sea safety, two critical aspects of the



Left, fisherman on Kili are happy with their catch from a FAD area. Above, islanders learned how to rig a sail to use in the event of engine failure.

# batches of fabulous food

industry. Under the guidance of Saurara Lewa, an expert FAO Food Safety and Fisheries Value Chain consultant, the tuna post-harvest training unfolded at the Outer Islands Fish Market Center in Uliga. The emphasis was on optimizing resource utilization by transforming offcuts into an assortment of valuable products such as tuna jerky, bacon, marinated tuna, sausages, patties, and samosas.

Concurrently, sea safety training was led by Michael Savins, Chief Technical Advisor for FAO FishFAD. Participants were equipped with essential techniques, including rigging a sail to navigate a vessel back to the island in the event of engine failure, ensuring their safety during maritime operations. Moreover, the FAO FishFAD program

tapped into the expertise of David Itano, who conducted a specialized training session in Majuro aimed at local fishermen. This session underscored enhancing tuna and pelagic catches through the strategic use of anchored FADs while prioritizing sea safety measures. Throughout the program, participants, drawn from the local fishing community and clubs, received invaluable theoretical insights and practical hands-on experience. This “train the trainers” approach empowered them to effectively disseminate their newfound knowledge and skills within their respective communities, thereby fostering sustainable growth and development in coastal fisheries.

These accomplishments represent significant strides for enhancing the

livelihoods of local communities. The FishFAD program played a pivotal role in the National Nearshore FAD program in 2023, enriching the knowledge and skills of local fishers, promoting sustainability in the fisheries sector, and fostering economic development through ecotourism initiatives. The Marshall Islands FishFAD project continues to make progress through the National Nearshore FAD Program toward achieving its objectives.

Despite encountering some challenges, the team has made remarkable headway in preparing for deployments and implementing the achievements of the program. With deployments and activities expanding to additional participating atolls and islands such as Utrok Atoll and Mejit Island, the team made



Above left and left, residents of Utrok learn how to put together a FAD. Above, members of the team that deployed the FAD at the atoll.

# FADs being used in 18 atolls

## FAD PROGRAM

significant strides toward its goals. The coordination of the FAO FishFAD Project was led by the Fisheries Development Officer Beven Wakefield. His leadership ensured its successful implementation, with a wealth of knowledge and experience contributed to developing fisheries, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to sustainable marine resources management, and community empowerment.

So far, FAD deployment has been completed in the following locations: Ailinglaplap, Ailuk, Arno, Aur, Ebon, Jaluit, Kili, Lae, Lib, Likiep, Majuro, Maloelap, Mejit, Mili, Namdrik, Namu, Ujae, and Utrok.

Benefits of anchored FADs for local

fishers include diversifying fisheries, reducing fuel consumption, decreasing pressure on coral reef fisheries, and improving food security. A new FAD development was rolled out in 2023.

The Nature Conservancy, in collaboration with regional partners, has deployed echosounder buoys to monitor fish presence and enhance fishing success.

An online platform helps fishers to track FAD locations, view fish aggregations, and optimize fishing times. Users are advised to check weather

conditions and safety precautions before fishing. Information on the FADs can be obtained via the provided QR code or website link.

Part of the Coastal National Nearshore FAD project is alerting fishers to the smart buoys attached to FADs provided by MIMRA, TNC, and FAO and how to use the online information. Some FADs do not feature smart buoys.

**The website:** <https://buoysmanager.satlink.es/>; Username: mimrafads@gmail.com; Password: FADRM18%.

# RMI's precious marine resources

The Education and Awareness program focused on promoting marine conservation and sustainable practices in outreach activities. The key activities undertaken during the fiscal year included attending a media training and summit on democracy, raising awareness about marine issues at a summer camp, organizing a beach cleanup, and conducting an awareness campaign on FADs.

These activities have resulted in increased awareness and understanding of marine conservation issues among various stakeholders, facilitated partnerships with external organizations, empowered community members to participate in conservation efforts, and strengthened MIMRA's role as a leading authority in marine resource management. MIMRA's Education and Awareness program is committed to continue advocating for the protection and preservation of the marine resources in the Marshall Islands.



## EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Beach cleanups, lessons about marine pollution and a summit on democracy were just some of the activities that MIMRA either hosted or were involved in to raise awareness.





Young people who participated in the annual MIMRA Summer Internship Program in 2023.

# Eight-week MIMRA program

## SUMMER INTERNSHIP

The MIMRA Summer Internship Program concluded with a series of presentations from the interns, highlighting their involvement in various MIMRA activities during the program.

These included initiatives such as FAD deployment on outer islands, industry inspections, fish bio-sampling, and maritime law research.

The closing program concluded with an award ceremony to acknowledge the contributions of the interns during their eight-week tenure at MIMRA. MIMRA expresses its appreciation for the interns' exceptional work across its divisions

and extends best wishes to these promising individuals for their future pursuits. The summer interns were: Debantré deBrum, Eden Joseph, Hovel Warane, Jadd Joseph, Kaji Abo, Jr., Walaka Albert, and Kenel Joab.

# Training hosted by IOM

## GIS PROGRAM

The comprehensive training program on data collection, mapping, and management was provided in the Marshall Islands by MIMRA's Coastal team in collaboration with IOM's Regional Data Hub

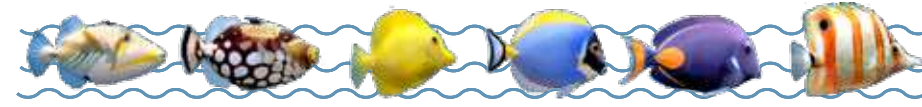


Participants in the Geographic Information System program.

in Asia and the Pacific.

This training benefited a variety of government agencies by enabling them to streamline data collection, visualization, storage, and usage, particularly in preparation for, during, and

after disaster events. For MIMRA and other CMAC members that participated, it provided helpful knowledge and skills for advancing Reimaanlok activities and work in participating communities.



# Global interest in increasing marine food security

## Summary

Globaly, there is a mounting interest in aquaculture, driven by its potential to address food security challenges and mitigate the impact of climate change. Aquaculture activities have been established in the Marshall Islands since the early 1980s, primarily centered on research and feasibility studies. Presently, the focus has transitioned toward enhancing food security and fostering socioeconomic development. Despite its infancy, the aquaculture sector in Marshall Islands has experienced substantial development over the past few decades.

In the last 10 years, the Marshall Islands has been engaged in aquaculture of a variety of commodities, including giant clams for export markets, particularly for the aquarium trade, and for restocking/stock enhancement activities, which primarily cater to local coastal communities for human consumption. Furthermore, the country has ventured into cultivating other species of mollusks such as trochus, black pearl oysters, and various types of hard and soft corals for export market. Additionally, there has been a specific emphasis on the cultivation of various species of marine finfish, with a focus on the Pacific threadfin (Moi) species.

Recognizing the need for diversification in cultured products, the MIMRA Coastal Division is actively exploring opportunities for future investments to further stimulate economic development and ensure food security in local communities. As part of these efforts, MIMRA is committed to seeking collaborations with regional organizations and other countries to ensure sustainable growth in the aquaculture sector.

## AQUACULTURE



Ajeltake Hatchery Technician Marshall Robinson feeding the moi fry in the nursery tanks.

## 2023 activities

In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), MIMRA facilitated a stakeholder consultation as part of the FAO technical cooperation project through its Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands. The primary objective of this meeting was to carry out a comprehensive assessment of mariculture in the Marshall Islands and address key challenges and opportunities in this sector and to develop sustainable strategies for its develop-

ment. The event had active participation from representatives from local and national government bodies, local research institutions, non-governmental organizations, and private entities.

The findings of the assessment highlighted the need to primarily enhance giant clam production efficiency as well as explore the development and production of other invertebrate species. Additionally, there is a focus on investigating seaweed for potential domestic consumption needs and to achieve objectives related to food security, nutrition,



Despite some challenges, including invasive jellyfish, the Ajeltake hatchery is providing a healthy level of employment as well as skills for residents.

# Ongoing expansion of clam farming

job creation, and overall economic development. Activities aimed at achieving the project goals continued in 2023 and 2024.

The World Bank-funded PROPER program is provided additional support for the expansion and implementation of giant clam farming in neighboring islands. This support encompasses the provision of raceway tank materials and equipment, as well as financial assistance for capacity building. The initiative got underway in 2023 with two new communities, Ujae and Lae atolls, both of which have expressed keen interest in developing giant clam farming operations in their respective communities.

Despite encountering several challenges in seedling production at the

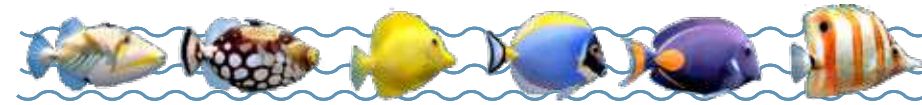
## AQUACULTURE

Woja Hatchery, there was continuing and unwavering effort to supply seedlings to Majuro farmers. Previous attempts at distribution did not yield revenue from clam sales, mainly due to farmer migration from the Marshall Islands that resulted in abandonment of their clam growing cages. However, the hatchery continued to pursue clam farmer recruitment during the year. To achieve this, a comprehensive training session was conducted, successfully training 16 farmers who received clam seedlings.

During 2023, the hatchery began working in collaboration with the FAO to enhance its clam seed production

through the revitalization of the hatchery. This collaborative effort aimed to increase the quantity of clam seedlings produced, thus positively impacting the overall supply of clam seedlings in the region.

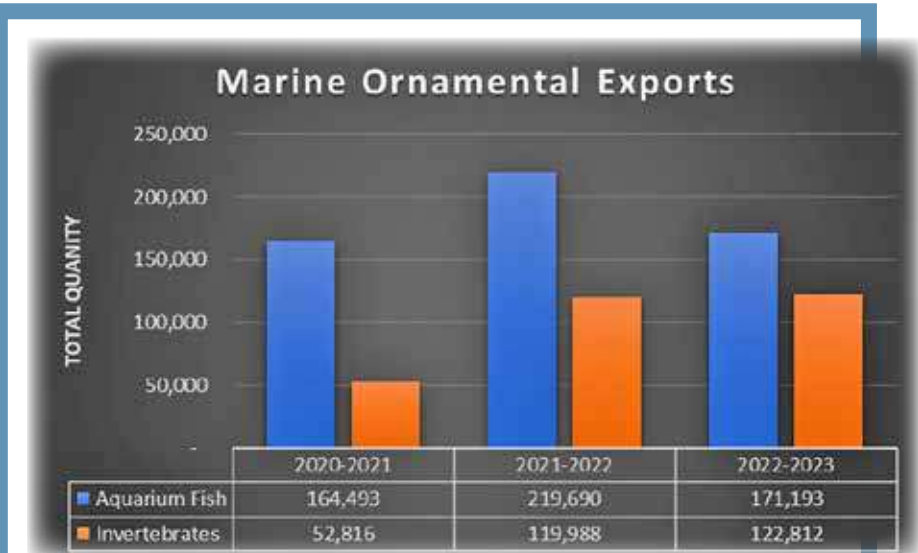
Despite the persistent challenges posed by jellyfish invasion in the nursery tanks at the Ajeltake Hatchery, the hatchery has consistently and successfully produced Moi fingerlings, ensuring that the cages remain well-stocked. Regrettably, due to financial constraints, the private fish farming company Atoll Technologies of the Marshall Islands made the difficult decision to halt all cage grow-out operations. Consequently, this created setbacks in the hatchery's operations and disruption on egg stocking. Recognizing the significant impact



# farming

of this project on the economy and food security, MIMRA has taken proactive steps to provide essential support. In an effort to ensure that the project continues without interruption while ATMI works on resolving its issues, MIMRA has extended financial support to facilitate the maintenance of fish in the cages. As the support provided is short-term, MIMRA anticipates that the ATMI will be able to successfully address their current situation before the fish are ready for harvest.

The Likiep Loto Hatchery functioned smoothly in 2023, consistently producing quality clam seedlings. The Arno Hatchery, on the other hand, remained non-operational during the year as a result of ongoing construction and renovation.

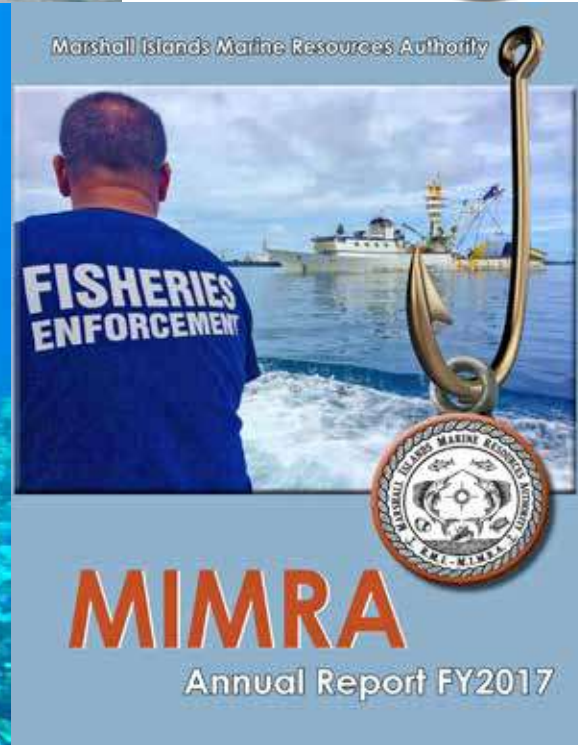
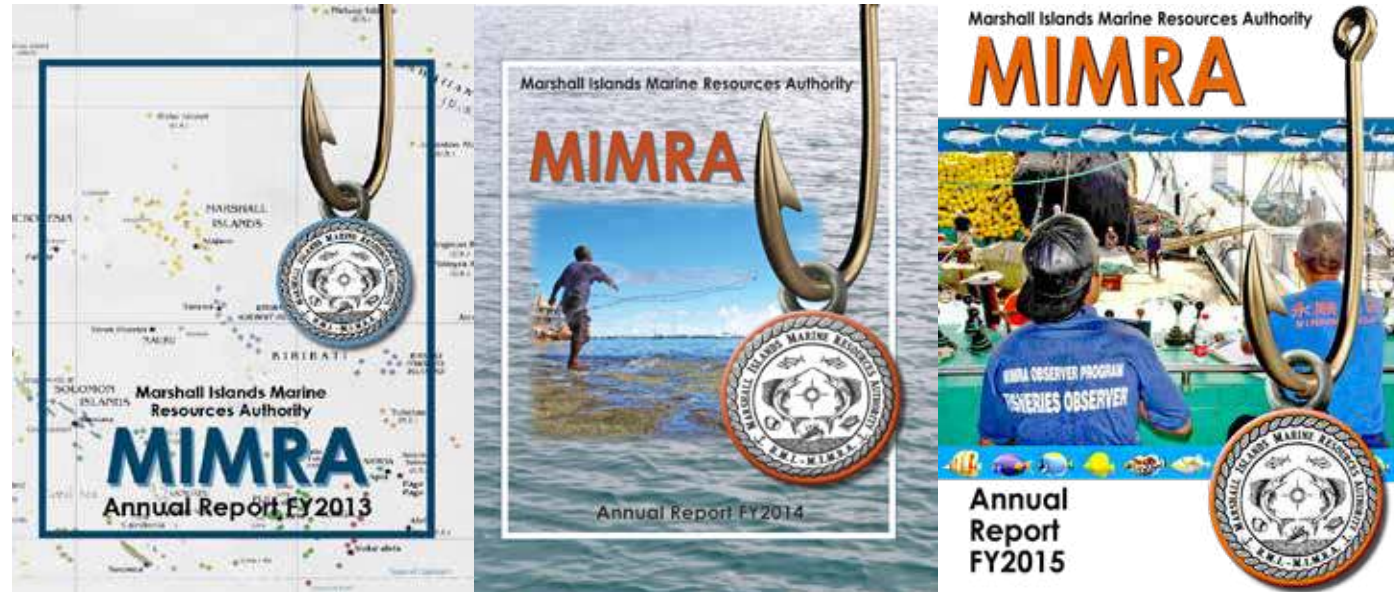


# Export trends for ornamentals

In 2023, four officially licensed local companies in the Marshall Islands exported marine ornamental commodities, including aquarium fish, giant clams, shells, and farmed corals to markets in Asia, Europe, and the United States. The export data reveals a decline in the export of aquarium fish from 219,690 in 2022 to 171,193 in 2023. Conversely, invertebrate exports saw a slight increase from 119,988 in 2022 to 122,812 in 2023. The Flame angel (*Centropyge loricula*) remained the most popular aquarium fish export, reaching a high of 83,874 pieces in 2023. Similarly, the Bumble bee snail (*Engina mendicaria*) was the most exported invertebrate, totaling 103,550 pieces, primarily destined for the United States.



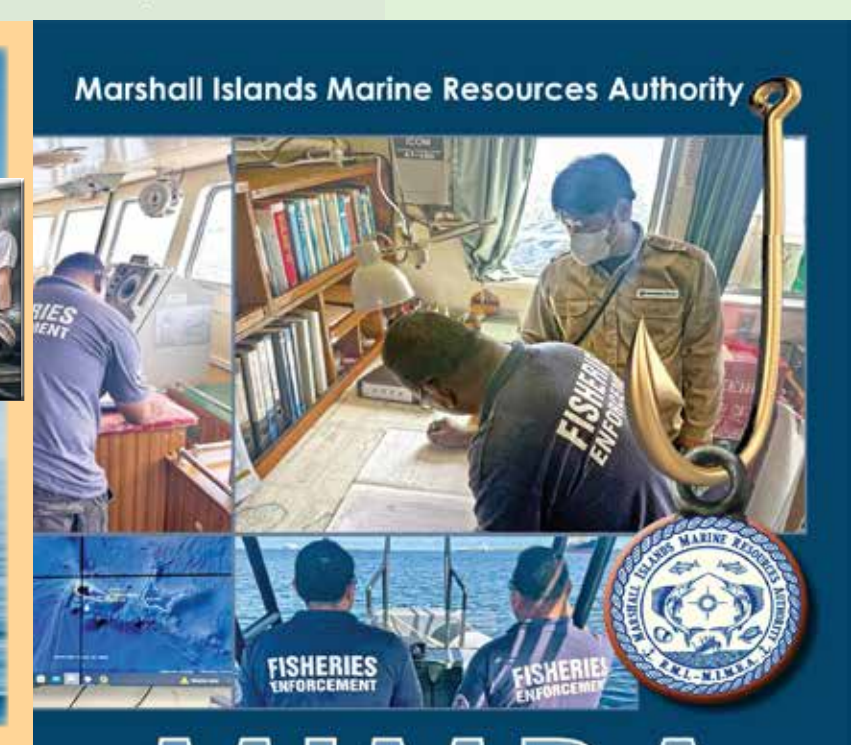
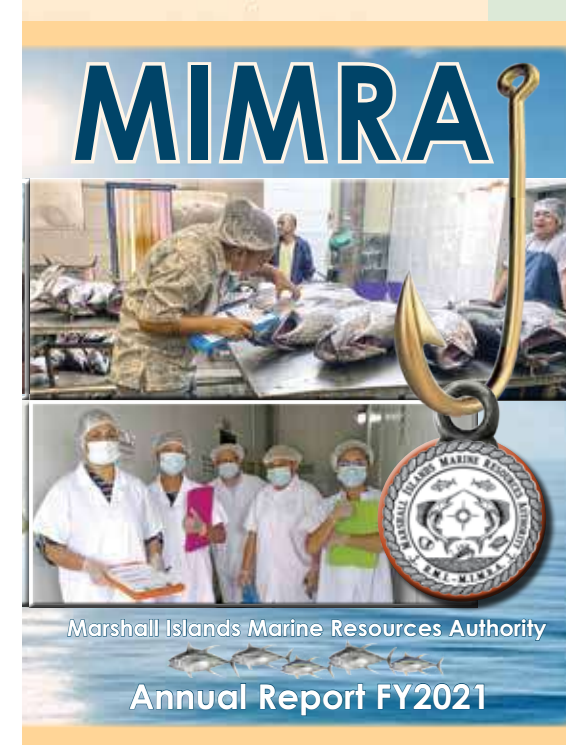
# MIMRA does everything



Being accountable and transparent has long been a MIMRA promise to the people of the Marshall Islands, with a key element of this being the publishing of annual reports with detailed information on the activities of the Authority.

Reports from 2001 forward can be read online or downloaded from MIMRA's website: <http://www.rmimimra.com/index.php/resources>. The reports are also available as glossy paperbacks and in Kin-

# by the book ... literally!



dle format at Amazon: Just go to amazon.com and search for "MIMRA Annual Report". They cost about \$10 each plus, potentially, shipping.

MIMRA believes the reports are of benefit both domestically and internationally. Fisheries expert Robert Gillett in his 2017 book, Fisheries in the Economies of Pacific Island Countries and Territories, commented: "The annual report of the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority is exemplary."



# AND CORPORATE AFFAIRS

## Financial accountability

The Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority is dedicated to transparency and accountability in all its financial work. The Finance Division ensures that funds are received and expended effectively, efficiently and according to the law and, where applicable, donor requirements.

Financial accountability is essential for the Authority to carry out its mandate for sustainably managing coastal and oceanic fisheries activities for the Marshall Islands. In this regard, MIMRA has had no unresolved or outstanding audit findings in recent years, demonstrating its commitment to accountability.

The Finance Division, after some delays largely due to Covid challenges, brought its audits up to date through Fiscal Year 2022. The FY2023 audit was in progress as the FY2023 Annual Report went to press.

For 2023, MIMRA saw a slight uptick in revenue from the Vessel Day Scheme, its largest source of operating revenue. It rose from \$24,986,929 in FY2022 to \$25,198,926 in FY2023.

This was in part due to the receipt of \$566,850 from VDS revenue from pole-and-line and longline vessels. Revenue from purse seine VDS fishing day “pooling” declined from 262 to 197 in FY2023.

Pool days are fishing days that PNA members put together to sell to fishing companies for multi-EEZ fishing access and as a result generate the highest rate of return. Overall, MIMRA sold 3,067 fishing days, including 197 pool days and 16 days traded to other PNA members.

Purse seine fishing days were sold to distant water fishing fleets from China, Japan, Philippines, Taiwan S. Korea and the Marshall Islands domestic fleet. The fishing day purchases of Marshall Islands-flagged fishing vessels under Koo’s Fishing Company, the Marshall Islands Fishing Company and Pan Pacific Foods accounted for 77 percent of the Marshall Islands allotment of fishing days under the PNA VDS.

Licensing revenue saw a small three percent decline, which reflects vessel licensing patterns year-to-year. Fishing

rights revenues declined by 53 percent. This was mainly due to a decrease in revenue from the FSM Arrangement vessels and in the funding received from the Forum Fisheries Agency for the US Fisheries Treaty “equal share” payment to all FFA members. This decline is notable given that from 2020 through 2022, revenues generated from fishing rights was stable in the range of \$3.5-\$3.6 million annually.

There was also a small decline in transshipment revenue, another year-to-year fluctuation in the use of Majuro Port. Observer fees also increased slightly by four percent, as fisheries observers resumed monitoring of both purse seine and longline fishing vessels following the opening of the border in Marshall Islands and elsewhere in the region.

The “others” revenue source rose 17-fold, from \$166,170 in FY2022 to \$3 million in FY2023. This was largely due to donor funding from the World Bank PROPER project, other grants, interest income and sale of export permits. Although there was some fluctua-



## a MIMRA commitment

tion in the different revenue sources, overall total revenues for FY2023 exceeded FY2022 by two percent. Total revenue increased from \$32.1 million in FY2022 to \$32.8 million in the current fiscal year.

MIMRA maintains an active monitoring, control and surveillance program for the commercial tuna fishery. However, there were no fishing violations in the Marshall Islands EEZ during 2023. One fine of \$25,000 was collected from a prior year violation. Some years, there are more and other years there may be none. This represents the ongoing nature of monitoring and enforcement of fishing rules in the EEZ.

Fisheries revenue contributed to the Marshall Islands national budget was slightly less, at \$25 million, than the previous two years. However, it changed only marginally from FY2021 through FY2023. The FY2023 contribution amounted to about six percent of the national budget.

MIMRA’s net position at the end of FY2023 rose by four percent,

from \$40,781,541 in FY2022 to \$42,383,664 this fiscal year.

MIMRA’s operating expenses increased by 14 percent in 2023 compared to 2022, going from \$5,407,564 to \$6,164,847. Significant increases were seen in wages, costs of boarding and observer fees, professional fees and training.

Challenges for MIMRA included the fact that during 2023, the Marshall Islands had the highest fuel prices in the Micronesia region. They averaged close to \$7 per gallon. Many commodities saw an increase in prices during the year, particularly with Covid disruptions of supply chains globally. Climate change and El Niño impact the location of tuna schools, which affects MIMRA’s revenue generation. In addition, while the annual three-month FAD closure is an important conservation measure, it does affect MIMRA revenue collections, especially transshipment revenue.

Historically, the FAD closure means fewer purse seiners transshipping in Majuro.

### MIMRA Contributions to RMI FY2014-FY2023

Fiscal Year	Contribution
2014	\$11,549,000
2015	\$15,773,000
2016	\$26,285,938
2017	\$40,129,700
2018	\$29,440,214
2019	\$29,141,128
2020	\$31,300,000
2021	\$26,000,000
2022	\$26,200,000
2023	\$25,000,000*

Source: MIMRA Financial Statements and Independent Auditors’ Report, FY2014-FY2023.

\*2023 figure was not yet audited as of the date of publication of this report.

# FINANCE

## MIMRA: Management's Financial Condition and Operations for fiscal years 2023, 2022 and 2021

This table summarizes the financial condition and operations of MIMRA for fiscal years 2023, 2022, and 2021.

### Financial Operations

Statements of Net Position					
	2023*	2022	Change	%	2021
<b>ASSETS:</b>					
Current and other assets	32,869,823	32,600,651	269,172	1%	31,229,095
Capital assets	6,196,808	6,462,176	-265,368	-4%	6,517,456
Other Non-current asset	945,446	133,715	811,731	607%	168,270
Investment in JV	3,547,584	3,445,052	102,532	3%	3,474,136
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>43,549,661</b>	<b>42,756,010</b>	<b>1,246,848</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>41,509,162</b>
<b>LIABILITIES:</b>					
Current & Non-Current Liabilities	708,367	\$1,874,749	-1,166,382)	-62%	1,088,074
Long Term Liability	447,650	99,720	347,930	349%	125,522
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b>1,156,017</b>	<b>1,974,469</b>	<b>(818,452)</b>	<b>-41%</b>	<b>1,213,593</b>
<b>NET POSITION:</b>					
Investment in capital assets	6,196,808	6,470,369	-273,561	- 4%	6,517,456
Restricted	-0-	352,898	-		474,793
Unrestricted	36,196,836	33,958,274	2,238,562	6%	33,403,751
	42,393,664	40,781,541	485,975	1%	43,396,000
<b>Total Liabilities/Net Position</b>	<b>43,549,661</b>	<b>42,756,010</b>	<b>1,246,848</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>\$41,609,596</b>

### Statements of Revenue, Expenses and Changes in Net Position

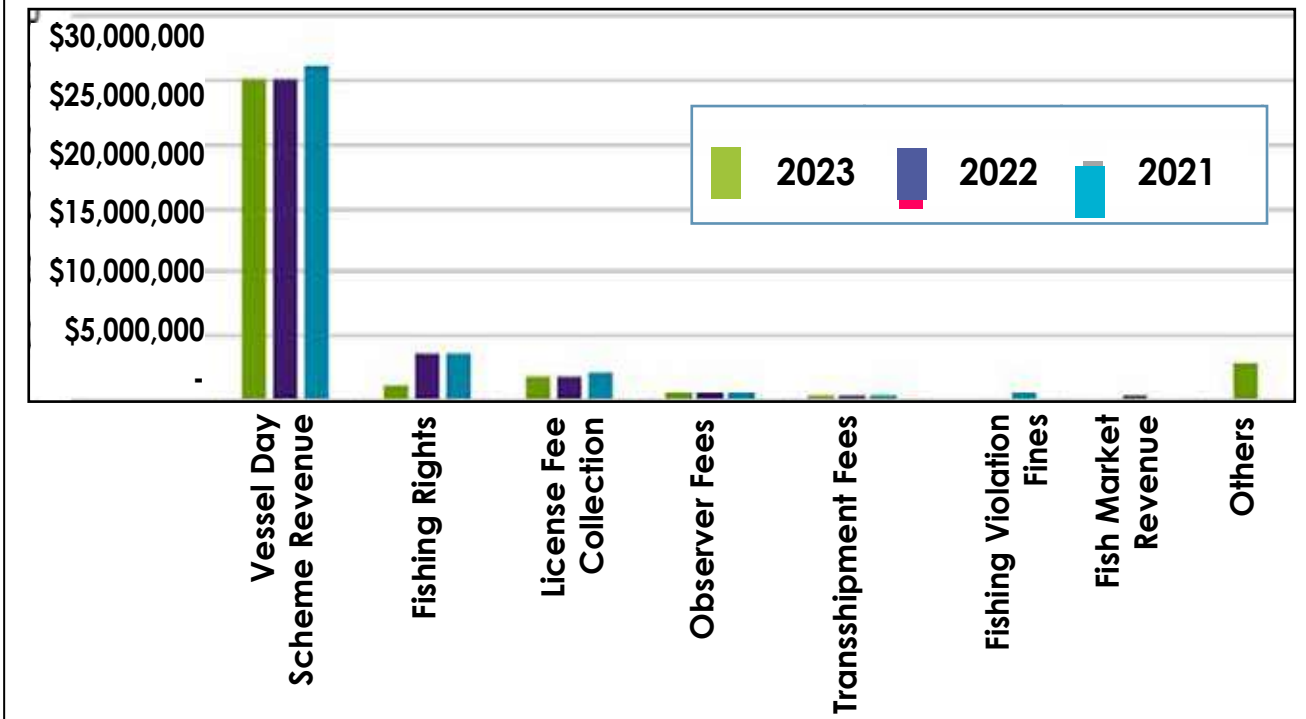
	2023	2022	Change	%	2021
<b>REVENUES:</b>					
Operating Revenues	32,285,033	\$ 31,945,210	339,823	1%	33,417,888
Non-Operating Revenues	491,917	443,667	48,250	11%	2,185,890
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>32,776,950</b>	<b>32,388,877</b>	<b>388,073</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>35,603,344</b>
<b>EXPENSES:</b>					
Operating Expenses	6,164,847	5,407,561	757,286	14%	5,957,541
Non-operating expenses	25,000,000	27,280,243	-2,280,243	-8%	27,221,953
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>31,164,847</b>	<b>32,687,804</b>	<b>-1,522,957</b>	<b>-5%</b>	<b>33,179,494</b>
<b>NET</b>	<b>1,612,102</b>	<b>(298,930)</b>	<b>1,313,172</b>	<b>439%</b>	<b>2,423,850</b>
Capital Contribution	-0-	784,905	-		1,193,158
Changes in Net Position	1,612,102	485,975	1,126,127	232%	3,617,008
Net position at beginning of year	40,781,542	40,295,566	485,976	1%	36,678,558
<b>Net position at end of year</b>	<b>42,383,664</b>	<b>40,781,541</b>	<b>640,151</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>40,295,566</b>

\*Unaudited.

# FINANCE

## MIMRA: Management's Discussion and Analysis for fiscal years 2023, 2022 and 2021

### Comparative Revenue: FY23 vs FY22 vs FY21



	2023*	2022	Change	%	2021
Vessel Day Scheme	\$25,198,926	\$24,986,929	\$211,297	1%	26,027,040
Licensing/registration	1,684,293	1,936,700	-54,580	-3%	2,164,000
Fishing rights	1,882,120	3,617,510	1,933,217	-53%	3,629,878
Observers fees	650,678	262,050	24,628	4%	610,450
Transshipment fees	316,000	347,000	-31,000	-9%	347,000
Fish Market	-	453,111	-453,111	-100%	-
Fishing violation	25,000	-	25,000	100%	600,000
Others	3,019,933	166,170	2,853,763	1717%	39,113
<b>Total operating revenues</b>	<b>32,776,950</b>	<b>32,133,470</b>	<b>643,480</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>33,417,481</b>

\* Unaudited.







**Marshall Islands Marine  
Resources Authority**

**[www.mimra.com](http://www.mimra.com)**

