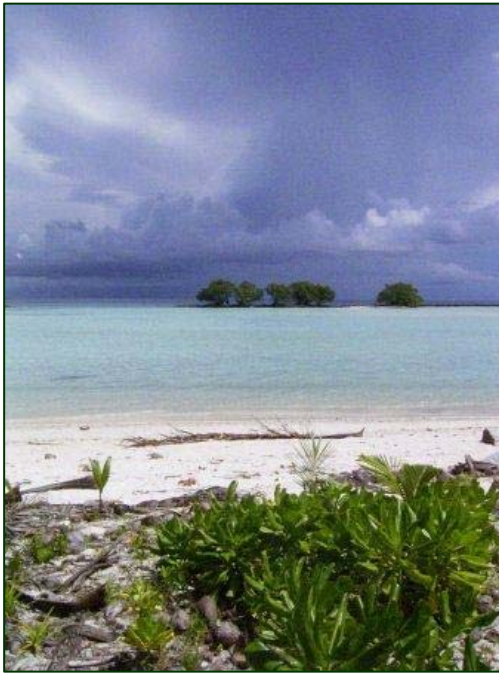


“Effective Management of World Heritage Sites and Capacity-Building for Protected Areas in the Marshall Islands”



Mid-term Progress Report
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icem International Centre for Environmental Management



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Department of the Environment and Water Resources

Acronyms and Glossary:

MIMRA	Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority
RMIEPA	Republic of the Marshall Islands Environment Protection Authority
OEPPC	Office of Environmental Policy and Planning Coordination
RNHP	Australian Government Regional Natural Heritage Programme
MICS	Marshall Islands Conservation Society
MIVA	Marshall Islands Visitors Authority
USP	University of the South Pacific
TNC	The Nature Conservancy
CMI	College of the Marshall Islands
ICEM	International Centre for Environmental Management
WH	World Heritage
CMAC	Coastal Management Advisory Council
NRAS	Natural Resource Assessment Surveys (Marshall Islands)
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity

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Introduction

The project "Effective Management of World Heritage Sites and Capacity-Building for Protected Areas in the Marshall Islands" (the Project) was devised by ICEM - the International Centre for Environmental Management in consultation and partnership with the national working group, the Coastal Management Advisory Council (CMAC) of the Marshall Islands. The Project, funded by the Australian Government through the Regional Natural Heritage Programme (RNHP), commenced in November 2006 and is scheduled to complete in May 2007. The objectives of the Project are:

1. To support the management of flagship conservation areas- the proposed World Heritage sites of Bikini and Ailinginae;
2. To build national institutional capacity for conservation area planning and management in the key national resource management agencies through:
 - Development of a National Conservation Area Plan (initially termed National Protected Area Strategy in the proposal to RNHP);
 - Guidance on legal framework for conservation areas.

The project commenced on November 14 with the first field visit by the technical specialist team. A program of small-group and one-on-one meetings and workshops involving government, NGOs, international partners and individual specialists were held until December 18, the end of the inception phase. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of progress in project implementation, including:

- The focus, outputs and work-plan of the project after detailed consultation;
- Activities and progress to date;
- Description of partners and stakeholders.

Existing policy processes and the need for this project

Conservation area planning in the Marshall Islands is generally initiated by the atoll local government level. The local government approaches one of the key national agencies for support- to date this has been:

- Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA), the fisheries authority, which responds to local government requests through supporting the development of community-based fisheries management plans that include the use of protected areas as a management strategy; and
- Republic of the Marshall Islands Environmental Protection Authority (RMIEPA), which responds through supporting the development of community-based management plans.

A third process has been the initiation of World Heritage site nominations in 2006- a local government-led process supported by international and local consultants (administered through the Alele Museum as the focal point for World Heritage).

Other possibilities for community-based conservation planning and management came with the establishment of the cooperative multi-agency working group, CMAC, which facilitates support and advice for communities from the range of member agencies, including all government resource management agencies as well as the College of the Marshall Islands (CMI) and local NGOs, Marshall Islands Conservation Society (MICS) and Natural Resource Assessment Surveys (NRAS).

In addition, there are several processes for collection of traditional and local knowledge relating to conservation and resource management being carried out, and possibly duplicated, by different agencies.

The Marshall Islands is a party to various environmental conventions and agreements requiring attention to national policy for conservation areas, including, most importantly, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the recently signed Micronesian Challenge. Under the Micronesian Challenge, the Marshall Islands has

agreed to have 30% of nearshore marine and 20% of terrestrial forest areas under “effective conservation” by 2020.

All these related activities, and the current efforts to cooperate and make effective use of the scarce national resources point to the need for an overarching national framework for conservation area planning and management. This project intends to assist the Marshall Islands address this need.

Activities to Date- Phase I

Development of Conceptual Framework

The specialist team held discussions with conservation planning experts including Maria Beger (The Ecology Centre, University of Queensland-UQ), Trina Leberer, Geoff Lipsett-Moore and Stu Sheppard (The Nature Conservancy- TNC Asia-Pacific) to discuss appropriate conservation planning processes for the RMI. Documents of national conservation planning efforts in the Micronesian region (Palau and FSM) were reviewed. Eco-regional planning guidelines from TNC were also reviewed. These approaches were considered in light of the needs of existing policy processes and institutional arrangements in the Marshalls, the information and resources available during the project timeframe, and the RMI government emphasis on human-centred conservation and resource management.

An overall conceptual framework for conservation planning in the Marshall Islands with support of the project was presented during the inception meeting on Nov 27 and agreed as an appropriate set of steps to prepare a National Conservation Area Plan and operational plan within the project period. This framework is contained in *Appendix 1: Project Roadmap*.

Project Management and Institutional Arrangements

Inception Meeting

An inception meeting was held to which key stakeholders were invited. The outline of the Project was presented, focusing on the capacity-building aspects, as described in Annex I. Vigorous discussion ensued, particularly on concerns such as the degree of involvement of local (Marshallese) team members, capacity-building and skills transfer. Overall, there was strong support for the project from all attending the meeting.

Establishment of Steering Committee

A Steering Committee has been established consisting of the heads of the three key government agencies: MIMRA, RMIEPA and OEPPC, with the Project Team Leader as Steering Committee Secretary. The Steering Committee has held the first of three planned meetings, and agreed on Terms of Reference as well as the overall direction of the project. The steering committee agreed to give special attention to the:

- Overall direction and relevance of the Project;
- Integration of the Project with other government activities and policy processes;
- Sustainability of Project outcomes.

Steering Committee members are: John Bungitak- General Manager, RMIEPA; Glen Joseph- Director, MIMRA; and Yumi Chrisostomo/ Deborah Barker- Director/ Deputy Director, OEPPC.

Establishment of Team and Experts

The core team is responsible for the main elements of the Project, however, we have an extended team of local resource management professionals who are very active in attending workshops, reviewing documents and collecting information for inclusion in the inventory.

Core Team

The core team of international specialists consists of Nicole Baker (Team Leader), Graham Baines (Protected Area Specialist), Caleb McClennen (GIS and Environmental Policy Specialist) and local team members Moriana Phillips (University of the South Pacific - USP Intern), and Joy Kawakami (seconded from Marshall Islands Conservation Society (MICS)).

Extended Team of Resource Management Professionals

The extended team consists of the following government officials and experts: Albon Ishoda, Terry Keju, Emma Kabua, Melba White, Florence Edwards (MIMRA), Riyad Mistry, Rito Akilang (RMIEPA), Don Hess, Dean Jacobsen, Frankie Harriss (CMI), and Ned Lobwij, Jeff Zebedy, Deborah Barker (OEPPC), and Neiar Kabua (Marshall Islands Visitors Authority-MIVA)

Other Local and International Experts

In addition, the team is accessing the expertise of a range of local and international experts who have knowledge of the biodiversity of the Marshall Islands including Zoe Richards (James Cook University), Maria Beger (UQ), Jim Maragos (US Fish and Wildlife Service), Daria Siciliano (University of California, Santa Cruz), Irene Ta'afaki (USP) and locally-based independent biodiversity experts Nancy Vander Velde and Brian Vander Velde.

Other Partners

The Nature Conservancy (TNC): The Project team has had assistance from Bill Raynor, Trina Leberer, Geoff Lipsett-Moore, Peter Thomas, Stu Sheppard, and Alison Green from Asia-Pacific and Micronesia Offices of TNC, and they continue to provide technical support and resources to the project.

University of the South Pacific (USP): The Project has formed a partnership with USP Marshall Islands Campus in using the GIS laboratories and equipment for processing of data as well as workshop venues.

Products from Coral Reef Millenium Mapping Project, Institute for Marine Remote Sensing at University of South Florida, USA, and Institut de Recherche Pour le Développement, France. Contacts: andrefou@noumea.ird.nc. The Project has made use of these products in the development of the reef classification system for the Conservation GIS.

Formal workshops and meetings held, and participants are detailed in *Appendix 2*.

Progress against outputs

The following section describes progress against outputs as described in *Appendix 1: Project Roadmap* document, and the steps that will be carried out in Phase II of the Project.

1 National Conservation Area Plan

1a Inventory of Conservation Targets

RMI Conservation GIS

A key output of the Project will be the GIS system that is being established as a repository for conservation-related information and as a planning tool for use now and into the future. Initially it was intended to compile existing scientific and survey-related information into the system. While developing the conceptual framework for the Project, it was determined that local and expert knowledge about key biodiversity features and traditional "mo" would be far more useful and relevant for planning and policy purposes.

Key literature was reviewed and biodiversity features mapped in GIS. Data from reclassified satellite imagery was obtained from Institute for Marine Remote Sensing at University of South Florida and merged with existing

local datasets to produce an exceptional database of conservation regions. Local knowledge was collected according to local knowledge gathering activities below. Local team members Joy Kawakami and Moriana Phillips developed GIS skills through entering the data into the GIS. All information has been compiled using ArcGIS 9.1, in a user-friendly GIS format on CD, for use and distribution with free software, ArcReader from ESRI. The project has now developed the most comprehensive and accurate maps of RMI conservation assets available as a foundation for the priority setting and strategy planning process.

Local Knowledge Gathering Process and Team

A team of 8 local resource management professionals attended a workshop and developed a draft process for collection of local and traditional knowledge. The importance of this information to the project objectives was emphasized during the inception meeting. The investment of time and effort given to this project activity was increased accordingly to expand the range and quality of information being collected. The team has interviewed local people and collected information on occurrences of Conservation Targets (ie the specific locations at which these features occur) on 15 atolls. There are 14 atolls for which this information remains to be collected. This activity has successfully developed local teamwork and capacity in eliciting and documenting local knowledge of biodiversity and traditional management.



Example of a map from the RMI Conservation GIS being developed in this project. This map shows the locations of special biodiversity on Wotho Atoll, from collection of local and expert knowledge.

Development of Conservation Targets list

A half-day workshop was held to develop a list of conservation targets- that is, the initial list of ecosystems and species that should receive conservation attention. This list has been drafted and is now being reviewed by team members and other experts. The list is a building block for the next stages of conservation planning and provides the basis for the RMI Conservation GIS..

1b Priorities for Action

No action has been taken in Phase I of the project to determine Conservation Goals and Priorities for Action. This will be addressed in workshops to be held in February to April, 2007.

1c Management Responses

A half-day workshop was held to discuss the various objectives of conservation in the context of the Marshall Islands. This was an important preparatory step to creating a vision and specific objectives for conservation planning. There are sharp contrasts between developed countries such as the USA and Australia, where conservation planning often carries with it assumptions such as the ability to set aside land and to regulate the use of resources which may not be feasible or appropriate for island countries. In the Marshalls, conservation and resource use go hand-in-hand. The discussion from this workshop raised the issue that food security of the Marshall Islands is very much dependent on conservation of natural resources. The workshop resulted in a shared understanding of the various objectives of conservation and a list of possible objectives for conservation in the Marshall Islands.

Discussion Papers

Discussion papers are being developed by Protected Areas Specialist, Graham Baines, to support the planning process by structuring and provoking discussion of appropriate management responses. The discussion papers draw on Graham's extensive knowledge of conservation management in many Pacific Island countries . Three discussion papers have been prepared to date:

- "Selecting Conservation Targets";
- "Administration and management of conservation areas at local level";
- "Lessons learned in establishing community based conservation areas elsewhere in the Pacific Island Region".

Adjustment of Proposed Activities and Outputs

Review of available information, consideration of the resources available and the timeline, in-depth consultation with local agencies on their needs and acknowledgement of national and regional activities that are related to protected areas led to some changes in the emphasis of the project. The primary changes are:

Shift from purely scientific information to local and expert knowledge for inclusion in inventory and GIS

Upon reviewing the status of scientific information from biological surveys and a project currently underway through NRAS to compile all scientific data into a database, it was decided to increase the emphasis on mapping local and expert knowledge of key biodiversity features. This required substantially more investment of time and training into the process of collecting local and expert knowledge, but has yielded high quality information that is relevant to the planning process.

Change in purpose of the final workshop- from "Developing protected area planning and management skills" to "Operational Planning"

There are several regional and national initiatives underway to develop training materials and courses for marine protected area/ conservation area planning and management, including PIMPAC/LMMA, TNC support

and courses being developed at the College of the Marshall Islands. In addition, after consultation with local agencies about their commitment to the Micronesian Challenge, it was realised that assistance in developing a clear operational plan to support the National Conservation Area Plan with actions, responsibilities and timelines for the next 1-3 years is a high priority. Given the existing training initiatives, the needs of the national agencies and the limited time available in this project, it was decided to shift the emphasis of the final stage of the project from a training course on site-level planning and management to a process that will more strongly support national institutional capacity to implement a national protected area strategy, through operational planning. This is expected to include a 2-day planning workshop and subsequent discussion, review and finalisation of an operational plan.

Next Steps: Phase II

1 National Conservation Area Plan

1a Inventory of Conservation Targets

- The team will continue to collect local and expert knowledge on occurrences of conservation targets and to enter this into the GIS.
- Maps of occurrences of Conservation Targets, special biodiversity features and existing/ proposed management regimes will be included in the National Conservation Area Plan.
- GIS system will be published electronically using Arc Reader and distributed to all national resource management agencies.
- The list of conservation targets will be finalised and descriptions of each target will be written.

1b Priorities for Action

- Workshop B2 to be held in April will address:
 - Conservation goals- % of Conservation Targets that we are aiming to have under effective management
 - Priorities for Action- atolls that are priorities for conservation will be determined based on biodiversity value and socio-economic criteria.

1c Management Responses

As described above, Phase II will see the development of the National Conservation Area Plan through at least 2 key workshops and ongoing meetings and discussions.

- Workshop B1: late February 2007
 - Review of lessons learned from existing conservation areas in the RMI
 - Development of policies that will improve effectiveness
- Workshop B2: late April 2007
 - Vision and objectives of the National Conservation Area Plan
 - Conservation goals- % of Conservation Targets that the Marshall Islands will aim to have under effective management
 - Priorities for Action- atolls that are priorities for conservation will be determined based on biodiversity value and socio-economic criteria.
 - Design principles for locally-managed conservation areas, including both ecosystem-based and socio-political aspects.

The plan document will be drafted and circulated for review.

Discussion Papers

One further discussion paper will be generated by Graham Baines to support the planning process- "Biodiversity management planning at atoll level".

2 Guidance on Legal Framework

Existing legislation, regulations and local government ordinances will be reviewed with respect to implementation of locally-managed conservation areas. Gaps in legal framework, degree of implementation and efficacy will be discussed. Recommendations will be made based on the management responses developed in the workshops in Phase II.

3 Operational Guidelines/ Plan

A workshop will be held in May to discuss the implementation of the National Conservation Area Plan. While the National Plan is expected to be strategic in orientation, this workshop will address the actions, timelines, responsibilities and resources required for moving forward with the plan over the next 1-2 years.

Support for World Heritage Sites

During Phase II, community consultation on Conservation Targets and resource use will be conducted for the sites of Bikini and Ailinginae. In conjunction with the Marshall Islands World Heritage Project, management plans for the two sites will be drafted and reviewed by stakeholders. Local government ordinances will be drafted to support the implementation of the management plans, in preparation for submission of management plans and nomination documents to the World Heritage Committee in January 2008.