

## Toward a Pacific Islands Marine Protected Area Community



**Issue:** Marine Protected Area (MPA) managers in the Pacific Islands face a unique set of challenges including limitations in human and financial resources and isolation from other MPAs. While each MPA has its own strengths and issues, most share the challenge of capacity limitations. They also have in common the great distances between islands that restrict the ability of managers to learn from and apply approaches that have been successful elsewhere. These shared challenges inhibit Pacific Islands MPA systems from being as effective as possible.

Nevertheless, many people feel the answers to today's challenges can be found in the islands. Traditional management approaches of marine resources in the Pacific Islands are thousands of years-old. For MPA managers the difficulty lies in building on these traditional approaches while adapting to modern technology and practices. Therefore, to play a successful role in MPA management, traditional and local approaches must be actively fostered, developed, and integrated into current MPA systems.

**Vision:** The Pacific Islands Marine Protected Area Community (PIMPAC) is envisioned to be a collaboration of MPA managers, non-governmental organizations, federal, state, and territorial agencies, local communities, and other stakeholders working together to collectively enhance the effective use and management of MPAs in the U.S. Pacific Islands and Freely Associated States.

**PIMPAC Inauguration Meeting:** More than 45 MPA leaders from around the Pacific Islands met in Tumon, Guam from August 26 to 31, 2005 to discuss their common strengths, challenges, and commitments to work together to support effective MPA management in the region. The workshop was co-hosted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the University of Guam. Workshop participants including governmental and non-governmental representatives from the U.S. Pacific Islands, Freely Associated States of the Pacific, and Fiji shared a common vision for regional coordination that would strengthen their individual and collective MPA efforts. The group also committed to work together in an evolving, regional Pacific Islands MPA Community.

At the Guam meeting, working groups drafted proposals identifying actions that PIMPAC could take to address the following priorities:

- Supporting the expressed needs of MPA sites, networks and programs through focused skill-building, on the job or intermittent trainings, including those that can result in recognized degrees and certifications, facilitating access to experts, and promoting staff exchanges.
- Building partnerships with academic and other institutions to strengthen long-term, locally-based MPA management and program capacity in the Pacific.
- Fostering information sharing about the state of this art, scientific knowledge and methods, local and traditional management systems.
- Promoting the exchange of knowledge, skills, lessons, and experiences by creating a regional learning network focused on peer to peer learning. This approach will build partnerships and learn from the experience of other successful efforts in other parts of the Pacific.
- Supporting and facilitating the exchange of information on island MPA opportunities and needs with the outside world.

**Next Steps:** The implementation of PIMPAC is underway. A one year work plan has been developed to focus training efforts on MPA management planning. The development of the management planning training module occurred in May 2006 on Yap, Federated States of Micronesia. Following the meeting, on-site assistance took place with a local non-governmental organization to support a local community's effort to develop an MPA.

A meeting is scheduled for October 2006 in Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia to provide training for two MPA managers from each jurisdiction on MPA management planning. Follow up technical assistance will then be provided to each island to support individual site management planning efforts. Additionally 2-3 exchange visits will occur to facilitate peer to peer learning this year. PIMPAC will also partner with National Science Foundation efforts to develop college level curriculum around management planning and support internships within 2 island jurisdictions.

Finally, the efforts of PIMPAC strongly support several national and regional efforts to develop networks of effective marine protected areas. These efforts include; the US Coral Reef Task Force, The US National System of Marine Protected Areas, and the Micronesia Challenge. PIMPAC will continue to work to coordinate the implementation and establishment of effectively managed MPA sites to help achieve the goals of these large scale efforts.

**Coordination:** The PIMPAC co-coordinators, housed within NOAA Pacific Services Center in Hawaii and the Micronesia Conservation Trust in Pohnpei, will use this work plan to coordinate activities and move PIMPAC forward. Deliverables for this first year will be based on the one year work plan that is and include the development of a regional website to house information on the community; partnership building with regional academic institutions; and targeted trainings that support multiple island groups.

**In closing....** PIMPAC is an effort that will depend on the collaboration and support of numerous agencies, organizations, and individuals. It is the aim of PIMPAC to build partnerships of Pacific Islands MPA practioners and to bring support to the region towards strengthening MPA planning, management and evaluation efforts and conserving the marine resources of the Pacific Islands.

**Partnerships:**

- All island state marine resource agencies and NGOs supporting marine resource management

**NOAA:**

- Coral Reef Conservation Program
- Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management
- National Marine Fisheries Service
- Pacific Services Center
- National MPA Center
- National Marine Sanctuaries

**Other:**

- Department of Interior
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Locally Managed Marine Area Network
- Community Conservation Network
- Micronesia Conservation Trust



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