

Technical assistance for pearl jewellery training in the Marshall Islands

Simon Ellis and Dr Maria Haws

Handicraft making is an excellent way to enhance byproducts of the pearl industry. Discarded shells and imperfect pearls can gain tremendous value if they are turned into a nice looking piece of jewellery or a handicraft. Across the Pacific Islands region — in places such as Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Tonga, Tuvalu and, more recently, the Marshall Islands — workshops on these techniques have been fairly common over the past few years.

In November last year, a pearl jewellery and marketing training was held on Majuro Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The primary sponsor of the workshop was the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA), with technical and financial assistance from the University of Hawaii Hilo (UHH) – Pacific Aquaculture and Coastal Resources Center (PACRC), the Marine and Environmental Research Institute of Pohnpei (MERIP) and SPC. Other partners included the College of the Marshall Islands and the communities of Rongelap and Namdrik atolls. Both communities have been developing black pearl farming, and both recently harvested their first pearls.

Training was conducted by Dr Maria Haws and Simon Ellis who are faculty members at UHH-PACRC. Simon Ellis is also director of MERIP, an FSM-based non-governmental organisation that promotes sustainable aquaculture in the Pacific Islands region. Haws and Ellis have combined experience of over 30 years in pearl farming development in the region. Orders for jewellery settings and tools were handled through MERIP. The UHH-PACRC program provided co-funding for the workshop

in the amount of USD 6,500 and MIMRA provided their conference room for the training and on-the-ground assistance from MIMRA personnel Florence Edwards and Darren Nakata.

Following the training, the communities organized a pearl auction and sale the following week. Combined sales from the events raised USD 31,000, which will go toward further pearl farming development on Rongelap and Namdrik atolls. Fifteen individuals participated in the training, and MIMRA technical staff gained valuable exposure to the pearl industry.

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Trainees are being taught pearl mounting techniques by trainer Simon Ellis (standing).