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COUNTRY STATEMENT

MARSHALL ISLANDS

The Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA) is the agency of the Government responsible for development, management, and conservation of all the marine resources, living and nonliving, in the Marshall Islands.

At this time, MIMRA is actively engaged in the management of the living resources in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The primary resources are the pelagic resources, particularly tuna resources.

The main programs in our fisheries are:

1. Commercial fishing
2. Artisanal or small-scale coastal fishing
3. Mariculture

MIMRA manages the pelagic resources through bilateral and multilateral fishing agreements. The bilateral agreement with the Japanese fishing industry licenses up to 190 fishing vessels which produce high quality seafood products consumed as sashimi or as other forms of fresh fish. The Republic is a party to the Multilateral Tuna Treaty with the United States. This agreement licenses up to 50 purse seine fishing vessels which fish for industrial grade tuna consumed as processed or canned tuna.

MIMRA also issues licenses for a fleet of locally-based foreign longline fishing vessels for high quality sashimi grade tuna, targeting mainly Hawaiian and Japanese markets. The main carrier of this sashimi product is the Air Marshall Islands (AMI). Currently there are five longline vessels operating under a joint venture between the Marshall Islands Development Authority (MIDA) and a Hawaiian-based company. In addition, there will be also eight longline vessels from Alaska operating under a joint venture with a local company which will use Jaluit seaport as their home base. In the recent past, MIMRA has also entered into two fishing agreements with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwanese companies by using Majuro as their transshipment point. These do not include the seven locally-owned fishing vessels and the five joint venture fishing vessels.

In line with the Government's effort to utilize and maximize economic benefits from the marine resources, particularly the pelagic resources, MIMRA is working closely with MIDA and other agencies of the RMI government to expand the locally-owned longline fleet.

Under the Asian Development Bank (ADB) assistance, a fishbase and a longline fleet of three vessels will soon be established on the island of Ebeye, Kwajalein. This assistance has provided and started a fisheries and nautical training school in Majuro. The school is providing training in fishing techniques, seamanship, engine repair, and other related skills for Marshallese youth who are expected to work on the domestic longline fleet or other related jobs. There is also plan to send selected youth abroad for further advanced training where such training cannot be obtained locally.

MIMRA is also working closely with MIDA in the effort to seek assistance to upgrade and convert the facilities on Enewetak into a fishbase for longline operation. Similarly, assistance is also being sought to expand or improve the capabilities of the Majuro shore facilities in order to provide sufficient support to our fairly new and growing longline industry.

The domestic longline industry has so far generated substantial benefits from the Republic as far as revenues for the government and the national airline, the Air Marshall Islands. Creation of employment opportunities on fishing vessels and the shore-side facilities, and certain indirect benefits are assisting the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) as well.

Recently, MIMRA was responsible for the patrol, surveillance and law enforcement activities related to the control of fishing in the EEZ. This function along with the budget allocations to carry it out have been transferred to the Sea Patrol Division of the Ministry of Justice. The division has indicated that its capability to run the patrol vessel is limited due to insufficient funding, and assistance in this regard is being sought.

In the effort to provide economic benefits to the people living in the outer islands, where subsistence fishing is used mainly for food consumption, two small-scale fishbases which include docking facilities, cold storage and ice making capabilities, fishing boats and a transport boat have been established in Arno Atoll, the closest atoll to Majuro, the main market. This project has already expanded to three other outer atolls (Alinglaplap, Likiep and Namu). Fish caught are transported and sold at the Ebeye market. All of these projects were provided through the grant aid under the Japanese government.

The Arno project alone has provided employment and additional income to at least 90 men and their families. Similar figures are anticipated to be achieved in the other three outer atolls where the projects have been established.

The provision of viable income for the people living on these atolls has proven an effective, contributing tool in the government's effort to decrease migration to the urban areas.

A clam hatchery has been constructed and established in Likiep Atoll. The main objectives of this program are to propagate clams for reseedling of reef areas, provide clam seeds to potential farmers in other outer atolls, and provide propagation and management training to these farmers so that eventually the farms will provide additional income to the farmers. A local private company started two clam farms, one in the outer islands and the other in Majuro. Both farms have already become economically productive mostly from aquarium markets. This same company also sells clam meat at its restaurant and bar at a very good price. Similar commercial concepts are being planned for interested outer island farmers.

MIMRA has also established two black-lip pearly oyster projects in Namdrik and Majuro Atolls. The goals and objectives of this endeavour include propagation of larval and spat oysters in controlled conditions which are then transplanted with nuclei so that they eventually produce pearls of marketable quality.

There are other potential projects which MIMRA is seeking assistance for their feasibility, especially from foreign sources as internal funding or assistance is not available; these are:

1. Farming of seaweed, sponge and sea cucumber: If proven feasible, these projects will, similar to the ongoing projects, provide supplementary economic benefits to the people in the outer islands, as well as reducing migration to the urban areas.
 2. Baitfishing or farming: This is aimed mainly to support the longline industry by providing cheaper but perhaps just as effective bait to the fishing vessels.
 3. Mooring System: This is also aimed to support the longline industry as the current docking facilities are not sufficient to accommodate the domestic fleet.
 4. As was mentioned earlier, assistance is being sought to upgrade and convert the existing facilities on Enewetak into a fishbase, as well as to expand or improve the capabilities of the Majuro shore facilities to provide sufficient support to the longline industry.
 5. Assistance from the appropriate US department or agency for access of our tuna and in particular, swordfish, into the US markets.
 6. MIMRA is also seeking assistance from appropriate US agencies for the coastal resources regulations (this exercise would also help in technology transfer).
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