



Women in fisheries profiles

Emma Kabua-Tibon

Emma Kabua-Tibon was born in 1983 in the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), where she grew up with a love for the ocean.

Emma holds a Master of Science degree in marine science from the Hawai'i Pacific University, and a Bachelor of Science from the University of the South Pacific. In 2018, she became the Chief of the Coastal and Community Division under the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA). She is also the Coordinator for the RMI Protected Areas Network and Secretariat for the Coastal Management Advisory Council.

Early in her career, Emma spearheaded a marine turtle conservation programme that included the development of RMI's first turtle curriculum, and coordinated a turtle tagging and database programme. She also contributed to various scientific surveys as well as legislation/policy development including the Reimaanlok National Conservation Area Plan. More recently, she was involved in the establishment of RMI's Protected Areas Network and co-organised the first National Oceans Symposium, which resulted in a National Ocean Policy and Implementation Plan for the country.

Emma is not one to sit still and is an active member of her community on Majuro. She serves as the Chairperson of the RMI Environmental Protection Authority Board of Directors, board member of the Jo-Jikum (a youth NGO), Vice-President of a women's NGO called Kora In Okrane (KIO), and a member of the Majuro Atoll Tennis Club. KIO is a young professional women's service organisation that was established in 2006 with a mission to provide targeted assistance to socially and economically disadvantaged groups in the RMI, especially women and children. KIO's current projects include the One Smokeless Stove Per Home Initiative, which aims to distribute energy and eco-friendly rocket stoves to every household in the country to promote safe, improved cooking for women, and the Dren in Mour (Water is Life) Project, which aims to provide all outer island households with individual water filter systems to give families access to clean water and ensure resilience to climate variability.

Why did you choose to work in fisheries?

I chose to work in fisheries obviously because of my passion for marine life. As an islander, I grew up by the sea where activities such as swimming, snorkelling, diving and fishing were a natural part of growing up. I recall from my childhood memories having constant ear infections during summer

breaks because I couldn't stay out of the water and crying every time I saw turtles being prepared for cultural feasts. I think the tipping point for me was when I met two female researchers, Dr Silvia Pinca and Dr Maria Beger, who introduced me to the world of marine ecology and took me out on my first marine research expedition to the outer islands. I think Disney's movie "The Little Mermaid" might have had an impact on me as well (and probably other girls too).

Why is the engagement of women in fisheries management important to you?

In Marshallese society, women tend to most household tasks such as caring for the children, cleaning and cooking. While the men are out fishing/hunting for food, the women are busy collecting firewood and preparing the oven. Once the men return with their catch, the women process the fish (cleaning/gutting) to be cooked, dried or smoked. Collection of shells for handicraft production is the only fisheries harvesting activity done by women. This societal and cultural practice has evolved over time due to outside influence and modernisation. Regardless, both men and women have distinct roles, responsibilities and contributions to their family's welfare and the community as a whole. The simple fact that women have different perspectives, different issues and different knowledge/skill sets from men should be enough to warrant women's engagement in decision-making processes, especially to ensure gender equity in the benefits of fisheries management.

What message do you have for women wanting to work in fisheries or aquaculture in the Marshall Islands?

I encourage all women who want to be in fisheries and aquaculture to pursue fisheries and aquaculture. We need more women in this workforce. There is so much to do.