



A GUIDE TO  
**BIGGER,  
BETTER  
CATCHES**

*FISH SMART. FISH FOREVER.*



This booklet was produced by cChange in collaboration with Division of Natural Resources Management (NRM), Department of Resources & Development (R&D); Office of Fisheries and Aquaculture (OFA); Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), Department of Public Safety - Enforcement; Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); Conservation Society of Pohnpei (CSP); The Nature Conservancy and the Micronesia Conservation Trust.

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When we start talking about fisheries management in Pohnpei, here are the kinds of responses we hear most often.

What's the problem?

WE CAN NEVER  
RUN OUT OF FISH.  
THE OCEAN  
IS BIG.

WHAT ARE WE  
SUPPOSED TO LIVE  
ON? DO YOU HAVE  
ALTERNATIVES?

HOW DO YOU KNOW  
THEY ARE LESS? DO YOU  
GO UNDERNEATH  
THE WATER &  
COUNT THE FISH?

GOD GAVE US  
THESE FISH.  
WE SHOULD  
EAT THEM.





But if you ask people how their catches have changed over the years, here is what you find.

1980

THESE FISH  
CAN FEED  
MY VILLAGE.



2000

THESE FISH  
CAN FEED  
MY FAMILY.



2020

OH DEAR...



What's the problem?

It's also taking us more time and costing us more money to catch fish than it did in the past.

What's the problem?

1980



2000

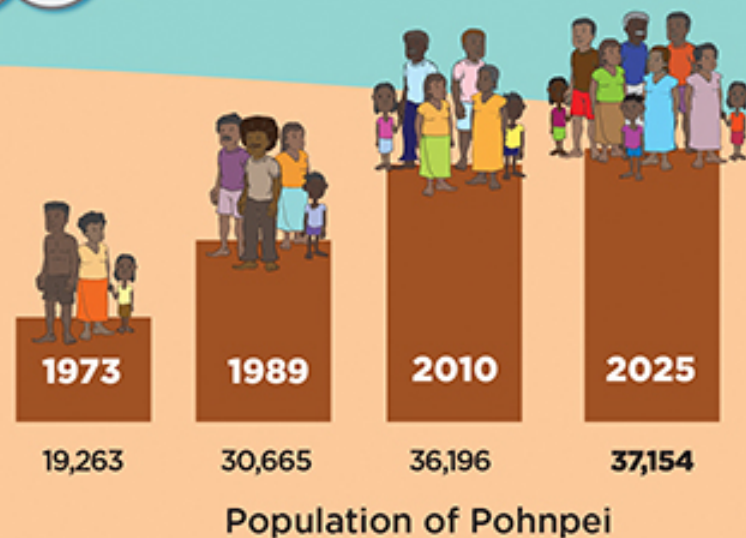
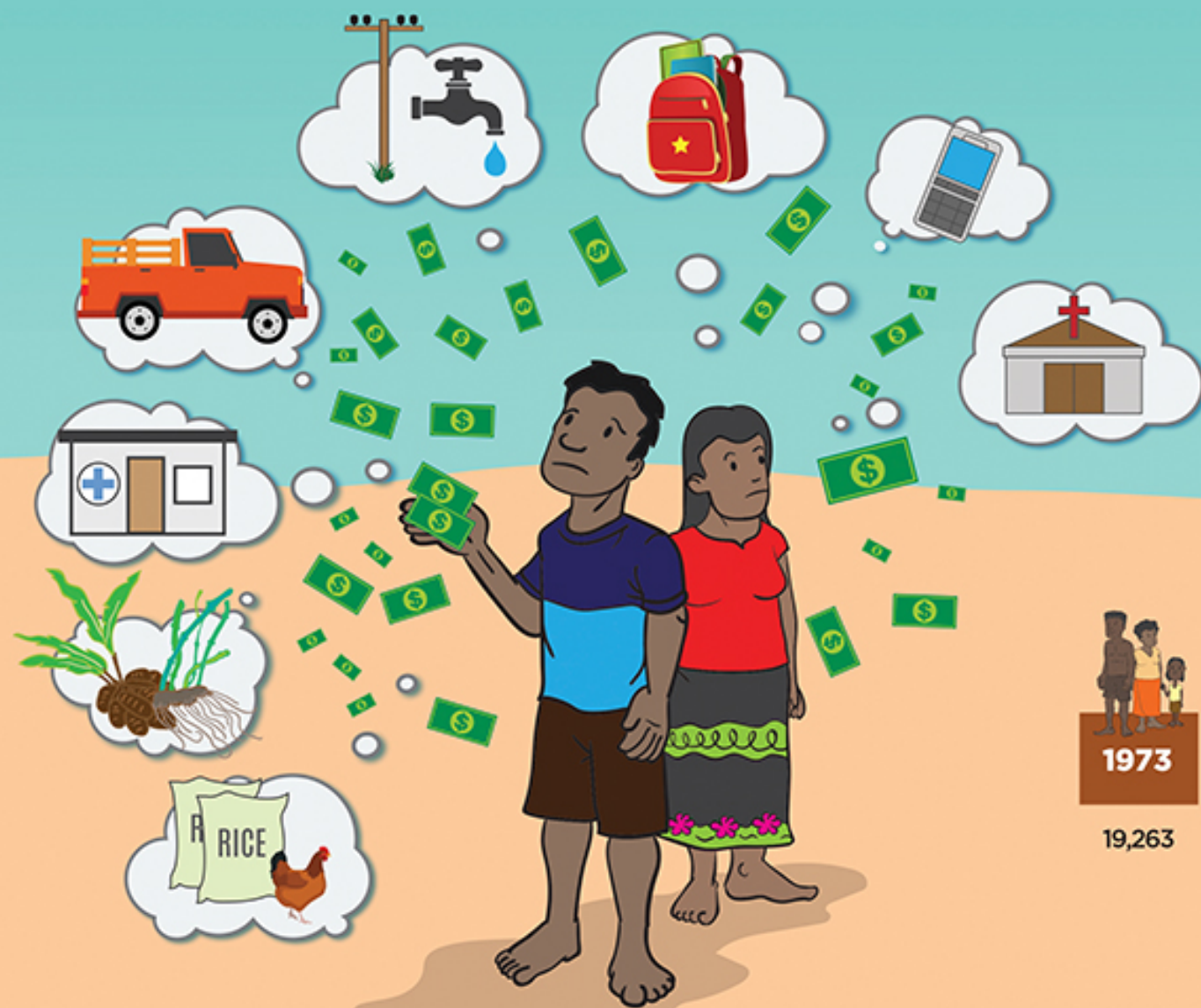


2020





So why has fishing changed so much?  
We are fishing more than ever, because we have more mouths  
to feed and we have more needs today than ever before.



What's changed?



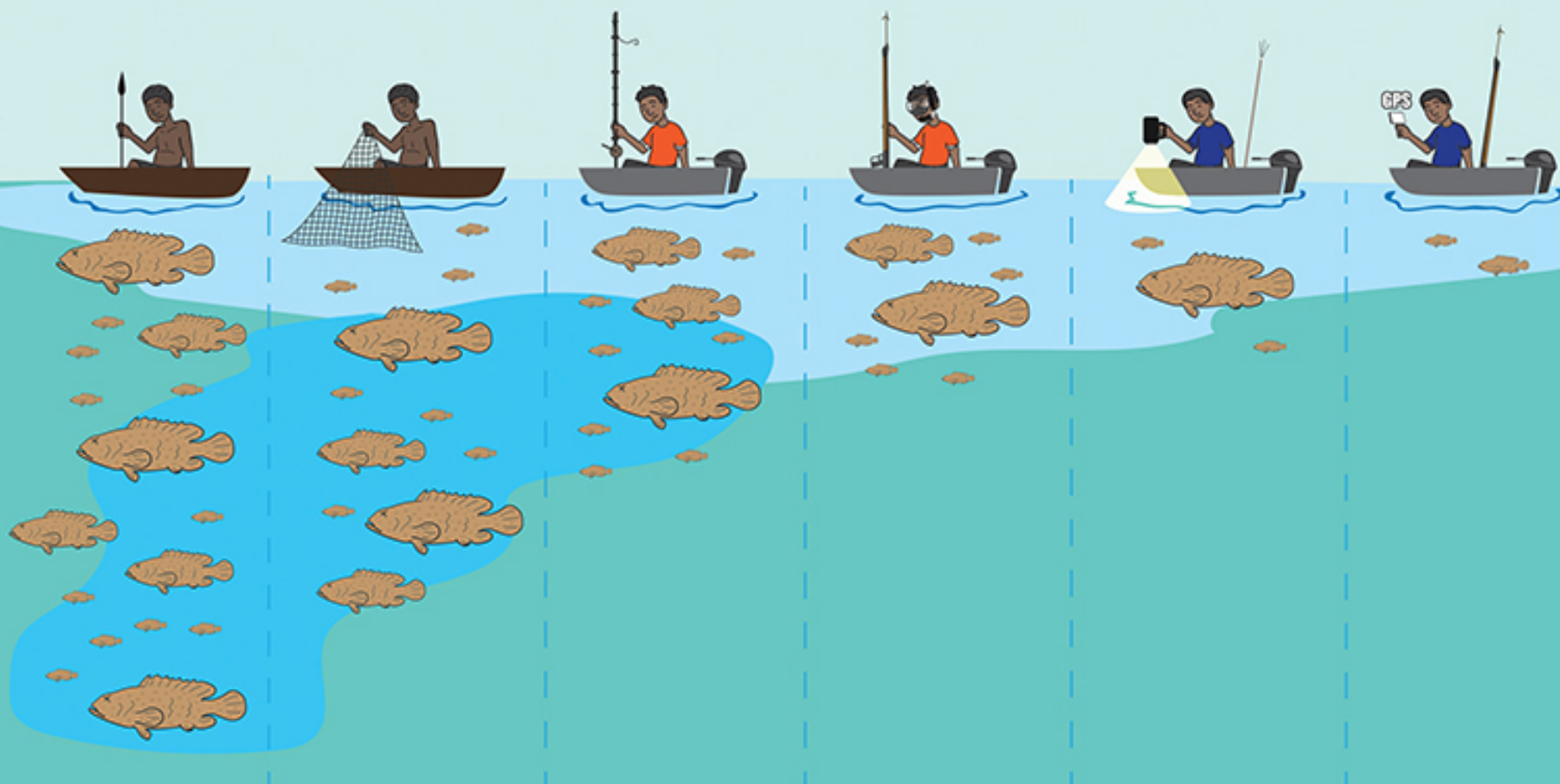
**BUT AS OUR ABILITY TO SELL FISH HAS IMPROVED, SO HAS OUR FISHING GEAR, ALLOWING US TO CATCH MORE FISH THAN EVER BEFORE, LEAVING VERY FEW BEHIND.**

What's changed?

1980

2000

2020



## SO WHAT DO ALL THOSE CHANGES TRANSLATE TO ON THE GROUND IN POHNPEI?



### FISHING ACCESS

Studies show that being close to main fishing centers and normally calm seas off the west coast of Pohnpei translate to more fishing access.

### FISH BIOMASS

As expected, with more fishing and better gear, fish biomass (the amount of fish in the water) was lower on the west side.

### COMMERCIAL LANDINGS

Interestingly, the majority of commercial landings came from reefs with high access near Kitti for most of the year. But during calm weather, fishing expands to the reefs up north.

What's changed?

**BOTTOM LINE:** Fish stocks are declining and reefs along the west coast are more fished, so improved management is needed.

## BUT WHAT DO OUR FISHERS SAY?



Fish are getting smaller and smaller over the past ten years - Taylor Paul



These days, it takes more than one fishing day in order for me to buy what my family needs - Pedrus Abraham



I've been practicing the traditional fishing methods I learned from my elders, today, I see big decline in fish population - Kostan Kosmas

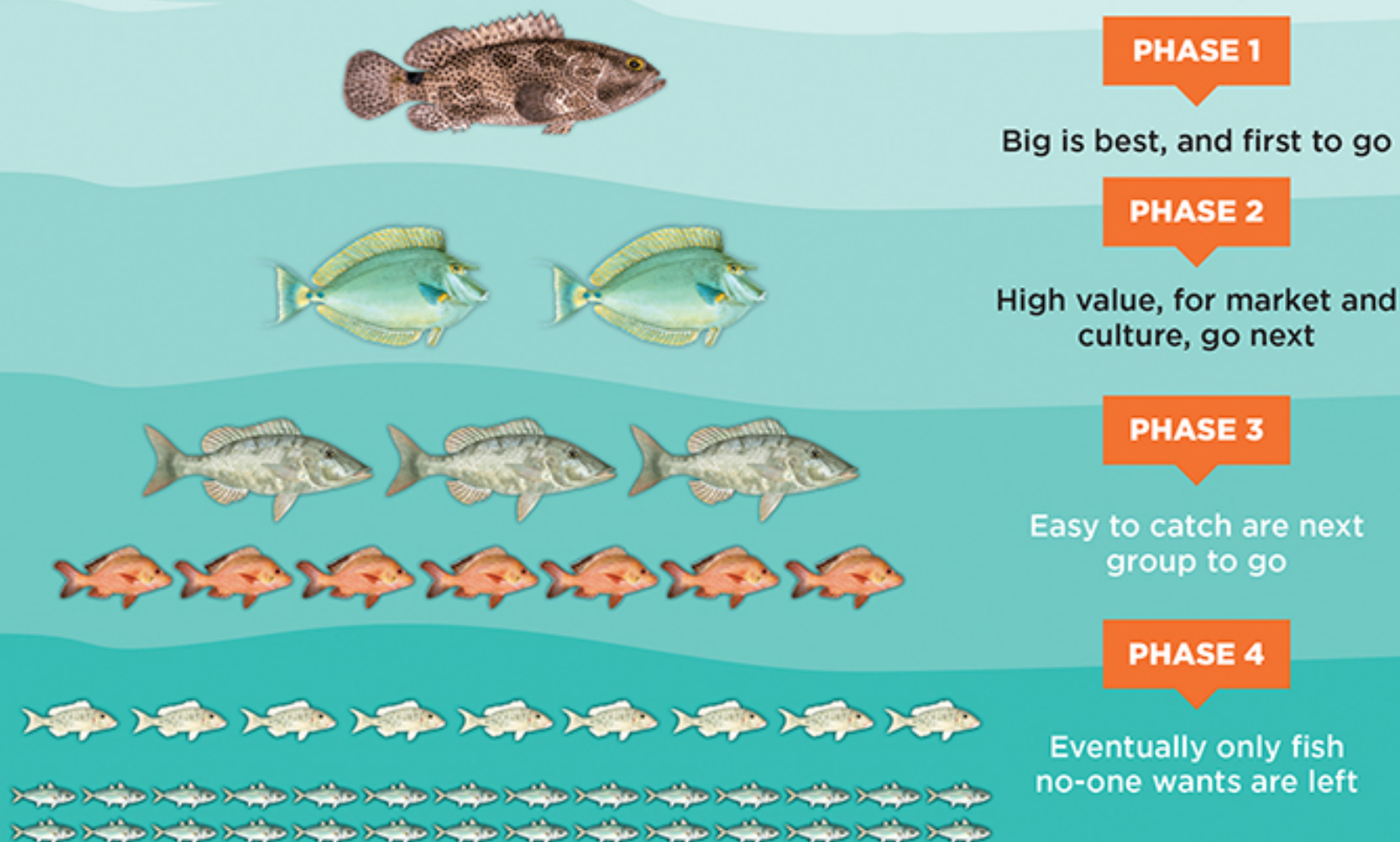
**WHAT'S THE STORY IN YOUR COMMUNITY?**

**WHAT KIND OF CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN?**



Overfishing typically happens in the same way everywhere.

First, the biggest, most valuable fish, disappear.  
Then it goes right down the food chain.



How do we know?

## YOU CAN FIGURE OUT HOW OVERFISHED YOUR FISHING GROUNDS ARE BY LOOKING AT WHAT YOU ARE CATCHING TODAY.

How far you are down the food chain tells you how much you have lost.

SO, WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

THESE?

Grouper are already at risk and fishing and sale are banned for five months each year to protect their peak breeding months.



The Napolean wrasse and Bumphead parrotfish are already so at risk that fishing and sale of these fish are legally banned year-round.

## ARE YOU STILL CATCHING THE BIG FISH?

Or are you further down the food chain?

THESE?

THESE?

OR  
THIS?

How do we know?





Working with Government, NGOs and experts, Pohnpei communities have taken additional steps, working to rebuild stocks using local management tools like community Marine Protected Areas (MPAs).

**SPILLOVER HELPS  
AREAS OUTSIDE  
THE MPAs**

MPAs are areas communities set aside to ensure fish grow bigger and breed and in time, restock local fishing grounds. These areas can also protect critical habitat for fish to thrive.

MPAs also have additional benefits for communities, such as storm protection and MPAs can be more resilient to climate change.

In Pohnpei, one of the ways we have tried to help our fish breed and restock our reef is our seasonal ban on the fishing, transport and sale of grouper. It started in 1999 and is intended to ensure that groupers, who breed predictably each year at the same times and in the same places, get a chance to reproduce each year.

### MOST COMMON GROUPERS IN POHNPEI

#### SAWI



*Plectropomus  
areolatus*  
Squaretail  
coralgrouper

#### WIDIR



*Epinephelus  
polyphekadion*  
Camouflage grouper

#### RIPWIRIPW

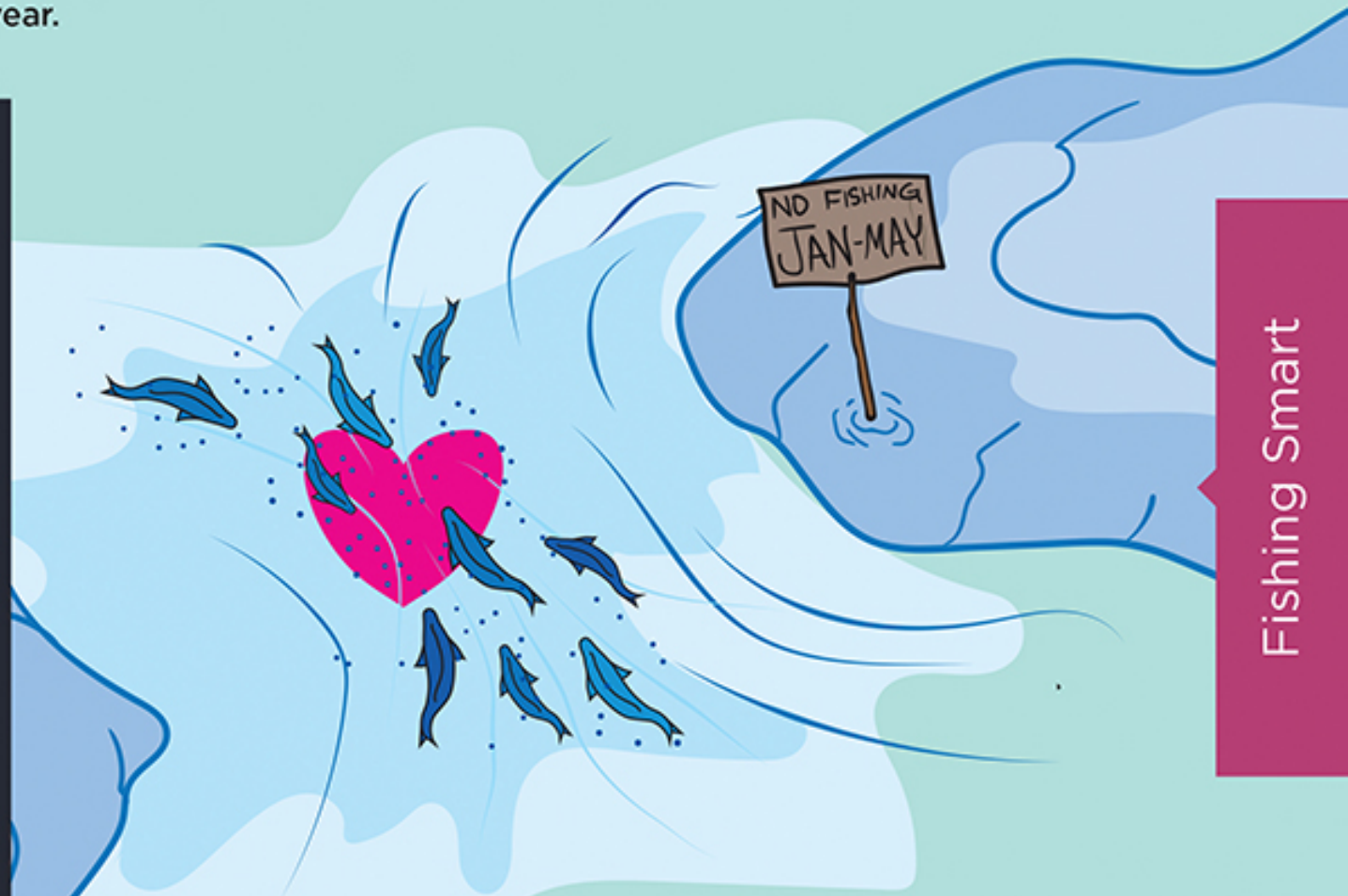


*Epinephelus  
fuscoguttatus*  
Brown-marbled  
grouper

#### MWANGER KEIPWAIPW



*Epinephelus  
maculatus*  
Highfin grouper



Fishing Smart

Grouper are more vulnerable to overfishing because they gather in the same places at the same times every year to reproduce, making it very easy to fish out the breeding stock. The ban, which runs from January 1 to May 31, is intended to let them breed each year so we catch more later.



## FISHERIES MANAGEMENT TOOLBOX

In addition to MPAs, there is a number of effective management actions, for both communities and governments, to help ensure your fish get big enough to breed and restock your reef. MPAs are just one tool.

6

The fisheries department supports communities to farm fish in ponds to provide food security/alternative income.

1

Establish MPA areas to help create space for fish to grow and breed each year. The fish in the MPA area help restock all the fishing grounds. MPA areas can also be placed on important habitat that fish need.

**But please note small MPAs will not fully protect fish that swim over large areas.**

MPA

2

**Establish size limits to ensure fish reach Set Sizes and restock your fishing grounds.**

You can also use bigger hooks and bigger mesh size in nets, to ensure the little ones get a chance to grow before you catch them.



3

**Ban harmful gear that leaves too few fish behind.**

Poison root fishing, night diving & scuba spearfishing are examples of practices places have banned. Small net sizes, too, particularly in fish nursery grounds.



4

**Limit permits allowed to visit sensitive areas.****Fish Aggregation Devices**

are used to attract deep water fish to one location, to make it easier to catch them. FADs are used to reduce fishing pressure on more overfished inshore areas.

7

5

**Create bans to protect key breeding sites or breeding seasons.**

Toolbox

## SO WHAT'S THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM?

We are allowing too few to get big enough to breed and restock the reef.

This is what overfishing means.

LET THEM  
BREED. EAT  
MORE LATER!

If we catch our fish before they get big enough to breed, they can't restock the reefs. So each year, we have less fish to catch.

If we wait till they get big enough to restock our fishing grounds each year, we ensure we have good catches year after year. We also get bigger fish.



Today, Pohnpei is adding another critical tool to revive our fishing grounds. Based on available research and consultations with local fishers, national minimum sizes have been developed for important food fish. These are the local fish fishers are most concerned about losing.

These are minimum sizes that ensure our fish have gotten big enough to breed and restock our reefs before we catch them. We want to see bigger and more fish, today and tomorrow.





## HERE ARE THE MINIMUM SIZES OF OUR MOST COMMONLY CAUGHT FISH.

Take a look at the fish you like or are concerned about and measure your catch over time.

**IF TOO FEW FISH GET BIG ENOUGH TO BREED AND RESTOCK OUR FISHING GROUNDS, OUR FISH WILL STEADILY DECLINE.**

### PWAHLAHL



Humpback snapper  
*Lutjanus gibbus*

10 inches

### KERTAKAI /KERILEL



Rudderfish  
*Kyphosus cinerascens*

10 inches

### MWOMW MEI



Pacific longnose parrotfish  
*Hippocampus longiceps*

10 inches

### PWULAK



Bluespine unicornfish  
*Naso unicornis*

14 inches

### SAWI



Blacksaddled coral grouper  
*Plectropomus laevis*

14 inches

### SAWI



Leopard coral grouper, Red salmon cod  
*Plectropomus leopardus*

14 inches

### SAWI PWILIET



Yellow-edged lyretail  
*Variola louti*

14 inches

### WIDIR



Camouflage grouper  
*Epinephelus polyphekadion*

14 inches

Minimum Sizes

### SAWI



Giant coral trout, Squaretail coral grouper  
*Plectropomus areolatus*

14 Inches

### OARONG



Giant trevally  
*Caranx ignobilis*

14 inches

### OARONG/ADAM



Bigeye trevally  
*Caranx sexfasciatus*

14 inches

### OARONG



Bluefin trevally  
*Caranx melampygus*

14 inches

### KOAHNG



Diagonal banded sweetlips  
*Plectorhinchus lineatus*

14 inches

### MAHU



Steephead parrotfish  
*Chlorurus microrhinos*

14 inches

### RIPWIRIPW



Brown-marbled grouper  
*Epinephelus fuscoguttatus*

24 inches

Minimum Sizes

### LOCAL NAME/S

Common name  
Scientific name

Size (inches)

### Minimum Size

The size our fish need to be to ensure we have fish today and tomorrow.



**AHI MOUR AHI PWUKOAH** is a campaign promoting what you can do to help revive Pohnpei's fishing grounds. So what can you do to help?

1

**Take Ahi Mour Ahi Pwukoah Pledge to avoid all undersize fish.**

That means letting small ones go if you catch them, or avoid targeting them all together. It also means not buying or selling undersize fish.

2

**Help spread the word about avoiding undersize fish and reviving our fishing grounds.**

The only way change happens is if we start talking about the need for action. The booklet is just a tool to get that started. Now we need you to share what you learned.



We encourage you to visit our office or one of our events to make your pledge and have your photograph taken with the Ahi Mour Ahi Pwukoah fish board. You can post it on Facebook and tag **#AhiMourAhiPwukoah**. Then you can share the post and share the Ahi Mour Ahi Pwukoah story with your friends and family.



## IN COMMUNITIES, SIZES CAN BE A GOOD WAY TO ASSESS THE HEALTH OF YOUR FISHING GROUNDS.

Just follow these steps to start a community discussion:

1

### Start talking about the problem

Is it getting harder to fish today? What's changed? Are there specific fish you are worried about most? Can you start measuring them to see how many are size mwhau or not?

2

### Agree on Rules/Action

You have a toolbox full of things you can do to revive your fishing grounds. Build consensus around one or a combination of tools.

3

### Assess whether your rules are helping

So, are fish catches improving? You can measure your fish catches to see if things have got better. If not, consider changing your approach or adding more management rules.

WHICH FISH ARE  
WE MOST  
WORRIED ABOUT?





# A CAMPAIGN BIGGER, BETTER CATCHES

Across Pohnpei, fish are getting smaller and smaller, and fishing is getting harder and harder. That means people are having a harder time meeting their food and income needs. The **Ahi Mour Ahi Pwukoah** campaign is a movement to reverse those trends and revive our fishing grounds, so we can better meet our needs today and tomorrow. That means pledging to avoid undersize fish and then sharing that message with your family and friends. For this work to succeed, it will take all of us.

As part of that, the campaign name, **Ahi Mour Ahi Pwukoah**, is intended to capture the need of each and every one of us to step up and together meet our responsibilities to our island history and our traditions by better managing the ocean's gifts that support us. Together, we can ensure we have bigger, better catches, and can sustain our way of life.

Tag and follow # **AhiMourAhiPwukoah**

