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.

© cChange, the Government of Federated States of Micronesia and the Pacific Community, 2021

All rights for commercial/for profit reproduction or translation, in any form, reserved. The authors authorise the partial reproduction or translation of this material for scientific, educational or research purposes, provided that the authors and the source document are properly acknowledged. Permission to reproduce the document and/or translate in whole, in any form, whether for commercial / for profit or non-profit purposes, must be requested in writing. Original artwork may not be altered or separately published without permission.

Enquiries on rights and permission should be made to:

DEPARTMENT OF RESOURCES & DEVELOPMENT
Federated States of Micronesia
P.O. Box PS-12
Palikir, Pohnpei FM 96941
Phone: (691) 320-2646/5133/2620
E-mail: fsmrd@fsmrd.fm

cChange: 10 Tower Street, Suva, Fiji
info@cchange4good.org

Acknowledgements
This booklet was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Government of Sweden. Its contents do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union and the Government of Sweden.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

What’s the problem? 04
Toolbox 16

What’s changed? 07
Minimum Sizes 18

How do we know? 10
Starting a dialogue 22

Fishing Smart 14
About the Campaign 24
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?

Godd 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**

**2000**

**2020**

What’s the problem?

These fish can feed my village.

These fish can feed my family.

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.
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.

Population of Pohnpei

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>19,263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>30,665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>36,196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>37,154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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?

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.

BOTTOM LINE: Fish stocks are declining and reefs along the west coast are more fished, so improved management is needed.
I’ve been practicing the traditional fishing methods I learned from my elders, today, I see big decline in fish population - Kostan Kosmas

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

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

How do we know?

What’s the story in your community?

What kind of changes have you seen?

But what do our fishers say?
Overfishing typically happens in the same way everywhere.
First, the biggest, most valuable fish, disappear.
Then it goes right down the food chain.

**PHASE 1**
Big is best, and first to go

**PHASE 2**
High value, for market and culture, go next

**PHASE 3**
Easy to catch are next group to go

**PHASE 4**
Eventually only fish no-one wants are left

Fish illustrations reproduced with permission of the Pacific Community (SPC) and cChange.
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 and fishing and sale of these fish is legally banned year-round.

Fish illustrations reproduced with permission of the Pacific Community (SPC) and cChange
ARE YOU STILL CATCHING THE BIG FISH?
Or are you further down the food chain?
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).

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 resilience 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.

Grouper are more vulnerable to overfishing because they gather in the same places at the same times every year to reproduce, making them 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.
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.

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 MPA areas will not fully protect fish that swim over large areas.

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. The fisheries department supports communities to farm fish in ponds to provide food security/alternative income.
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. Create bans to protect key breeding sites or breeding seasons.

5. Limit permits allowed to visit sensitive areas.

6. 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.
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.

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 RE STOCK OUR FISHING GROUNDS, OUR FISH WILL STEADILY DECLINE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fish Name</th>
<th>Minimum Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humpback snapper</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutjanus gibbus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rudderfish</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kyphosus cinerascens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific longnose parrotfish</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hipposcarus longiceps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluespine unicornfish</td>
<td>14 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naso unicornis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitemargin lyretail grouper</td>
<td>10 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variola louti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leopard coral grouper, Red salmon cod</td>
<td>14 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saddleback grouper</td>
<td>14 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plectropomus laevis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAWI PWILIET</td>
<td>14 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitespotted grouper</td>
<td>14 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variola louti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish illustrations reproduced with permission of the Pacific Community (SPC) and cChange.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
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?

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.

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.

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:
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**