

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN

2020-2025

Protected Areas Network Office
Republic of the Marshall Islands

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Agencies and organizations that were consulted included key staff from the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA) and affiliate partners under the CMAC from Government agencies and institutions, namely the RMI Environmental Protection Authority, Office of Environmental Policy and Planning Coordination, Marshall Islands Conservation Society, Ministry of Natural Resources & Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, College of the Marshall Islands, and Women United Together Marshall Islands.

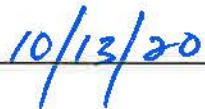
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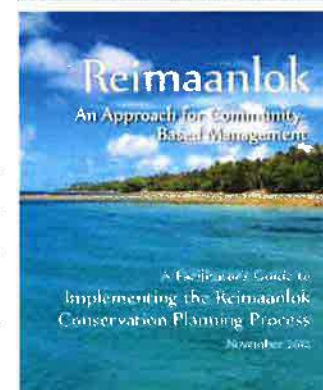
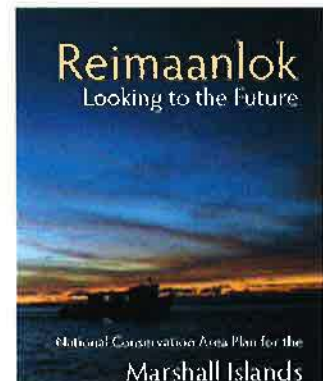
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INTRODUCTION

The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) is unique with twenty-nine coral atolls and five solitary low coral islands. The exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Marshall Islands is over 2 million km² (770,000 sq. miles) and a mere fraction of that (less than 0.01% or 70 sq miles) is combined total land area. RMI on average is 2m above mean sea level; this is the main reason climate change is an important issue to the RMI and why the nation needs to build the resilience of its people to environmental variability. The RMI has a total of 1,225 islands and islets made up of two Chains - Ratak (Sunrise) to the east, and the Ralik (Sunset) Chain to the west. It is an isolated nation, far from the nearest trade center, with a high dependence on subsistence use of resources and the traditional land-tenure and governance systems. Natural resources remain a fundamental aspect of the Marshallese culture, livelihood, and survival. However, exploitation of limited resources to meet social and economic needs has increased giving rise to serious problems confronting land and coastal environments. Moreover, it is now becoming clear that resilience of these islands to new emerging threats such as climate change relies on maintaining healthy ecosystems and traditional nature-based protection against climate and natural disasters.

With a changing environment, protected areas are recognized as an essential part of a sustainable future. Over the past few decades, various efforts have been made to encourage, guide, and assist communities to establish resource management plans and conservation areas on different atolls and islands. The Reimaanlok (Looking to the Future): Blueprint to Conservation Planning in the RMI, in particular, is a prime example of government and community collaboration providing a bottom-up planning process to identify species and areas of greatest biological value and developing resource management plans for each atoll in line with cultural, socioeconomic, and future needs. With emphasis on a holistic conservation approach for sustainable development, the Reimaanlok encompasses environmental stewardship, cultural safeguarding and economic development as one inter-connected goal, while integrating climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction for future generations. In short, the Reimaanlok represents a roadmap of the way forward to achieve the ambitious targets of the Micronesia Challenge and links community efforts to regional and international goals. This powerful approach to planning, now paired with the Protected Areas Network, makes RMI one of a few countries with a unique opportunity to ensure effective stewardship of natural resources.



Milestones

1992	- The National Environment Management Strategy was developed to strengthen the environmental management capabilities of the nation's main environmental agencies, the RMI Environmental Protection Authority and the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority. - Promulgation of Marine Water Quality Regulations to maintain and protect marine waters for designated uses that will provide for the propagation of aquatic life, protection of marine resources, enhancement of human subsistence uses, and for recreation.
1994	Promulgation of Earthmoving Regulations to prevent accelerated erosion, accelerated sedimentation, and disturbance of cultural resources including land, reef, and lagoon.
2000	- RMI completed its National Biodiversity report and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan under the Convention of Biological Diversity. - Promulgation of Plant and Animal Quarantine Regulations to prevent the introduction and further spread of injurious insects, pests, and diseases into and within the RMI.
2002	Establishment of M²EIC (MIMRA, MIVA, EPA, MoIA, and CMI) as a collaborative multi-agency group focused on community-based fisheries management.
2006	- Signed Declaration of Commitment to the Micronesia Challenge by the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), the Republic of Palau (Palau), the U.S. Territory of Guam (Guam), and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNMI) to effectively conserve at least 30% of the near-shore marine resources and 20% of the terrestrial resources across Micronesia by 2020. - Evolution of M²EIC to CMAC (Coastal Management Advisory Council) consisting of representatives from MIMRA, RMIEPA, MoIA, MoRD, OEPPC, HPO, MIVA, MICS, CMI, WUTMI, AND IOM. CMAC developed its first strategic plan with an overall goal of integrated natural resource management for the RMI.
2008	- The Reimaanlok (Looking to the Future) National Conservation Area Plan was developed as an overarching framework for conservation area planning, which represents a roadmap of the way forward to achieve the ambitious targets of the Micronesia Challenge and links community efforts to regional and international goals. - The Coastal Management National Framework, called for under the Coast Conservation Act of 1988, was produced to review current coastal conditions and activities and recommend action and policy to achieve sustainable future development and remedy past development in and around coastal zones.
2011	RMI became home to the world's largest shark sanctuary when there was a total ban on possession / landing of any sharks including sale and trade.

2012

- The Reimaanlok Facilitators Field Guide was created to enhance the Reimaanlok by providing an 8-step process to help implement the Reimaanlok on a site by site basis.
- Promulgation of Sea Cucumber Regulations to promote the sustainable use, the proper conservation and management, and export of sea cucumbers in the RMI.

2015

- Nitijela enacted the Protected Areas Network (PAN) Act of 2015 that establishes a network of protected areas including a PAN Office and a framework to improve the effectiveness of protected areas as well as a sustainable funding mechanism to disburse conservation funds to the protected area sites.
- Promulgation of Aquarium Fishery Regulations to ensure proper conservation of coastal marine resources and management of the RMI aquarium fishery.
- CMAC membership expanded and became a platform for collaboration, integration and technical advice on natural resources management including sustainable use of coastal resources, biodiversity conservation, climate change and disaster risk reduction.

2016

- Nitijela enacted the Styrofoam and Plastic Products Prohibition Act 2016 to ban the importation, manufacturing, sale or distribution of Styrofoam cups and plates, disposable plastic cups and plates and plastic shopping bags.

2017

- Development of a National Environment Management Strategy to strengthen the international, regional, and national coordination of the government's effort to address environment needs identified in the RMI State of Environment report 2016.
- RMI hosted its first National Ocean Symposium. A significant outcome of the event was the establishment of a National Ocean Policy & Implementation Plan, which sets a roadmap to address priority issues and challenges around sustainable fisheries, climate change impacts, marine pollution, and coral reefs and marine protected areas.

2018

- The PAN Amendment Act 2018 was passed by Nitijela, containing new provisions including PAN oversight by the Board of the Marshall Island Resources Authority (MIMRA), insertion of Type IV - Traditional *Mo* to provide distinct value for traditionally protected areas, and the formalization of CMAC as the advisory and technical arm for the PAN.

2019

- Signed Joint Communique by Leaders of the governments of CNMI, Guam, Palau, RMI, FSM and its states (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap) for a 2030 Micronesia Challenge, building on the success and accomplishments of the MC to pursue a collective approach to address critical issues such as sustainable livelihoods, fisheries management, enforcement capacity, and climate-related disaster risk reduction and management.

2020

- Promulgation of PAN Regulations to create an avenue for the PAN Office to receive and disburse funding to support protected areas established by communities in the RMI. Under the PAN, there are certain criteria for eligibility in order for sites to be able to receive assistance and support through the PAN Office. The Regulations also provide the legal framework for the process of nominating areas for protection under the Act.



STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

With the establishment of the RMI PAN Office, a request was made to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to help develop a strategic plan to guide the implementation of the PAN. This Strategic Plan was formulated during a Strategic Action Planning (SAP) workshop held in Majuro on June 5th to 7th 2019 that was structured to encourage involvement and advice from various members that represent CMAC and other relevant stakeholders. Prior to the SAP workshop, a set of questionnaires were sent out to gather information and viewpoints to help feed into the discussions during the meetings. Agencies and organizations that were consulted included key staff from the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority (MIMRA) and affiliate partners under the CMAC from Government agencies and institutions, namely the RMI Environmental Protection Authority, Office of Environmental Policy and Planning Coordination, Marshall Islands Conservation Society, Ministry of Natural Resources & Commerce, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade, College of the Marshall Islands, and Women United Together Marshall Islands.

The major goal of this Strategic Plan is to guide the operations of the RMI PAN Office in its quest to meet its statutory mandate through delivery of effective and efficient support to PAN sites. In order to achieve the goals of the network, the appropriate structural bodies must have the necessary elements to function efficiently. Furthermore, sustainable finance sources are needed to support communities in various areas in need of resources as they continue to meet current biodiversity conservation challenges and emerging issues such as climate change.

This Strategic Plan is a high-level document that focuses on priority strategies and actions that the PAN Office will implement within the next five years to ensure effective administration of the PAN Act by the PAN office. This strategic plan will continue along the Reimaanlok path by promoting and supporting the establishment of protected areas and improved planning and management of these areas. Furthermore, the proposed measures and actions will augment the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, National Oceans Policy and National Strategic Plan 2020-2030 in facilitating conservation and sustainability of RMI's natural resources. The RMI PAN Office is under MIMRA and PAN oversight is provided by the Board of the Marshall Island Resources Authority. Therefore, this document also aligns with MIMRA's Strategic Plan for 2019-2023 and supports achievement of MIMRA's strategic goals.

PAN VISION, MISSION AND GOAL

Vision: Sustainable and resilient RMI where natural and cultural resources are effectively and equitably managed and conserved for future generations

Mission: To secure and enable mobilization of resources in support of the establishment and management of a network of protected areas in the RMI

Goal: To ensure the PAN Office effectively and efficiently serves the RMI Protected Areas Network

At the heart of this plan are three priority areas aimed at fulfilling the RMI PAN's mission and goal.

- 1. Governance and Institutional Capacity:** RMI PAN is effective, transparent and accountable in implementation of operations
- 2. Sustainable Finance:** RMI PAN is sustainably financed and responsive to changes affecting the network
- 3. Information and Communication Management:** RMI PAN information is effectively maintained and managed to meet stakeholder needs

PRIORITIES, OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Specific objectives and strategies outlined in this framework have been set apart under the three priority areas to successfully meet the expected outcomes, established targets and actions. This Plan is in tandem with the PAN Act 2015, PAN Amendment Act 2018, and the PAN Regulations 2020.

Priority 1 - Governance and Institutional Capacity

Objective 1: By 2021, the PAN Office will be fully established with appropriate institutional capacity, financial and technical resources, and operational structures that are transparent and accountable in implementation.

Outcome 1: Fully staffed PAN Office and effective implementation of PAN operations.

Strategies

Actions

Indicators

Strategy 1.1 Passing of PAN Regulations 2019 by MIMRA Board	Review regulations with stakeholders to ensure consistency with PAN laws	Approval of PAN Regulations 2020
Strategy 1.2 Alignment and consistency of strategic plans and terms of reference for PAN Institutions (PAN Office and CMAC)	- Develop Strategic Plan and TOR for PAN Office based on mandate - Review and update Strategic Plan and TOR for CMAC to ensure alignment with PAN	- Approval of PAN Office Strategic Plan and TOR - An updated CMAC Strategic Plan and TOR
Strategy 1.3 Adequate staffing and capacity building is incorporated into organizational development	- Conduct assessment of capacity needs - Develop appropriate training and capacity building where necessary	- Development of TORs for PAN Staff - Hiring of PAN staff for management, finance, and administrative support
Strategy 1.4 Adequate financial resources, equipment, and physical infrastructure for optimal mandate delivery	Develop a comprehensive PAN work plan and budget consistent with objectives, resources available and time frame	Approval of PAN Office work plan and budget by MIMRA Board for PAN operations
Strategy 1.5 Effective coordination and engagement with key stakeholders and partners to ensure transparency	- Conduct regular meetings with CMAC, LRCs, and partners where necessary on PAN - Ensure decisions and decision-making processes are documented	# of stakeholder meetings on PAN activities # of meeting minutes/reports
Strategy 1.6 Oversight and evaluation of management and use of funds by PAN sites	- Develop guidelines and ensure they are being followed: - criteria and standards for PAN eligibility - requirements for management plans for Protected Areas - actions, training, infrastructure, and equipment eligible for PAN funding	# of finance, monitoring, and reporting guidelines and procedures being implemented # PAN sites approved by MIMRA Board to receive funding and/or technical support from CMAC or other special experts based on established regulations and guidelines # disbursement of funds to PAN sites each year

	- ranking of applications for PAN funding - form and content of budgets and reports by LRCs - information collection, monitoring, and reporting - arrangement of technical assistance to LRCs	
Strategy 1.7 Transparent performance-measurement system for timely, effective, and efficient operations	• Conduct regular internal assessments to monitor progress against PAN's Strategic Plan • Allow for independent evaluations to determine effectiveness of PAN Office	• # of self-assessments on PAN operations and performance • # of external organizational audits and reviews of PAN Office

Priority 2 - Sustainable Finance

Objective 2: By 2022, the PAN Office will be properly resourced where eligible sites are receiving PAN funding and/or technical support based on established regulations and guidelines.

Outcome 2: Sustainable financing mechanism established for the PAN.

Strategies	Actions	Indicators
Strategy 2.1 Assessing current economic instruments and financial gaps to support the PAN	• Review the RMI Sustainable Finance Plan 2009 to validate mechanisms and figures • Consolidate information on existing finance structures and funding sources used to support conservation • Conduct economic assessments for PAN sites	• # of targeted stakeholder meetings/workshops • Matrix that lists and compares options with updated figures • Cost-benefit analysis results
Strategy 2.2 Seizing financing mechanisms that are practical	• Establish arrangements for PAN Office to access RMI's Endowment Fund	• Signed agreement with MCT & 1st drawdown of RMI's MC Endowment Fund

and feasible for long-term financing of the PAN	• Explore realistic sustainable financing mechanisms, i.e. allocation from fishing revenue, allocation from environmental fees, etc.	• # of targeted stakeholder meetings/presentations and minutes
Strategy 2.3 Supporting the diversification and growth of sustainable finance to support the PAN	• Campaign and develop fundraising initiatives • Work with partners to evaluate possibilities for new investment options to support existing finances	• Community fundraising projects • Portfolio of finance sources and investment options • Provision of finance for investment into PAN Fund/RMI's MC Endowment Fund

Priority 3 - Information & Communication Management

Objective 3: By 2023, PAN Office will be following effective information and communication management standards that meet its operational needs, accountability requirements, and stakeholder expectations.

Outcome 3: Raised profile of the PAN Office with strong understanding and buy-in from key stakeholders.

Strategies	Actions	Indicators
Strategy 3.1 Efficient collection, organization and management of PAN information	• Establish agreement with CMAC members to enable sharing of information and data for PAN purposes • Develop and implement appropriate tools/instruments to collect information/data, i.e. host online surveys on website • Set up a centralized filing system for record keeping • Regularly maintain, protect and secure PAN information	• Signed agreements for information/data sharing with CMAC members • # of updated information/data on Reimaanlok status, PAN sites, atoll profiles, and other contents • Centralized database for PAN Office • # of back-up files/records

Strategy 3.2 Optimum flow of information between PAN Office, CMAC, and stakeholders	• Set up a mailing list and a contact database to disseminate news, information and data with relevant stakeholders • Conduct stakeholder meetings to provide updates where necessary • Provide the MIMRA Board with sufficient context regarding PAN for informed-decision making	• PAN mailing list and contact database • # of information updates (emails, presentations, reports) disseminated to LRCs and other stakeholders • # of stakeholder meetings and discussions • # of reports to MIMRA Board
Strategy 3.3 Convenient access to PAN information to serve education, promotion, evaluation and reporting purposes while respecting security, privacy, and confidentiality requirements	• Develop webpage for easy access to information on Reimaanlok and PAN updates, management plans, etc. • Utilize media/social media platforms to promote, educate and raise awareness on PAN • Participate at and organize public events with stakeholders and partners to increase support and effect long-term stewardship goals • Develop policy to ensure stakeholder information is obtained with appropriate knowledge or consent	• PAN Office webpage updated on a regular basis • # of press releases, brochures, newspaper ads/articles, and radio appearances • # of public events attended/organized • # of updates on MC progress • PAN Office Facebook page updated on a monthly basis • Policy to protect stakeholder information and privacy by design
Strategy 3.4 Effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluating PAN sites at all stages	• Establish monitoring and evaluation process including routine review on the status, progress and outcomes of funding and/or technical support being used at PAN sites	• # of PAN site updates and reports