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📍 Palau International Coral Reef Center- PICRC

## Press Release

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### **Building capacity for Offshore Fisheries to address food security issues**

In an eventful start to the year, the island of Palau has found itself in the midst of a fish shortage, with many restaurants and small caterers on island unable to find fish. With the official closure of the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) on January 1, 2020, many have pointed to the PNMS as the source of this issue.

However, this shortfall follows a pattern. In the past, during the months of January and February, when Chinese New Year is celebrated, it was common for Taiwan-owned fishing operations to slow or stop. Other fish shortages throughout the year have been reported as well. Indeed, Kuniyoshi Fishing Company (KFC) and Palau Tuna, Incorporated continue to purchase fishing days and are expected to offload next month, according to MNRET Minister Umiich Sengebau.

Nevertheless, the fish shortage highlights the importance of food security for a small island nation, and how discrepancies in the market and supply chain can have ripple effects for the community. It emphasizes the need that exists to strengthen capacity for Palauan fishermen to step in to provide fish when there are no larger commercial operations. MNRET, in cooperation with local fishermen, has been working to address these challenges. Aid assistance from the Japan Government through the Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) through MNRET is working towards acquiring a fishing vessel, the installation of additional Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs), and technical assistance for their use and maintenance. In addition, a fishermen exchange program is being negotiated with the Okinawa Prefecture to help with off-shore fisheries training for Palauan fishermen.

The Belau Offshore Fishermen's Association (BOFA), a new fishing cooperative, is being convened in coordination with MNRET to make plans for Palauan fishermen to receive training, to streamline offshore fishing operations, and to formulate a buying scheme that will stabilize the price for both consumers and fishers. Interim president of BOFA, Mr. Okada Techitong, said that ultimately, the purpose of BOFA is to catch fish and sell it to fill the void that currently exists in the pelagic fishery, as well as to connect the community to the commercial fleet of Palau. He went on to say that this is an opportunity for Palauans to benefit more fully from the resources that exist in our waters, greater than the relatively small percentage that was being received from larger commercial operations.



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In finding conservation solutions that are beneficial for the greatest amount of people, there will be many challenges to overcome, and it will take time to find the right balance. Supporting Palauan fishermen, and helping them find a fair price for their catch, is a good start in the process.