

EPA SUPPORT FOR THE FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES (FAS) OF PALAU, MARSHALL ISLANDS, AND FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA

EPA provides technical support, but no funding, to the Pacific Island nations of Palau, Marshall Islands, and Federated States of Micronesia, known collectively as the "Freely Associated States" (FAS). The FAS were all districts of the former Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) which the United States administered on behalf of the United Nations from 1947 until 1978. The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM or Micronesia) became independent in 1979; both entered into a separate Compact of Free Association with the US in 1986 (and updated in 2003). The Republic of Palau (ROP) gained independence in 1994, and in the same year signed a Compact of Free Association with the US.

The FAS have a unique and close relationship with the US. For example, FAS citizens are allowed to live, work, and travel unimpeded and as nonimmigrants in the US. Under the Compact, the US provides financial assistance (managed by DOI's Office of Insular Affairs) to the FAS, and defends their territorial integrity. Our close ties, which go back to the end of WWII, are also reflected in the high number of FAS citizens who serve in the US armed forces. Palau, the Marshall Islands, and FSM are all Associate Members of the US Coral Reef Task Force. In addition, these countries all use the US dollar as their currency.

While some other federal agencies (e.g., HHS, USDA) continue to provide financial support to the FAS, the environmental statutes (e.g., RCRA, CAA, CWA) which underpin EPA programs generally limit EPA financial assistance to states, tribes, territories, and possessions of the US. While they were still part of the TTPI, US EPA provided substantial assistance to the Marshalls, Micronesia, and Palau. For example, EPA provided construction funding which built much of the water and sewer systems still in place in the FAS, and helped create and fund operations for local EPAs in Palau, the Marshalls, and the four states of the FSM: Yap, Chuuk, Pohnpei, and Kosrae.

EPA continues to provide technical support to the FAS countries, consistent with the Compacts, and in coordination with, and supported by, DOI OIA.

Examples of EPA technical support:

- Lab certification for all 6 environmental labs in FAS (in partnership with American Samoa EPA)
- EIA training
- Fuel spill prevention training (for above- and underground fuel storage tanks; provided to the regulated community as well as local government)
- Drinking water system assessment (in partnership with US PHS)
- Drinking water operator training (in partnership with US PHS and Guam EPA)
- Pesticides training to improve food safety (in partnership with State of Hawaii)
- Solid waste & medical waste consultation
- Hazardous waste assessment, on-site neutralization, and training
- Emergency Response: US EPA can be activated through US AID in declared disaster
- In Marshalls, US EPA co-chairs bi-national workgroup overseeing environmental compliance at US Army Kwajalein Atoll in partnership with DOD, RMI EPA, and other federal agencies

- In Palau, during early to mid-2000s, EPA provided environmental oversight of US-funded road construction on Babeldaob Island in partnership with DOI, ACE, Palau EQPB, and other federal agencies
- Other: when requested, EPA has provided specific technical assistance on issues ranging from coral reefs, dredging, oil drilling, and wastewater treatment plant design.

Environmental Challenges

Palau, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia are all blessed with beautiful scenery, abundant coral reefs, large fisheries, and clean air. However, it's a challenge on all islands to provide environmental services most Americans take for granted, such as drinking water, sewage, power, and solid waste. For example, in the Marshall Islands' capital of Majuro, drinking water flows through the pipes only 2 to 3 days per week. Limited financial resources, and in the case of Majuro also limited rainfall, increase the difficulty of providing these services.

Climate change provides another big challenge in the FAS, especially to low lying atolls where the viability to live on currently populated islands may be at stake. In addition to sea level rise, potential impacts from climate change in the FAS include change in major storm frequency and severity, change in precipitation patterns (more droughts or floods), degradation in fresh water quantity and quality, coral reef bleaching, ocean acidification degradation to coral, and impacts to food supply.

Demographic Information:*

| | Marshall Islands | FSM | Palau |
|----------------|------------------|---------|---------|
| Population | 63,000 | 108,000 | 20,000 |
| Estimated GDP | \$150M | \$238M | \$164M |
| GDP per capita | \$2,370 | \$2,205 | \$8,122 |

*source: DOI web site