

media release

President Toribiong endorses Palau's first National Water Policy

Koror, Palau, Monday April 23rd 2011: Palau's President, Johnson Toribiong, endorsed his country's first National Water Policy this week saying that it "will serve as a clear indicator and important guide for our nation's future economic and sustainable development based on clean and safe water that is essential for the health of our people, ecosystem and economy."

The policy aims to protect and conserve Palau's water resources, ensure Palauans have access to safe, affordable, sustainable water supply and wastewater services, and see that these services are managed and operated sustainably and effectively.

The National Water Policy was developed by Palau's Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism in partnership with a European Union funded Integrated Water Resources Management (EU IWRM) Planning Project being run by the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities' Water and Sanitation Programme (SPC WSP).

Gwen Sisior, the Ministry's Water Policy Officer, said one of the key goals of the policy was to ensure that responsibility for key aspects of water and wastewater management was spread across different organizations in a coordinated and integrated manner.

"What we don't want to see happen is a fragmented sectoral approach to managing our water supply. Organizations should work together to clarify the specific roles, responsibilities, activities and timelines to implement and support the national water policy," Ms Sisior said. "Water development and management should be based on a participatory approach and value collaborations from users, planners and policy-makers. Decision-makers should strive to ensure effective communication with all stakeholders, multiple sectors and different levels of various organizations."

The new policy was based on best practices demonstrated by a Global Environment Facility IWRM (GEF IWRM) demonstration project that looked at the sustainable management of the Ngerikiil watershed, Palau's main water catchment.

The project's manager, Lynna Thomas, said that their demonstrations of an integrated approach to catchment management highlighted the importance of considering the needs of all users and the environment for any policy to be successful.

"I think that this new policy is an excellent step toward a more sustainable management of Palau's water resources," Ms Thomas said. "It takes into consideration the needs of all sectors and seeks input from all stakeholders, from community to congress. It also seeks to protect natural ecosystems that play a vital role keeping water catchments healthy and robust enough to deal with future threats like climate change."

Palau's water policy covers the entire water cycle in Palau, from ridge to reef. This includes rainfall, water flow through upstream watersheds, groundwater, lakes and streams, water supply and wastewater infrastructure, and water flow through downstream rivers, mangroves and reefs.

"Protecting our environment is key to the continued success of our tourism industry and to the future health and wellbeing of our people," Ms Sisior said. "Water also needs to be affordable to all users at all locations at all times. This means that Palau's waters must be managed in ways that will continue to support healthy ecosystems, and that the finances of Palau's water management will support adequate investment, operation, and maintenance, so that the environmental and financial health of Palau's water systems are maintained for generations to come."

In endorsing Palau's National Water Policy President Toribiong said that he looked "forward to its implementation and will be submitting it to the 8th *Olbiil Era Kelulau* (House of Delegates) for their full support and endorsement with a Resolution".

Palau's GEF IWRM Demonstration Project and the EU IWRM Planning Project are both part of a regional project run by SPC's Water and Sanitation Programme to improve water management throughout the Pacific.

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