

Second Meeting of the Pacific Meteorological Council (PMC-2)

1-5 July 2013
Nadi
Fiji Islands

Agenda Item 6.4.4: Drought Warning System and Response - Republic of the Marshall Islands

Purpose

1. To outline the Linkage between Drought Early Warnings and Products issued by the NMS and the coordinated response from the NDMO and the NMS
2. To inform the meeting of the challenges and lessons learned pertaining to the Drought Response in RMI most especially in the Coordination and Management of Information
3. To report on the response activities and recovery efforts to the severe drought in the northern Marshall Islands.

Background

4. The Republic of the Marshall Islands is located just north of the Equator between 161 and 172 degrees east.
5. In February 2013, reports from the NMS corroborated by several northern islands indicated water shortages. As a result, pre-positioned Reverse Osmosis units were deployed to the affected northern islands. Six of the seven units deployed were operational, but challenges with maintenance and spare parts were evident.
6. On April 19, 2013, the RMI Government declared a state of emergency due to the drought conditions being reported and experienced in the northern Marshall Islands.
7. Assessment teams were sent to four of the affected atolls and reported that the water shortage was severe and that RO units deployed in response to the crisis were failing. Cases of diarrhoea and other drought-related illnesses were on the rise. As reports indicated that the prolonged and severe drought affecting the northern islands continued and lives were at stake, RMI government elevated the emergency to a state of disaster on May 7, 2013.
8. The assessment also identified health concerns and risks related to dehydration especially in children. Food crops including, coconuts, breadfruit, banana, taro and pandanus were also reported to be severely impacted due to the drought.

9. Immediate access to fresh water supplies and Immediate and long-term assistance on food security were also identified needs.
10. In Response, two RMI Government operated ships left between 6 and 8 May and carried food supplies to 567 households in the worst-affected communities. The staple items included rice, tinned food and vegetables to meet a family's needs for 10 days per deployment. Two RMI Government operated ships were deployed to the north-east and north-west islands between 6 May and 8 May, carrying full water containers and hygiene kits. A second deployment of food supplies and water was carried out in the same manner in late May.
11. Although it has been operating for a few days, On May 9th, 2013 the Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) was officially activated to coordinate all response activities as well as direct the information management.
12. The RMI Government, realizing that the response and recovery plans called for resources far beyond it's capability to provide, requested for the U.S. Presidential declaration of a State of Disaster in RMI to trigger further assistance from the U.S.
13. As response activities are ongoing, more background information will be provided as they are available.

Recommendations

14. The Meeting is invited to:
 - **Note** the support provided by OCHA, UNDAC, WHO, USAID and other international partners to the EOC and the collaboration provided in the response and recovery activities
 - **Note** that close collaboration between NMS and NDMO as well as regional climate services office is necessary for the effective drought warning, response and recovery.
 - **Note** through the lessons learned the importance of response Coordination and Information management.
 - **Note** that activities are ongoing and the recovery plan is still being drawn up.