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## Information bulletin

# Marshall Islands: Drought

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**Information Bulletin n° 1**  
**GLIDE n° 2013-000053-MHL**  
**24 May 2013**

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current drought situation and details available at this time within the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI).

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is currently working with the RMI Government and other key international actors to identify the support required for the drought response and early recovery. More information regarding the potential roles for IFRC and partner national societies (PNSs) will be provided on this soon.

Current assistance is being provided by IFRC in partnership with New Zealand Red Cross (with financial assistance from Ministry of foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand), Kiribati Red Cross and Australian Red Cross, in consultation with American Red Cross.



Community volunteers in Ailuk together with New Zealand Red Cross delegate distributing water.  
Photo Cred: IFRC

There is no National Society in RMI, but there is a committed group of volunteers who have been working to develop a National Society and have drafted the Red Cross Act which is ready to be considered by the RMI Government in August 2013.

[<click here to view the map of the affected area, or here for detailed contact information>](#)

## Summary

Due to persistently low rainfall during the dry season since late last year, areas of the RMI are experiencing a severe water shortage situation and a growing food security issue. The RMI Government declared a state of emergency for the northern areas of the RMI on 19 April 2013, which was followed by a declaration of a state of disaster on 8 May, due to the severe drought experienced in 15 atolls/islands north of Majuro. The estimated total population of the 15 affected atolls/islands is some 6,400 people.

The drought conditions have severely affected drinking water supplies, rainwater catchment storage, salinity and bacterial contamination of groundwater, health issues and depletion in agriculture/food production on the atoll islands. These impacts require immediate as well as longer term measures.

The RMI Government, through the National Disaster Committee (NDC) deployed assessment teams and is also delivering food and water to the affected areas. UNDAC (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination) has undertaken a complementary assessment and the assessment report is currently being compiled. The Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP) is expected to be released today.

The RMI National Volunteer Group (NVG) aiming to establish a National Society of Red Cross within RMI requested support from the IFRC with the agreement of the RMI government. Resulting from that request

and in consideration of the emerging humanitarian concerns, IFRC, New Zealand Red Cross, Australian Red Cross and Kiribati Red Cross have been working together in providing assistance to the Marshall Islands. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), with whom the IFRC is working closely on the formation of the national society in RMI, has been consulted and provided feedback on the mobilization of team members to RMI.

A Plan of Action outlining the potential roles for IFRC and partner national societies (PNSs) is currently being drafted and will be available after 26 May, Sunday.

## The situation

Located just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean, the RMI is made up of 1,200 islands, islets and atolls with a land area of 180 square kilometres. RMI, like most of the countries in the region, faces increasing challenges from climate change and natural disasters.

RMI declared a state of emergency for 13 atolls and islands in northern and western Marshall Islands on 19 April 2013 due to prolonged dry season and severe drought. Villages have had to ration water to preserve supplies, and the number of affected atolls/islands has since increased from 13 to 15. The drought is now reported to be affecting some 6,400 people across the following list of 15 atolls/islands north of Majuro.

### Agreed number of affected population by EOC on 19 May

	Affected Atoll	Number of the Affected		Number of Health care centres reporting data
		Population	Households	
1	Ailuk	339	63	1
2	Aur	499	95	2
3	Lae	347	51	1
4	Lib	155	27	1
5	Likiep	401	78	2
6	Maloelap	682	125	5
7	Mejit	348	64	1
8	Namu	780	187	4
9	Ujae	364	54	1
10	Utrik	435	69	1
11	Wotho	97	20	1
12	Wotje	859	133	1
13	Ebadon	106	15	1
14	Enewetak	664	106	1
15	Mejatto	308	47	1
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>6384</b>	<b>1134</b>	<b>24</b>

The RMI, through the NDC, together with other government agencies (Public Works, Majuro Water and Sewerage Company, Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Agriculture) and supported by advisers from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), USAID and International Organization for Migration (IOM), deployed assessment teams between 27 April and 2 May.

The assessments have identified that the communities in these northern atolls/islands are being severely affected by the drought and face potential health, environmental, social, and economic hardship, due to the persistent dry weather.

Drought-affected people are experiencing a range of issues including:

- the majority of household (HH) tanks are dry

- water in wells is significantly reduced and the majority of wells are contaminated with salinity resulting in the water being unsafe to drink
- there are insufficient numbers of Reverse Osmosis (RO) units within drought-affected atolls/ islands
- there is declining water production output from the RO units in place due to requiring maintenance
- local food crops are severely damaged, such as breadfruit and banana. Immature fruit is falling off the trees, trees are losing leaves and limbs and in some cases dying
- the adverse impacts of the drought on the current and future supply of food in these communities is a growing concern
- health issues resulting from the drought have been reported such as diarrhoea, conjunctivitis (commonly known as pink eye) and influenza.

The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) was established by the NDC in the capital, Majuro. The EOC is the critical platform for coordination with key government entity representatives and cluster leads based in the centre. With the support of the UNDAC team, the RMI has established four clusters to manage sector specific interventions and these are WASH, health, food security and logistics. The UNDAC is leading the support to RMI Government in developing cluster/HAP plans.

The IFRC team leader was requested by RMI government to support the work across all clusters in developing the four Cluster Action plans and supporting the UNDAC team in completing the HAP Plan. The HAP plan is currently before RMI Government Cabinet and is anticipated to be released today.

RMI Government through the actions of the NDC has been deploying a number of vessels carrying food, water, medical supplies and sanitation hygiene items to the affected communities.

Food has been provided through the distribution of food rations of rice, flour, and canned food across 11 drought-affected atolls/islands.



New Zealand RC delegate giving health messages through play activities to children in Ailuk. Photo Cred: IFRC

There has been water distributed to the 12 most affected atolls/islands, and there are 11 RO units currently providing drinking water (two of those being the NZ RC RO units which are to be returned to NZ RC at the end of the NZ RC deployments).

To alleviate the acute shortage of water and related drought impacts in the affected areas, an additional four will be purchased with funding from AusAid while another 11 are currently being fitted out to become functional and be deployed.

RMI has now commenced deploying health teams through Ministry of Health to undertake health assessments in the entire drought-affected atolls. At the same time they will also provide a range of health messages, preventative health practice and distribute hygiene kits, water purification tablets, jerry cans and direct health treatments as required.

USAID and US embassy have provided 17 RO units (of the above listed RO units) complemented by technical assistance of food security/agriculture as well as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) expert. Japan will provide emergency relief goods of food and water in line with the government response plan. In terms of RO units, AusAid provided grant for purchase of four RO units while NZ Red Cross provided two RO units with four water and sanitation delegates. This was undertaken with financial assistance from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand. OCHA and ADB have made cash grant contributions. UNICEF has mobilized its assistance specializing in WASH whereas WHO, FAO and SPC/SOPAC are in process of providing additional technical assistance.

Due to the remoteness of the affected atolls/islands, delivering support has and will be a challenge. The limited availability of boats and planes, coupled with the cost of utilizing air or sea bridges and staffing for distribution are barriers to providing effective and timely relief required.

Weather forecasts are being provided in 10-day blocks, as accuracy is difficult to obtain past that period. It is anticipated that even if rain starts to fall, the impacts of the drought will continue until at least July. It will take some time for water sources to improve and crops to be harvested.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Red Cross in the Marshall Islands is currently in the very early stages of formation. Since 2011, the NVG has been working on the drafting of the Red Cross Act. The latest version of the Act was recently shared with the IFRC and the ICRC for comment. The IFRC regional office in Suva liaised closely with the NVG prior to the mobilization of international team members to RMI for the drought response. The IFRC and New Zealand Red Cross country teams are working closely with the NVG. IFRC has been supporting the volunteers in considering their ability to establish a system for collecting in-kind donations from the public. The IFRC has also encouraged the NVG to participate in government operational and coordination meetings related to the drought response.

The IFRC has deployed a team leader/disaster management-delegate (TL/DM) for a three-week mission to assess the situation and recommend a Plan of Action. The TL/DM is working closely with the NVG to provide guidance on the role of the group in the operation and related formation issues. In light of transport constraints to the affected atolls the TL/DM is coordinating with the government and other organizations on the ground to determine how to make optimal use of available resources. An additional team member from the Kiribati Red Cross will arrive on 27 May, Monday to assist with the development of the Plan of Action.

New Zealand Red Cross deployed three delegates (in conjunction with two colleagues from MSWC) and two transportable RO units on 13 May. The three delegates are now working on the atolls of Maloelap and Ailuk to deliver clean water. In the absence of Red Cross volunteers the team is working with community members to make sure knowledge about maintenance and operation of the RO units is disseminated. The current team of delegates will be replaced by a second deployment from NZ RC of one WASH delegate to arrive on 25 May, Saturday.

In Majuro, the New Zealand Red Cross and IFRC are working in close coordination with the Government UN agencies and donor governments based in country. The IFRC regional office in Suva is coordinating with other regional partners and the Pacific Humanitarian Team.

The Australian Red Cross has provided the IFRC TL/DM delegate and will also be providing a WASH delegate from their volunteer pool.

The potential roles for IFRC and PNSs are currently being identified and a Plan of Action will be available after 26 May, Sunday.

### Contact information

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

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The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

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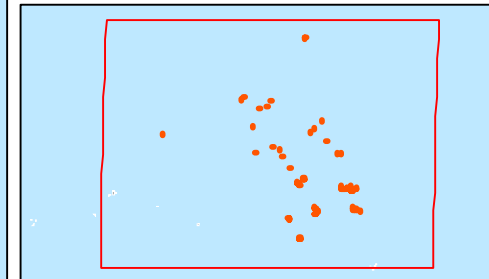
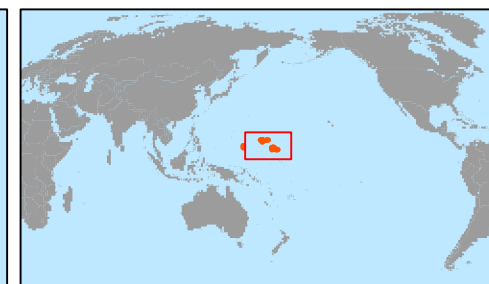
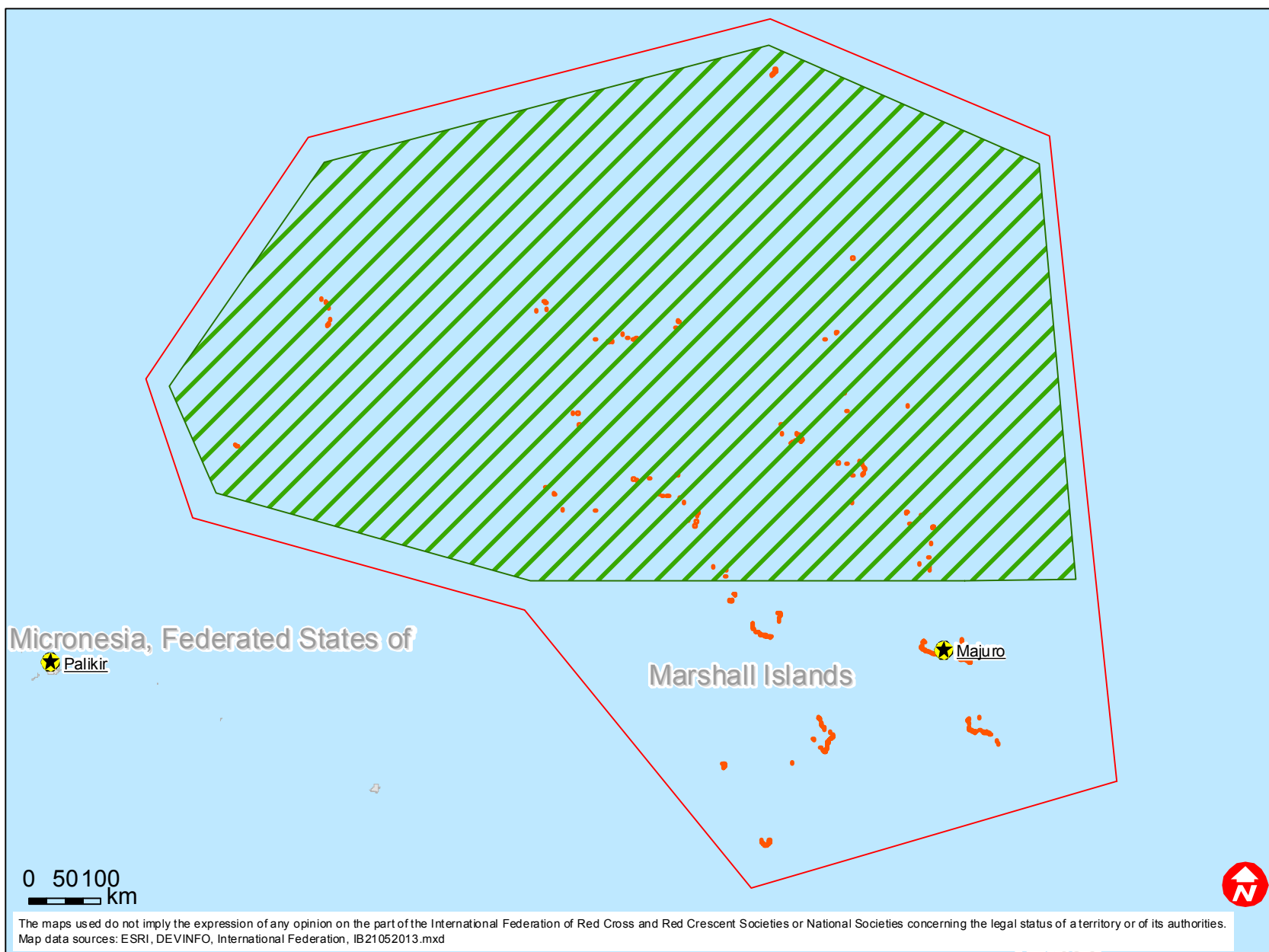




The IFRC's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
  2. Enable healthy and safe living.
  3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.
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-  Drought affected atolls
-  Marshall Islands