


www.ifrc.org  
Saving lives,  
changing minds.

## Information bulletin

# Marshall Islands: Drought

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**Information Bulletin n° 2**  
**GLIDE n° 2013-000053-MHL**  
**7 June 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 working with the RMI Government and other key international actors to identify the support required for the drought response and early recovery. Assistance being provided by IFRC is in partnership with New Zealand Red Cross, Kiribati Red Cross Society and Australian Red Cross. IFRC is currently analyzing the possibility of launching an Emergency Appeal.

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



Mobilization of Reverse Osmosis (RO) units to drought-affected atolls. Photo Cred: IFRC

## Summary

Due to an extended dry period, 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 for 13 atolls/islands. The disaster assessments undertaken 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. The most pressing humanitarian needs are access to safe water and the growing need for food due to local crop failure. 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 15 atolls/islands north of Majuro.

The RMI Government initiated the National Disaster Committee (NDC) which then led to the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) 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 (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination) team, the RMI has established four clusters to manage sector specific interventions in water and sanitation, health, food security and logistics. An UNDAC team was leading the support to RMI Government in developing the cluster/Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP).

The RMI Government has now released for general circulation the: "Immediate and Near-Term Drought Response Plan for the Republic of the Marshall Islands". This plan details the work to be undertaken within each of the four clusters of Food, WASH, Health and Logistics. The plan also highlights the IFRC as one of the key partners from which the RMI Government can access support.

The RMI National Volunteer Group (NVG) is aiming to establish a National Society of Red Cross within RMI. The NVG, with the agreement of the RMI Government, requested support from the IFRC to provide assistance for the drought response. Therefore, the IFRC, New Zealand Red Cross (NZRC), Australian Red

Cross (ARC) and Kiribati Red Cross Society have been working together to provide assistance to the RMI. The IFRC continues to work with partners to finalize an IFRC Plan of Action to address the humanitarian needs resulting from this drought and is currently analyzing the possibility of launching an Emergency Appeal.

The RMI Government and international partners continue to respond cooperatively to the drought situation. In addition to IFRC and Red Cross societies, the following partners are involved: UNDAC, Asian Development Bank (ADB), AusAID, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), International Organization for Migration (IOM), New Zealand Aid Programme, World Health Organization (WHO), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Regional Office for the Pacific (ROP), Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), UNICEF, U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), USAID/Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), and the Embassy of Japan.

## The situation

Located in the North Pacific Ocean, about half-way between Hawaii and Australia, the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) is made up of two archipelagic island chains with a population of 69,747 (2013 est.) spread out over 34 low-lying coral atolls, comprising 1,156 individual islands and islets. RMI, like most of the countries in the region, increasingly faces challenges from climate change and natural disasters.

Weather forecasts are being provided in 10-day blocks, as accuracy is difficult to obtain past that period. Severe drought conditions persist in the northern atolls of RMI. Some light rainfall has been received in recent weeks in Aur and Maloelap. Forecasts indicate that Majuro and southern atolls will receive sufficient rainfall in the coming weeks, and drought conditions are not expected in these areas. The likelihood is for northern RMI to stay in drought conditions for at least another month and probably two, however, seasonal rainfall is expected to increase in June as the monsoon establishes over continental Asia and the northwest Pacific. It is anticipated that even if rain starts to fall now in the 15 drought-affected atolls/islands, the impacts of the drought will continue for several months. It will take months for water sources to be replenished, water quality to improve as well as crops to be planted and harvested.

The drought is affecting approximately 6,400 people in 1,134 households across 15 atolls/islands (Ailuk, Aur, Lae, Lib, Likiep, Maloelap, Mejit, Namu, Ujae, Utrik, Wotho, Wotje, Ebadon, Enewetak, Mejatto) north of Majuro. 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 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 listed below:

- The majority of household (HH) tanks are dry.
- Water in wells is significantly reduced and the majority of wells depleted of fresh water with only brackish to saline water available resulting in the water being unsafe to drink.
- There are insufficient numbers of Reverse Osmosis (RO) units within drought-affected atolls/islands and there is declining water production output from the RO units in place due to maintenance issues.
- Insufficient supply of food in the communities is a growing concern. Local food crops, such as breadfruits and bananas, are severely damaged as trees are dying.
- Health issues resulting from the drought, such as diarrhoea, conjunctivitis (commonly known as pink eye), and scabies have been reported.

The drought disaster prompted the Ministry of Health to deploy medical and pharmaceutical supplies immediately to ensure that all the affected atolls/islands are equipped with the drought related medical requirements. Although health concerns were initially listed as one of the key issues resulting from the drought disaster, there has been no indication of severe disease outbreaks.

RMI has commenced deploying health teams through Ministry of Health to undertake health assessments in the entire drought-affected atolls. At the same time they have been providing a range of health messages, emphasizing on preventative health practice and distributing hygiene kits, water purification tablets, jerry cans and delivering direct health treatments as required.

The RMI Government through the actions of the National Disaster Committee (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.

Two weeks' supply of relief assistance to the affected atolls and islands were deployed to the affected atolls from 25-31 May. RO units were deployed to Likep, Wotje, and Aur whereas bottled water was supplied to Enewetak and Aur. It is also discovered that Enewetak is in desperate need of food supplies. Further plans are still being discussed on how and when to distribute food and water to the affected atolls and islands.

There has been water distributed to the 12 most affected atolls/islands, and there are currently 13 RO units deployed providing drinking water. To alleviate the acute shortage of water and related drought impacts in the affected areas, an additional four were purchased with funding from AusAid while another 11 from USAID through IOM (International Organization for Migration) are currently being fitted out to become functional and be deployed.



Setting up and testing of Reverse Osmosis (RO) units on a drought-affected atoll. Photo cred: IFRC

The RMI Government has issued for general circulation the: "Immediate and Near-Term Drought Response Plan for the Republic of the Marshall Islands" in May 2013. This plan details the work to be undertaken within each of the four clusters of Food, WASH, Health and Logistics. The IFRC team leader was requested by the RMI Government to assist in developing the cluster plans, as well as supporting the UNDAC team in developing the overall Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP).

## Combined response to date

Through the establishment of the EOC and led by the RMI Government, a sound foundation for collaboration has been established. The following combined response for the drought is what is known to date:

Cluster/ Sector	Response to date <sup>1</sup>	
<b>WASH</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Distribution of bottled water to the 12 most affected atolls and islands.</li> <li>• Dispatching 4 RO units, in addition to the 7 dispatched earlier.</li> <li>• 2 RO units with 3 technicians (rated flow: 1 litre / minute).</li> <li>• Relief supplies (which include hygiene kits, water containers 5gal (20L), water purification tablets).</li> <li>• Grant (\$100,000) for the purchase of 4 RO units and spare parts, AusAID.</li> <li>• 1,000 WASH kits (water purification tablets, water containers 2.5gal (10ltr), IEC, soap), WASH cluster coordinator to be deployed for 4 weeks, key radio messages (protection of food, promotion of nutrition and hygiene practices).</li> <li>• Emergency Cash Grant (\$50,000).</li> </ul>	RMI RMI IOM/ USAID  NZRC/ IFRC IOM/USAID  AusAid  UNICEF  OCHA
<b>Health</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supply of medical test kits and Oral Rehydration Salts (ORS).</li> <li>• 10,000 ORS sachets, 2 Basic Emergency Health kits (to cover 10,000 people/kit), IEC, MUAC Tapes.</li> <li>• Deployment of pharmaceutical and medical supplies to all affected atolls (except Enewetak).</li> <li>• Deployment of health teams to Ujae, Lae, Wotho, Lib, Namu, Mejit, Likiep.</li> <li>• Technical assistance (1 WHO Surveillance Expert).</li> </ul>	MoH RMI  UNICEF RMI  RMI  WHO
<b>Food</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First round of distribution of food rations (rice, flour, canned food,</li> </ul>	RMI

<sup>1</sup> "Immediate and Near-Term Drought Response Plan for the Republic of the Marshall Islands" RMI Government May 2013.

Cluster/ Sector	Response to date <sup>1</sup>	
<b>Security</b>	baking powder) Maloelap, Wotje, Mejit, Ailuk, Utirik, Likiep, Ujae, Lib, Wotho, Lae, Namu. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical assistance (2 food security experts (SOPAC and FAO) for initial assessments).</li> <li>• Donation of food and water (\$80,000).</li> </ul>	SOPAC, FAO  JICA
<b>Logistics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of chartered boats for transporting medical and relief supplies.</li> <li>• Provision of chartered aircraft (AMI) for assessments and RO deployment and health teams.</li> <li>• Response support for affected areas (\$100,000).</li> <li>• Response support for affected areas (\$100,000).</li> <li>• Local donations – funds (\$1,200).</li> <li>• Local donations – relief supplies.</li> </ul>	RMI  RMI  DAEF ROC
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mobilization of 5-member coordination and assessment team (logistics, coordination, information management and WASH)</li> </ul>	UNDAC/OCHA

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

There is currently no national Red Cross Society in RMI. There is a National Volunteer Group (NVG) who has been working on the drafting of the Red Cross Act, and has strong support from the RMI Government. The RMI Government is currently taking the lead in coordinating and developing plans. A letter of agreement between IFRC and the RMI Government is currently being prepared to guide IFRC relief and recovery efforts until such time as the Red Cross Society become legally constituted.

The NVG, with the agreement of the RMI Government, requested support from the IFRC for the drought response. Recognizing the humanitarian imperative arising from this disaster (and in light of the formation of the NS to demonstrate the spirit of cooperation and solidarity) it was deemed important for the IFRC to respond to the needs in RMI and through the operation to develop the capacity of the volunteer group.

The IFRC, New Zealand Red Cross (with financial assistance from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade New Zealand), Australian Red Cross and Kiribati Red Cross Society have been working together to provide assistance to the RMI.

An IFRC team consisting of a team leader (disaster management and organizational development delegate), a water and sanitation delegate, and a Pacific Regional Disaster Response Team (RDRT) member were deployed to RMI to work with the NVG in support of the overall response.



Distribution of water from Reverse Osmosis (RO) unit on a drought- affected atoll. Photo cred: IFRC

New Zealand Red Cross (NZRC) provided four water and sanitation short-term delegates to RMI. Three delegates have now exited, with one replacement who arrived on 25 May. All NZRC water and sanitation delegates were deployed to atolls/islands with NZRC RO units, and together with RMI Government counterparts (Majuro Water and Sewerage Company MWSC), to assist in water production, distribution and community messaging. Australian Red Cross (ARC) provided a water and sanitation short-term delegate who arrived on 28 May for three weeks to also assist IFRC with the deployment of additional RO units on loan to RMI government by USAID through IOM. Australian Red Cross also provided funding for the IFRC team leader.

The IFRC team leader is working with partners to finalize an IFRC Plan of Action to address the humanitarian needs resulting from this drought. The proposed activities will provide short to medium-term assistance to an identified six atolls/islands most affected by the current drought situation in the northern atolls of the RMI. These activities support the work of the NVG, RMI Government, and international partners.

The aim of the IFRC Plan of Action is for drought-affected people in six atolls/islands to recover following the drought and build greater resilience towards similar events in future by doing the following:

- Increasing the provision of safe, accessible, equitable and appropriate quantities of water through the installation of RO units and maintenance of previously installed RO units within RMI. Safe drinking water is a high priority for all drought-affected communities now and in the future. Through the installation, running and maintenance of RO units for water production, there will be increased availability of safe drinking water for drought-affected communities. The RMI Government has requested support within this sector as there are a limited number of local technical personnel to undertake the installation and maintenance of RO units, within atolls/islands.
- Developing early recovery initiatives which increase the communities' capacity to collect, store and use water efficiently, by the repair and improvement of water supply schemes (catchments, tanks, etc). Community education and support to repair, install and maintain effective water collection and storage will be undertaken.
- Increasing sanitation practices and hygiene promotion messaging to prevent diseases (water-borne and from other vectors) and health issues resulting from the drought.
- Increasing community participation in recording weather patterns, well water quantity/quality assessments and community education. Building community education and participation in understanding weather patterns, water quantity and quality within wells, will assist communities to self-manage water availability in the future and provide an early warning system for future prolonged dry periods.

## Contact information

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

- **IFRC regional office:**
  - Aurelia Balpe, Head of Pacific Regional Office, phone: +679 331 1855; email: [aurelia.balpe@ifrc.org](mailto:aurelia.balpe@ifrc.org)
  - Vuli Gauna, Acting Disaster Management Coordinator, phone: +679331 1855; email: [vuli.gauna@ifrc.org](mailto:vuli.gauna@ifrc.org)
- **IFRC Zone office:**
  - Christine Strater, Operations Coordinator, phone: +6012 213 0149; email: [christine.strater@ifrc.org](mailto:christine.strater@ifrc.org)
  - Al Panico, Head of Operations, phone: + 603 9207 5704; email: [al.panico@ifrc.org](mailto:al.panico@ifrc.org)



**Click here**

1. **Map [below](#)**
  2. **[Return](#) to the title page**
- 

## How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGOs\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

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.

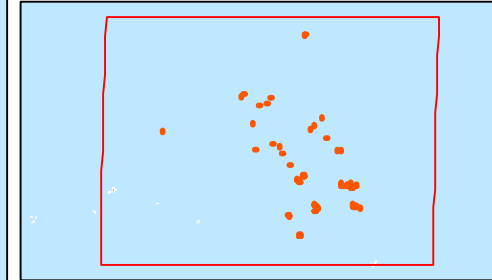
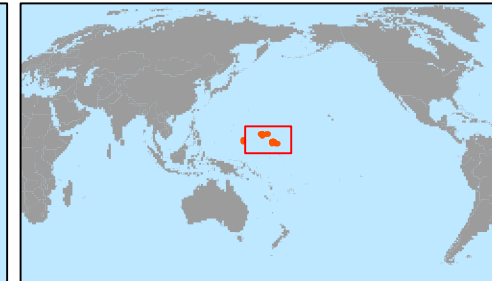
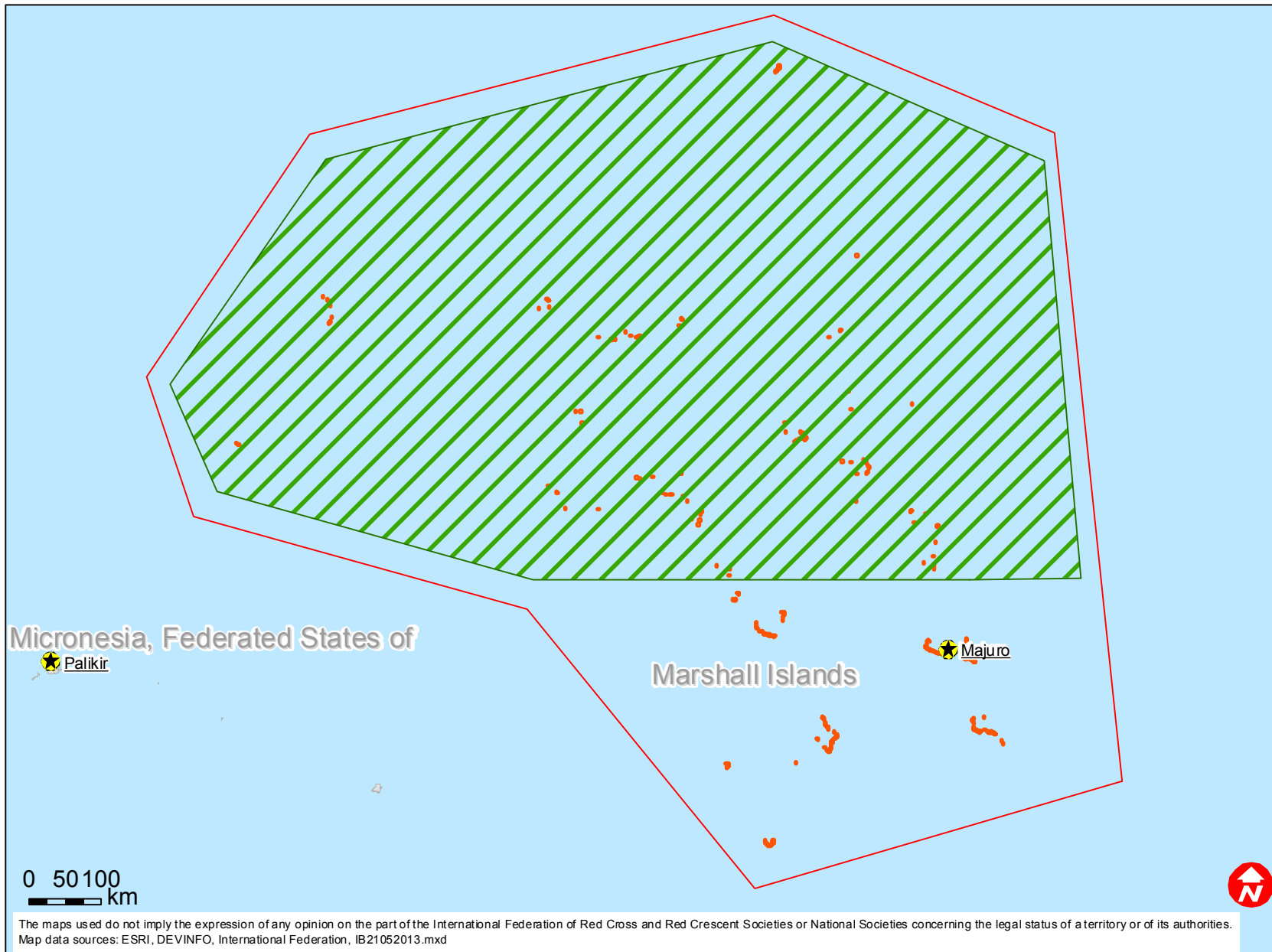




The IFRC's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

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.
-



# Marshall Islands: Drought



-  Drought affected atolls
-  Marshall Islands