UPDATES FROM THE MINISTRY

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Employee Birthdays

Bureau of Agriculture

Harlan Derbai ———— Jan. 8
Mickey M. Towai ———— Jan. 8
Bernice Sidoi ———— Jan. 10
Raynold Skilang ———— Jan. 18
Kashgar Rengulbai ———— Feb. 3
Raybon Wasisang ———— Feb. 17
Olwachel Demei ———— Feb. 19
Jason Tewid ———— Feb. 29
Havalei Recheked ———— Mar. 2
Gwendolyn Bai ———— Mar. 10
Emerick Kintaro ———— Mar. 13
JB Nagata ———— Mar. 18
Tyler Abraham ———— Mar. 20
Carter Ngiralbong ———— Mar. 27

Bureau of Marine Resources

Carl Haruo ———— Jan. 21
Glen Kinto ———— Feb. 10
Erbai Yukiwo ———— Feb. 12
Alfred Tuelbang ———— Mar. 2
D-Van Ongrung ———— Mar. 24

Bureau of Tourism

Jennifer L. Kumangai ———— Jan. 13
Kevin Mesebeluu ———— Jan. 26
Fabian Iyar ———— Feb. 2
David A. Orrukem ———— Feb. 25
Endira N. Apsalom ———— Mar. 8

Ungil Sils Leko Rekau...

I hope this newsletter finds you well and in good spirits. We are back to share some more updates and stories from our ministry for the first quarter of 2020. The year has been an opportunity and blessing to many but not without its share of challenges and issues that we all must face as a nation. We continue to work to put in place a domestic tuna fishery that will yield substantive benefits to local fishers and communities like never before. At the same time, our health and wellbeing are being put to the test with the coronavirus pandemic. Tourist numbers have reached its lowest points causing a ripple effect on economies the world over, especially in Palau with many of our businesses being highly dependent on the tourism industry as our main economic driver. The damage is already being felt but the important thing is remaining healthy and resilient throughout this ordeal.

Minister F. Umiich Sengebau

The year 2020, internationally known as "biodiversity super year," is supposed to host several major global events that place biodiversity at the forefront. It provides a unique opportunity to deliver transformative progress for the conservation and sustainable use of the species of wild animals and plants.

While we are already doing our part in the scheme of things, we strive to do more - and I hope our stories paint a picture that demonstrates our collective efforts, with communities and partners alike.

National & International Days Dedicated to Environmental Commitments and Efforts

World Wildlife Day is March 3

The animals and plants that live in the wild have an intrinsic value and contribute to the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic aspects of human well-being and to sustainable development. World Wildlife Day is an opportunity to celebrate the many beautiful and varied forms of wild fauna and flora and to raise awareness of the multitude of benefits that their conservation provides to people.

International Day of Forests is March 21

When we drink a glass of water, write in a notebook, take medicine for a fever or build a house, we do not always make the connection with forests. And yet, these and many other aspects of our lives are linked to forests in one way or another. Forests, their sustainable management and use of resources, including in fragile ecosystems, are key to combating climate change, and to contributing to the prosperity and well-being of current and future generations.

Koror Elementary School Goes Eco-Friendly

During the 2020 Education Awareness Week, the Koror Elementary School (KES) family had students bring plastic reusable containers for lunch on Thursday, March 19. There

Students standing in line for lunch with their plastic reusable containers.

seems to be an increasing trend with both the public and private sectors taking steps to protect the environment as was demonstrated at KES. School officials recognized the significant use of disposable plastics and paper products in previous Awareness Week programs which led to the

School cooks plating students' reusable plastic containers.

decision to put such measures in place. With 685 students, the school has made a significant impact in minimising plastic waste with this initiative. Congratulations KES for a great achievement!

MINISTRY NEWS AND UPDATES

Biosecurity Officers Confiscate Banned Items

Packed chicken feet pictured above.

Biosecurity officers recently confiscated several unpermitted items from a 40-feet container that arrived from China. Officer Sadang Osarch inspected the container and discovered 72 cases of items that were imported without proper permits, including sausages, chicken feet and other products. Any items for human consumption require permits from the Biosecurity Division with our Bureau of Agriculture and there is a strict prohibition on any meat and meat products from China. The vendor was warned since it was a first offense and all the items were later incinerated and disposed of properly. For more information on this matter please contact the Biosecurity Division at telephone number 587-5804.

Some of the unidentified items.

Bureau of Agriculture Updates Forest Action Plan

BOA Director Fred Sengebau (front row, left) pictured here with employees and ministry staff for the planning exercise.

On March 11, a meeting was held in Nekken to update Palau's Forest Action Plan and make sure it aligns with the Sustainable Forest Management Plan, Statewide Assessment and Resource Strategy, national priorities and our Bureau of Agriculture's Strategic Action Plan. During the meeting the participants were able to identify focal areas and objectives and go through national priorities in

order to update activities. The outcome of this meeting will be an updated Forest Action Plan which identifies the work that needs to be done to achieve objectives for ensuring healthy forests that sustain our culture and livelihoods, enhance our economy and strengthen the resilience of our island ecosystems and communities. For more information please contact our office at telephone number 544-5804.

Watershed Legislation Enacted Banning Palau's Cooler Trade

On April 8, President Remengesau signed RPPL 10-54 into law and ended the longstanding practice of people leaving the country with a cooler of up to 50lbs of reef fish. The new prohibition on export, which became effective upon signing, covers commercial and non-commercial exports and applies regardless of whether fish are processed or not.

Many Palauans have grown accustomed to bringing local fish to family members living overseas including a growing number of visitors who brought fresh fish back home as gifts. However, data from our Bureau of Marine Resources indicate that in 2019 alone, close to 230,000 lbs. of reef fish was exported through the cooler trade, significantly depleting fish stocks and driving market prices to unaffordable levels. While the prohibition will prove challenging in the short term, it serves as a turning point to ensuring that the nation's food security efforts are achieved and will yield significant benefits to the community. Please call our Bureau of Marine Resources at telephone number 488-3125/2897 if you have any questions.

Bureau of Marine Resources Bids Farewell to Mr. Jerome Oiterong

On February 13, the Bureau of Marine Resources and several ministry employees housed at the Bureau celebrated the retirement as well as the birthday of Senior Coastal Fisheries Officer Jerome Oiterong, who was better known as the supervisor of the Airport Inspection Officers.

(Far left) Jerome shown here celebrating with BMR staff.

Jerome, as he was always fondly called by his first name, will be remembered as a gentle, humble, low key and soft spoken individual who had the temperament and great patience to deal with his fellow co-workers at the Airport Inspections Office and the main office. "In my years in government, it's not a common thing to have had an employee like Mr. Oiterong. Not only was he dependable, he was also very trustworthy and for that, his retirement was extended from last year to this year", revealed Bureau Director Leon Remengesau. "It's a sad thing because it

was Jerome's birthday but we were also saying goodbye since everyone officially retires from government on their birthday."

The newly minted retiree was an exemplary employee who was promoted once for his exceptional performance in his duty as the relief or the 'fill in' officer for the Coastal Fisheries Officer assigned to the Palau International Airport. He also was very instrumental in the timely reconciliation of the Bureau's export permit fees and the deposits to the National Treasury.

Also present at the retirement lunch to give their well wishes to Jerome were the friendly staff from the ministry's projects and programs, including the Micronesia Challenge Regional Coordinator, Ms. Geraldine Datuin, experts from Japan's Overseas Fishery Cooperation Foundation and Taiwan's aquaculture experts. The Bureau wishes Jerome all the best and thanks those who were able to join to make it a memorable afternoon.

PAN Fund Honors the Life and Memory of Ms. Sue Miller Taei

Ms. Sue Miller Taei.

The Protected Areas Network extends its condolences to the family, friends and colleagues of Ms. Sue Miller Taei, a member of the PAN Fund board of directors who passed away on January 4, 2020. In honor of her memory and the many years of valuable service and contributions toward national efforts, the board of directors adopted a resolution to recognize Ms. Taei and affirmed the privilege of working with her and the wealth of experience she brought with her.

For over 5 years, Ms. Taei served on the board of directors, exemplifying leadership excellence and commitment to biodiversity conservation beyond the Palau PAN as evidenced in many local and regional conservation initiatives. Ms. Taei was the Executive Director of the New Zealand and Pacific Islands and Ocean Program under Conservation International and has worked in Samoa, New Zealand, Palau and the Pacific region for many years. She will be missed.

Ms. Taei and staff with President Remengesau and PAN Fund officials.

PAN Conducts Training for Reporting

On January 15, the Network put together a financial report and tracking tool training for the Association of State PAN Coordinators (ASPC). The ASPC is made up of the 16 states' PAN program managers and, among other things, are responsible for submitting quarterly reports to the PAN Office and PAN Fund to be able to trigger the disbursement of funds to further support their management efforts throughout the year.

(Far left) PAN Program Coordinator Obichang Skebong with PAN staff and ASPC members.

This was an opportunity for new managers and a refresher for the more seasoned ones to go through the reporting process and tracking tool while sharing new approaches and challenges. The intended outcome of the training was to improve and strengthen the capacity for reporting.

World Wetlands Day Celebrated

Students at Melekeok Elementary School shown here.

In celebration of World Wetlands Day, the Melekeok Conservation Network (MCN) organized an art contest for students at Melekeok Elementary School to raise awareness on the importance of biodiversity in lake Ngardok, an important wetland area in Palau. Together with partners, MCN held an awarding ceremony at the school to announce the winners of the art contest with the winning artwork to be featured in an upcoming seasonal calendar to be created by MCN. The first-place winner with a prize of $100 went to 8th grader, Jesse Takawo. Second place with a prize of $75 went to 8th grader, Jaeneth Martin and third place with a $50 prize went to 8th grader, Omtab Lorenzo.

Managing Cultural Sites Through PAN

A historic preservation symposium co-hosted by the Bureau of Cultural and Historical Preservation and Ngatpang State Government was held in February where information was provided about the Network and its mandate to support efforts to manage natural and cultural sites. Much of our work has resulted in protected areas with a primary focus on biodiversity and natural resources so this was

PAN Communications Officer, Ms. Sahar Hanser, at symposium.

an opportunity to encourage the inclusion of cultural sites which can also be managed through the support of the Network. Appreciation is extended to the organizers for the opportunity to present at the symposium.

PAN Bids Farewell to US Embassy Science Fellow

Ms. Stacy Schuur, a US Embassy Science Fellow who served for three months in Palau had the opportunity to work with the ministry and PAN on various initiatives and projects, notably the recently held PAN conference. Ms. Schuur also helped the Our Oceans Secretariat in developing the program for the Our Oceans Conference 2020 and assisting students with the Tuna Diplomacy Youth Leadership Program. Specific to this program, she helped with the students' social marketing campaign to link fishers with restaurants to track and promote sustainable fishing practices through RARE's Our Fish App, in conjunction with Ebiil Society. When asked about her experience in Palau, Ms. Schuur expresses, "It was an honor and pleasure to serve as a US Embassy Science Fellow working with the ministry. As beautiful as the nature is in Palau, the highlight for me is always the people. I truly enjoyed our time together, learning a bit about the culture and am forever grateful for being welcomed as family."

Ms. Schuur (middle) with Minister of State Rehuher-Marugg and Minister Sengebau.

PAN Strengthens and Expands Partnership with US Embassy

MCN representatives and partners shown above.

The Melekeok Conservation Network (MCN) hosted a site visit to Ngardok Nature Reserve with partners from Ebiil Society, PAN Office, Ngardmau PAN, US Forest Services, US Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) and Science Fellows through the US Embassy. The site visit was an opportunity for partners to highlight past collaborations and opportunities to further such partnerships in future projects.

The US Forest Service, NRCS and Science Fellows through the US Embassy have provided financial and technical resources and training opportunities for MCN, including the construction of its Nursery, donating erosion control devices and setting up MCN's Ngardok Nature Reserve as the first Forest Dynamic Plot site in Palau. The Network continues to strengthen its capacity to manage protected areas through such partnerships.

Training Planned for Removal of Unexploded Ordnances

At the request of the Norwegian People's Aid and the Debedebokel Organization, a meeting took place with the Association of State PAN Coordinators to discuss trainings to locate and properly remove explosive remnants of war and unidentified explosive ordnances found in PAN sites. The meeting proved successful and the Norwegian People's Aid will work with the association to schedule site visits and organize the necessary trainings to remove the hazardous materials throughout the year.

ASPC members pictured here after meeting in Ngiwal.

The association also discussed training opportunities for their programs, calendar of events and other matters. For more information about the association or possible collaboration opportunities, please contact them at aspc.palau@gmail.com or palaupan@gmail.com.

Over 1,000 Trees Planted in Ngardmau

Ngardmau's Ongedechuul System of Conservation Areas with Ebiil Society, Palau Conservation Society, the US Embassy Science Fellows and the PAN programs of Ngatpang, Aimeliik and Melekeok launched a project to reforest 100 acres of bauxite terraces in Ngardmau. Over 1,000

Ngardmau Governor Aderkeroi (center) with partners and state employees pictured here.

native trees were planted with the help of students from Ngardmau Elementary School. Ngardmau's PAN program and partners will continue this work which initially started as an activity in recognition of the International Day of Forests, celebrated March 21.

2020 Youth Conference Concludes

The 2020 Youth Conference was held on March 12-13 at the Ngarachamayong Cultural Center. The two-day conference brought together students from grades 9-12 from Palau High School, Mindszenty High School and Ibobang High School with the focus of this year's conference on marine pollution.

President Remengesau with participants of the Youth Conference pictured here.

Leading up to the conference, students attended three different pre-conference activities hosted by various agencies. On February 22, the Palau International Coral Reef Center hosted a trip to the island of Ngerchong for a trash collection activity that included collecting sand samples to test for microplastics. On February 29, the Environmental Quality Protection Board took students to the Aimeliik landfill where they toured the facility and learned about sedimentation. On March 7, the Palau Conservation Society and PAN Office hosted the students on a visit to Airai's Medal Ngediull to observe the impact of pollution in marine protected areas.

Participants collected trash at Ngerchong as part of the pre-conference activities.

During the two-day conference, students participated in a range of knowledge building and application activities. They listened to presentations on the impact that marine pollution has on climate change, sustainable blue economy, MPAs and sustainable fisheries. They also worked in small groups to identify existing problems in the community and create potential solutions that the youth could implement. After the groups presented their recommended solutions, the top three were chosen to present to a leadership panel.

The group working on the issue of microplastics chose to address factors including the lack of motivation, awareness, education, reinforcement and consequences. Their solution was to encourage each other to do more through presentations to each other and to elementary schools. Further emphasis was made to do follow-ups to ensure that others were doing their part. The group campaigned on a proposed slogan, YOU 2.0, to encourage each other to make those lifestyle changes to help the environment.

After observing occurrences of sedimentation, the group working on this issue identified sedimentation sources being at the household level, where bare slopes were eroding; at the schools where grass is cut too low exposing soil; and, in areas along the compact road that have been burned, exposing them to potential landslides. The students determined that the actions required were to inform the responsible parties of the issue and to be a part of the solution to that issue.

Students hold up their youth pledges, shown here with Minister Baklai Temengil-Chilton and others.

The last group created an action plan to address the problem of sedimentation on marine protected areas. Their solution requires all promoting 8th grade students and graduating high school seniors to plant at least one tree per student in order to fulfill their academic requirements. Planting would take place annually throughout the month of May, beginning in 2020 until 2050.

Ms. Anu Gupta Joins the Ministry Family

Ms. Anu Gupta pictured here.

In March 2020, Anu Gupta started in the Environmental Planning Unit (EPU) in the ministry as the Land Use Planning Coordinator. Anu will be working with the ministry through the GEF6 project to achieve its goals of sustainable development via improved land and resource mapping and planning. Anu comes to the ministry after working for eight years as a private consultant based in Northern Virginia, during which time she partnered on such projects as the GEF5 and GEF6 Project Documents and Inception Workshops, assisted with State of the Environment Reporting, and helped develop reports and strategies for nongovernmental organizations. Before that, she worked with the Palau Conservation Society for many years.

Anu first came to Palau in 2001 as a Peace Corps Volunteer with EQPB. "I'm pretty excited to work with MNRET to implement these ambitious initiatives for

Landscape and Seascape Planning," said Anu. "I'm fortunate to have contributed to several of Palau's national biodiversity and environmental policies, so it is fulfilling to take those policies and mainstream them into island-wide visions that will lead to improved development practices on the ground." Anu and her husband Butler Bintorio are also thrilled for the opportunity to bring their two children home to Palau so they can learn more about their culture and family. Anu tries to walk or hike everyday for exercise: "Come walk with me!"

Palau Adopts the World's Strictest National Sunscreen Standard

Picture of Milky Way, a popular tourist site in the rock islands.

Palau is the first country in the world to ban all active sunscreen ingredients and preservatives known or suspected to be reef-toxic. In 2018, President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr., of the Republic of Palau, signed The Responsible Tourism Education Act of 2018 into law, which prohibited sunscreens containing ten ingredients from being imported, distributed, sold, manufactured, or brought into the Republic starting January 1st, 2020. Pursuant to that law, the ministry promulgated new regulations tightening existing restrictions on sunscreens by adopting a precautionary approach that bans all active sunscreen ingredients and preservatives known or suspected to be reef-toxic.

The adoption of these regulations prohibiting reef-toxic sunscreens strengthens a national standard that was already the strictest in the world by, among other things, adding to the list of banned ingredients in the regulations. The updated list substantially increases the number of banned ingredients and, as of the time of adoption, essentially limits legal sunscreens to those that exclusively use zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide as their active ingredients and do not contain parabens, triclosan, triclocarban or phenoxyethanol. These additions to the list of banned ingredients align with a determination made last year by the US Food and Drug Administration that of the currently marketed active ingredients in the United States, only zinc oxide and titanium dioxide are "generally regarded as safe and effective" for use in sunscreens.

The new regulations also adopt a groundbreaking regulatory approach for sunscreens based on the precautionary principle. Instead of waiting for scientific studies to conclusively prove an ingredient is reef-toxic before banning it, the ministry has decided to prohibit any sunscreen ingredient suspected of being reef-toxic. Furthermore, to ensure that the new regulations remain responsive to scientific advancements, the ministry may also amend the list to remove banned ingredients if scientific research studies definitively reveal that ingredients prohibited by these regulations are not reef-toxic.

Apart from contributing to the protection of Palau's pristine environment, these regulations further establish the nation as a destination that educates tourists about responsible tourism and the protection of the environment.

Ministry Hosts Interns for Special Projects and Micronesia Challenge

The ministry recently welcomed Ms. Shuri Kelly Chibana and Ms. Shiphrah Odelomel Tellames as interns who joined us in December and January, respectively. Ms. Chibana is currently a student with our Palau Community College and was selected among a group of peers as Palau's Micronesia Challenge Young Champions intern. Ms. Chibana works under the guidance of the Micronesia Challenge Regional Coordinator and is tasked with developing communications products with the focus of showcasing some of her work at high-level events relating to the Micronesia Challenge.

(Back row, left to right): Ms. Tellames, MC Regional Coordinator Geraldine Datuin, Ms. Chibana; (front row, left to right): Mr. Jerry Nabeyama, Minister Sengebau, Ms. Vera Kanai.

Ms. Tellames recently graduated from Pittsburg State University with a degree in International Business and, through an internship program with the Palau National Scholarship Board, joined us as a Policy & Finance Program Assistant. Her work involved supporting the ministry's efforts pertaining to the Palau National Marine Sanctuary and the Nagoya Protocol on Access & Benefit Sharing under the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity. The ministry encourages more college students to seek early exposure and experience in the workforce as young professionals.

A Statement from Minister Sengebau on Palau's Domestic Pelagic Fishery

COVID-19 brings into sharp focus how our problems are interconnected and thus, require multi-sector solutions. Many of us still recall supertyphoons Bopha and Haiyan, as well as the more recent drought. Along with these experiences, we learned that when disasters strike, our whole community is impacted, as enduring threats to various national securities, including water, food, energy, health and economy are multiplied - all at the same time. Challenging times like these make it crucial for our community to be resilient and adaptive, which require us to remain cognizant of these interconnections; remain collective with shared goals; and maintain, if not increase, our collaborative efforts.

The impacts we are seeing with COVID-19 on our health, educational system, as well as our economy underscore our need for a more diversified economy and ensure the foundations for our food security. Passing the Palau National Marine Sanctuary (PNMS) Act in 2015 represented an achievement for securing additional protection of our rich marine biodiversity; for promoting ocean conservation; and for reaffirming our sovereignty over all our waters. In addition to these, and just as important as these, is that PNMS offered new and increased opportunities for us to develop a domestic fishery. Not only will an active domestic fishery offer more economic benefits from the tuna fishery to the local people, it will also contribute towards increasing our local food security.

In order to achieve these ambitious goals of the PNMS, large-scale changes in our pelagic fishery needed to be made. To transition from the current foreign owned and controlled pelagic fishery to locally owned and controlled domestic fishery with more potential benefits to local people would not be easy and would face challenges. One of those challenges was how to transition and still maintain the local supply of pelagic fish, such as tuna, as foreign fishing fleets were the main suppliers of most of the tuna available locally.

While Palau has begun to feel the unfortunate effects of such a shortage, work is ongoing to address it. Supporting local fishermen has been the focus of this work; staff from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment, and Tourism (MNRET) have accompanied local fishermen to visit Japan and Indonesia to learn about fishing cooperatives and their operations, and they will travel to Indonesia in the near future to assess the feasibility of purchasing a pole and line fleet to bring to Palau. Building capacity in terms of gear, training, and boats, is also a priority. MNRET has purchased a 20-foot container for local fishermen to use as cold storage, a central marketplace project has been awarded and construction will soon commence, and a pole and line vessel provided by Japan will be available in 2021. The government of Japan will also partner

with MNRET to provide training to fishermen on proper fish handling and techniques. The Ministry is also providing small grants to help the local fishermen through the Project Development Fund from the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).

While we are transitioning to a fully functional domestic fishery, several foreign fishing boats continue to operate in the 20% domestic fishing zone to help with the supply of pelagic fish until local fishermen are able to fully meet the local demand. Regulations have been put into place to make available at up to 10% of their catch for purchase by the Palau government, and communication between the fleets and the Ministry is ongoing in that regard. Okinawan fleets also fish in the

Domestic Fishing Zone, and MNRET is in talks with them to help supplement our tuna supply as well.

Work will continue, for both short term solutions and the long term success of the Domestic Fishery and the PNMS. We want to see sustainable fishing operations managed by our local fishermen, with support from the government. We envision that this will provide food security for both local people and visitors, which is becoming more critical in these changing and uncertain times, as well as ensure we leave a sound legacy of rich and abundant ocean resources for future generations of Palauans.

Meet Mr. Jerry Nabeyama
Our Ministry's Profiled Employee for the Quarter

Mr. Nabeyama shown here.

Mr. Nabeyama is quick to say he represents the state of Ngatpang, so let that be known before we get into other matters. He wants people to know that the Palau Visitors Authority (PVA) website lists several attraction sites in Ngatpang, including the Tabecheding Waterfall that people can visit for $5.00 a day, as well as a Japanese shrine, Beluu ra Ngimis (traditional village), Sidang Sireib (historic remnants ofWWII) and other sites that you can learn more about by contacting PVA at telephone number 488-2793 or Ngatpang State Government at 535-1882.

Jerry works for the ministry's tuna program as the Project Coordinator, a role he took on when he joined us last year after his time with the Palau National Marine Sanctuary Office. He brings a wealth of experience to the ministry given his work with the Pew Foundation and as an elected official, serving as a member of the House of Delegates for Ngatpang from 2008-2012. He has also worked as a land court registration officer and, in the private sector, has owned and managed a construction company.

Jerry currently serves as a board member for the Friends of the Marine Sanctuary and a member of the Ngatpang State Planning Commission, Palau Public Lands Authority and was the appointed Floor Leader in the 1st Constitutional Convention of Ngatpang. He attended Palau Community College and graduated from Palau High School in 1985. Jerry was born in Koror to Chief Rubeang Hiromi Nabeyama and Marianne Iyar on December 7, 1964. He is married to Ms. Marie Anderson and has two sons and two daughters - Miner, Lashay, Michael and Mikirong. In his leisure time, Jerry enjoys interacting with people, fishing and time with family.

We hope you found this edition of our newsletter informative and invite you to check out our previous newsletters by going to www.palaugov.pw/executive-branch/ministries/natural-resources/. We'll be sharing more stories and updates with you in our next edition coming out at the end of June.