UPDATES FROM THE MINISTRY

www.palaugov.pw/executive-branch/ministries/natural-resources/

Employee Birthdays

Bureau of Agriculture

Trebkul Tellei ———————— Jul. 8
Beverly Subris ———————— Aug. 23
Goran Vanoosterweyck —— Aug. 27
Everson M. Sadang ———— Sep. 14
Joseph Tiobech ———————— Sep. 19
Uelbil P. Michael ———————— Sep. 20
Edwin Polloi ———————— Sep. 24

Bureau of Marine Resources

Tito Ringang ———————— Jul. 22
Nazaria Tutiy ———————— Jul. 24
Roman Mongami ———————— Aug. 22
Helena Rebelkuul ———————— Aug. 28
Leon Remengesau ———————— Sep. 8
Scherryl D. Solang ———————— Sep. 9

Bureau of Tourism

Ray Marino ———————— Jul. 27
Dorothy T. Ueda ———————— Aug. 26
Keyan Solomon ———————— Sep. 30

Wishing you all a happy birthday, a wonderful year and success in all you do.

Alii and Good Day to You!

Minister Umiich Sengebau

Let's continue to be thankful for a COVID-free nation and the many blessings bestowed to us during these challenging times. Our healthcare professionals and front liners have done tremendously in keeping us safe and we take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to all of them. Our diplomatic partners have contributed by providing medical equipment and expertise, including dispensing medical treatment to our citizens in their countries who would otherwise be unable to receive the needed healthcare. May God bless you all!

It's hard to believe that we've already come to the month of October, having celebrated our 26th Independence Day and exercised our Constitutional right to vote in the recently concluded primary election. In January, a new administration and leadership will be inaugurated - one that will be faced with unique challenges to move the country forward in the new normal in the face of this pandemic. We remain optimistic in the resilience of the Palauan people and trust that we will get through this together. We are also hopeful because the recently concluded 3rd National Environment Symposium provided important recommendations that provide potential solutions to addressing our economic hardships and food and energy needs.

Once again, we are excited to share some of the work and services the ministry provides, as well as other interesting and related stories and I hope you find this edition of our newsletter useful and informative.

National & International Days Dedicated to Environmental Commitments and Efforts

International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer is September 16

The ozone layer, a fragile shield of gas, protects the Earth from the harmful portion of the rays of the sun, thus helping preserve life on the planet.The phaseout of controlled uses of ozone depleting substances and the related reductions have not only helped protect the ozone layer for this and future generations, but have also contributed significantly to global efforts to address climate change; furthermore, it has protected human health and ecosystems by limiting the harmful ultraviolet radiation from reaching the Earth.

World Tourism Day is September 27

Tourism has been among the hardest hit of all sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic. No country has been unaffected. Restrictions on travel and a sudden drop in consumer demand have led to an unprecedented fall in international tourism numbers, which in turn have led to economic loss and the loss of jobs.

Women, youth, and workers in the informal economy are the most at risk from tourism sector job losses and business closures due to the pandemic. At the same time, the destinations most reliant on tourism for jobs and economic growth are likely to be the hardest hit.

The tourism crisis is also a threat to wildlife conservation initiatives and to the protection of the world's cultural heritage. The sudden fall in tourism revenues has cut off funding for biodiversity conservation. With livelihoods at risk in and around protected areas, cases of poaching and looting are expected to rise. With 90% of World Heritages Sites closed as a result of the pandemic, humanity's cultural heritage is at risk in all parts of the world.

On this World Tourism Day, the COVID-19 pandemic represents an opportunity to rethink the future of the tourism sector, including how it contributes to the sustainable development goals, through its social, cultural, political, and economic value. Tourism can eventually help us move beyond the pandemic, by bringing people together and promoting solidarity and trust – crucial ingredients in advancing the global cooperation so urgently needed at this time.

MINISTRY NEWS AND UPDATES

Mr. Joseph Tiobech

Bureau of Agriculture Bids Farewell to Mr. Joseph Tiobech as he Retires

Mr. Tiobech started working for the Bureau of Agriculture in 2000. He has overseen the fruit tree projects with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, helped PAN Office and Forestry Division with creating fire breaks, led some of the *Kebeas* control efforts with states and contributed to many more efforts with the Bureau. Mr. Tiobech has participated in agriculture trainings in Hawaii, Fiji, Japan and other countries, which developed him professionally for the work he undertook.

The Bureau congratulates Mr. Tiobech for his 20 years of service as the Invasive Plants Coordinator and wishes him all the best on his retirement. His active engagement and leadership with staff and other partners will be missed as he enters retirement life as a full-time farmer.

Japan Donates Tilling Tractor

On August 21, the Government of Japan donated a tilling tractor (worth up to $40,000) in a small handover ceremony held at the Agriculture Development Support Center Compound at Ngchesar.

Ambassador Karasawa handing over keys to the tilling tractor to Director Sengebau with Bureau staff in attendance.

Picture of tractor donated by the Government of Japan.

The ceremony was attended by His Excellency, Mr. Akira Karasawa, Ambassador of Japan to Palau, and Director Fred Sengebau of the Bureau of Agriculture and several staff.

This grant aid is one of the schemes under "the Economic and Social Development Programme in fiscal year 2016" of up to 200 million yen, signed in October 2017. At the event, Director Sengebau emphasized that the assistance was a very timely donation to help Palau's farmers and thanked the Government of Japan for their generosity, expressing his hope to continue the cooperation with Japan for the development of agriculture in Palau.

Ambassador Karasawa stated that this assistance would be the first in contributing to Palau's agriculture efforts and plans to sustain this support over the longterm. The ministry conveys its gratitude and appreciation to the contribution and continued partnership of the Japan Government.

Recent Survey Results Indicate Trochus niloticus (semum) Populations Increased Since 2016

Jointly prepared by the Bureau of Marine Resources and the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC), the report follows up on a survey that took place in 2016, where a total of 122 sites with fore reef and reef crest habitats from Kayangel to Peleliu, were visited. Results of this survey show that trochus populations have increased since the last survey in 2016. The density of trochus on the reef crest was 734 per hectare, exceeding the amount recommended for harvesting, which is 600 per hectare. Trochus shells are valued for its mother of pearl layer, which is traditionally made into items such as pearl buttons and jewelry. While this means the harvesting of trochus can be considered, conditions are lacking for a profitable harvesting season with no buyers in the market and given the challenges faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Polished trochus shell showing its mother-of-pearl layer.

An electronic copy of the report is available on PICRC's website, www.picrc.org.

BMR Donates Rabbitfish to Peleliu

Last August 20, 2020, PMDC technicians and the Taiwanese experts in the BMR-ROC Aquaculture Project (AP) delivered 1500 klsebuul rabbit fish fries measuring almost four inches to the third floating fish cage belonging to the state government in Camp Beck, Peleliu State. Previously, BMR had installed three fish cages and stocked two of them with 4000 meyas rabbit fish fries.

Fish cages pictured here at Camp Beck (inlaid photo shows technicians releasing fish into the cages).

Deploying three fish cages in Peleliu has been a substantial investment of the BMR/ROC/TNC floating fish cage introduction effort in the country because of the logistics, considerable fuel and related costs such as hotel accommodation for the PMDC technicians as they had to spend a week in Peleliu constructing the three fish cages. Additionally, BMR had to provide a large supply of aqua screen and construct a protective screen surrounding the three fish cages to ward off the very real threat of crocodile attention on the fish stock in the fish cages. This required another week's stay in Peleliu for the PMDC technicians. Afterwards, BMR had to send the crew yet again to relocate the three fish cages and line them up perpendicular to the tidal current direction so that all three cages can have the water flow through them at the same time. This will contribute a lot to having water circulate equally through the three cages and help alleviate rapid accumulation of waste on the bottom and algae on the fish nets.

BMR Makes Special Donation to PICRC

In support of the Palau International Coral Reef Center (PICRC)'s outreach and educational programs, the Bureau of Marine Resources (BMR) on Sept. 28, 2020 donated 20 rabbit fish fries of klsebuul to the Center's main showcase, the Palau Aquarium. Previously, BMR had been providing meyas fingerlings to PICRC for diversity and a little maintenance as the rabbit fish is an algae eater

in the display tank. The klsebuul fries, in this instance, will be reared and displayed in their newly renovated aquarium as part of the Sustainable Fishing Exhibit.

PICRC technicians receiving fish fries at BMR (inlaid photo shows klsebuul fries).

MNRET Endorses FAD Strategic Plan and TNC Grants Assistance to Offshore Domestic Fishery

On September 15, 2020 the Bureau of Marine Resources (BMR) in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) were able to finalize a FADs Strategic Plan and presented it to the Minister for his endorsement. The strategic plan is part of an ongoing effort to develop our offshore domestic fishery.

Endorsement of FADs strategic plan attended by TNC, BMR and BOFI representatives.

Along with the endorsement, the Bureau also announced related funding assistance that has been secured from the TNC to begin implementation of the plan. With the plan in place, work has begun in the BMR Engineering and Maintenance Shop to construct and deploy a number of aFAD's within our waters. The development of the domestic fishery effort includes training fishers on FAD fishing techniques, fish handling and catch quality control. The witnesses to the endorsement of the plan and the signing of the document for the grant assistance from TNC included members of the Belau Offshore Fishers Inc. (BOFI) and the media.

Carnegie Mellon University Completes Project with Bureau of Tourism

After a 10-week remote internship, Mr. Abhi Depravali and the Carnegie Mellon University has completed its joint project with the Bureau of Tourism (BOT). Beginning in June, Abhi and Director Mesebeluu began secondary research, consultations and project planning to frame out the work and to prepare to deliver the project outcome.

Abhi interviewed BOT Compliance Officers Endyra Apsalom and Ray Marino to discover how they registered tour operators and boat owners for tourism, as well as reviewing the application form for BOT. After this consultation period, it was agreed to proceed to build the data system utilizing Microsoft Access. Other higher end systems were available, however in terms of the learning curve, access to technology and system stability and usability, it was decided that for the needs of the Bureau, a standard office suite was sufficient. Abhi also created youtube training videos that will be made available to the Bureau for training purposes on how to use the system.

Concluding the build in early August, Abhi then spent time training the compliance officers in the use of the system. The compliance section of the Bureau is now actively populating the data system with information on all the tour operators and the Boat Owners Association for Tourism (BOAT) members. Once complete, the system will allow filtering of data sets to generate reports for tour operators based on compliance and citations, years in business, certification in Green Boots and Green Fins. The system can also filter reports for employee profiles including number of employees, nationality, certifications and gender. One new filter that was included at the last minute was the ability to generate a filter based on COVID-19 safety compliance. This is empowered by Executive Order 442 and Directive for Essential Air Services, to allow the Bureau to fulfill and capture businesses that have gone through the training for COVID-19 safety for a safe tourism restart.

For BOAT members, the Bureau will have the capability to generate reports based on characteristics of the members. This will include type of propulsion, hull, drivers and owners. This is a great asset for BOAT as this support for providing timely and accurate data allows the members to make decisions based on sound information, as well as track how the BOAT members are progressing over time.

On behalf of Minister Sengebau, the Bureau extends it sincere appreciation to Carnegie Mellon University and the program leads, Julia Peopping and Joseph Mertz. The Bureau also wants to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Abhi Devarapalli and wishes him luck in his higher learning institutional endeavors.

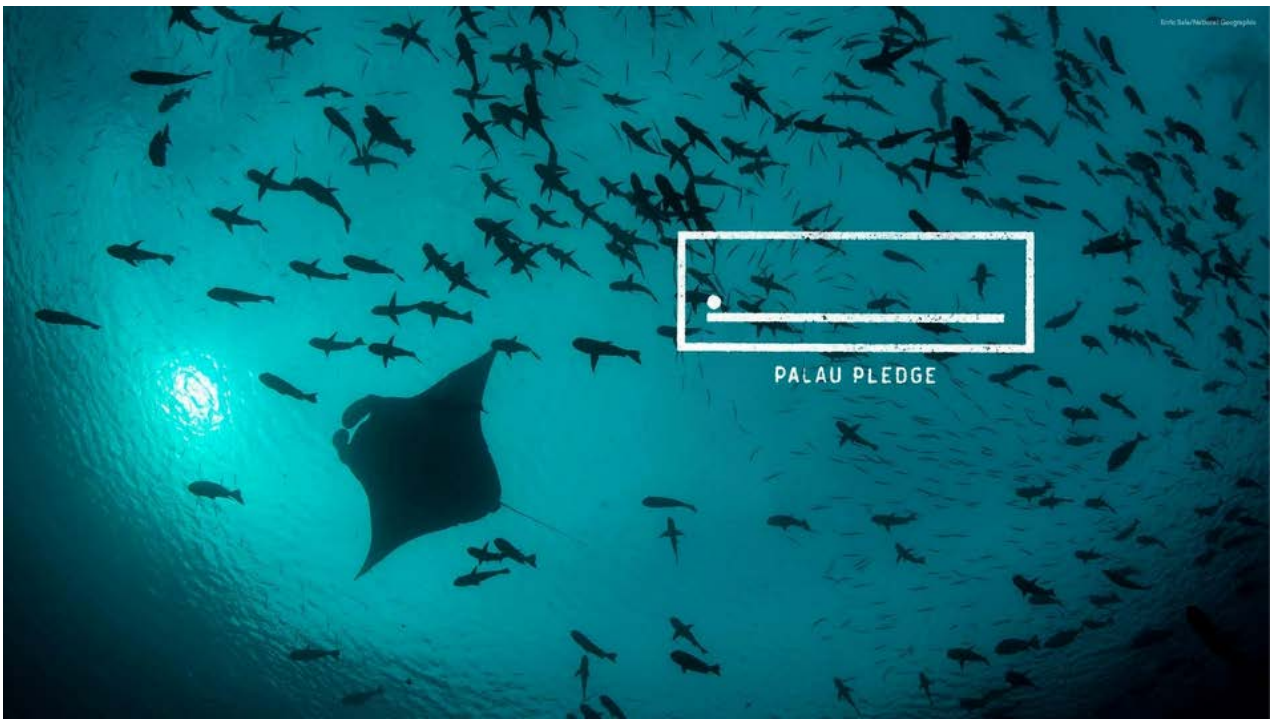
Tour Operator Updates

Based on RPPL 9-53 "Tourism Act" that vested the ministry to regulate all tourism activities and services for the Republic of Palau and Executive Order 391 that directs the Bureau of Tourism to administer the Tour Operator's License, ALL TOUR OPERATORS are required to register and renew their tour operator's license with BOT. As of September 2020, 36 tour

companies have completed the registration. The Bureau of Tourism has extended the registration date until the end of the year due to COVID-19. The application is available online at http://palaugoc.pw/bureau-of-tourism/ and can also be emailed to anyone who requests by telephone or email. BOT would like to inform everyone that you must obtain a tour operator license in order to process your business license at the end of the year. A new database is in place now for reports and, with this new database, next year all tour companies would be able to verify and update their information. However, with the borders closed and no flight, most of the tour companies are not in operation now. Please call 488-8699/8695 or email bureauoftourism@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Bureau of Tourism and the Palau Pledge

The Bureau of Tourism is working to execute the adoption of the *Palau Pledge* as the official platform for outreach, awareness and branding for its media strategy. Via Presidential Executive Order 442, the Bureau is also tasked to encourage best practices in the business sector on COVID-19 safe operations and certification, including requiring businesses to educate visitors on environmental



protection policies and environmentally responsible options to their customers in accordance with the Responsible Tourism Education Act of 2018; and, to meet the Bureau's deliverables for integrating biodiversity safeguards into development, creation and launch of a business certification program and the design and implementation of environmentally friendly tourism products.

The Bureau is looking to be further enabled to deliver on these tasks through a Presidential Executive Order that will officially adopt the *Palau Pledge* platform as the official Bureau branding for the Republic. This Executive Order would allow BOT to effectively leverage the *Palau Pledge* program to execute and communicate regulations and policies while building new partnerships for high-value tourism.

Under BOT, the *Palau Pledge* platform will develop and amplify Palau's National Tourism Master Plan and help deliver on the Pristine Paradise Palau brand positioning internationally. To help achieve

this, the *Palau Pledge* platform will also be a key tool in implementing the Responsible Tourism Policy Framework of high value and low impact tourism; and the Palau National Marine Sanctuary's strategic conservation pillars: communication and awareness; tourism policy and regulation; compliance and enforcement; and public private partnerships.

Speaking about the new integrated approach, Bureau Director Kevin Mesebeluu stated: "With our tourism industry under significant pressure due to COVID-19, it's more important than ever to uphold Palau's brand positioning as a pristine paradise - delivering unspoiled beauty, cultural authenticity, pristine seas and unparalleled experiences in nature. This will help our industry recover quicker post-pandemic, by delivering high-value visitors that contribute more to our economy while having a smaller environmental footprint. Our culture is underpinned by traditions of caring for our natural environment and sets Palau apart from other island destinations. By integrating the *Palau Pledge* into BOT, we can continue to capitalize on its significant international brand awareness and create a powerful tool for tourism transformation at a local level."

Finally, the adoption of the *Palau Pledge* under BOT would begin to deliver on the promise of a Pristine Paradise Palau for everyone. This Palau brand is perhaps best and most recently articulated by President Tommy E. Remengesau, Jr. in his recent speech at the UN General Assembly this September where he said, "We must not only build back greener, but build back bluer".

Efforts Underway to Make Palau a Carbon Neutral Destination

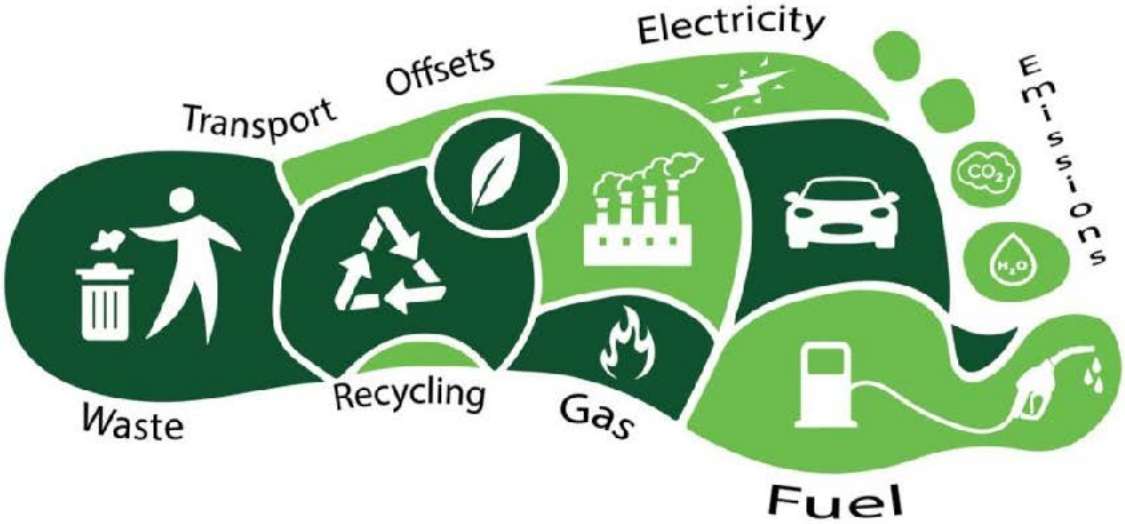
The Bureau of Tourism, Sustainable Travel International and Slow Food have launched a new project in Palau that aims to mitigate the tourism sector's carbon footprint and establish Palau as the world's first "Carbon Neutral Tourism Destination." The project is taking an innovative destination-level approach that includes promoting local food production within tourism and developing a carbon management program for tourists. This project supports the objectives of the Coalition of Fragile Ecosystems (COFE) and International Cooperation and Development Fund (TaiwanICDF) and has been endorsed by various government agencies, including our ministry, the Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Education, the Our Oceans 2020 Organizing Committee and the Office of the President.

Known for its unspoiled natural beauty and pristine seas, Palau is regarded as one of the top marine tourism destinations in the world. Last year, more than 89,000 international tourists visited the country, which has a population of just under 22,000. As such, tourism represents the island's main source of economic income and employment.

As a small island destination, Palau is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, which threaten the islands' marine ecosystems, coastal communities, and tourism industry. While tourism is the economic lifeblood

of the island, it also contributes to the climate crisis. Tourists are responsible for a significant portion of Palau's carbon footprint as they travel to the remote island by plane and consume food imported from overseas.

In recent years, Palau has taken extensive measures to further environmental protection and responsible tourism. This includes establishing one of the world's largest marine sanctuaries; creating the world's first mandatory eco-pledge (Palau Pledge) that all visitors are required to sign upon entry; banning tour operators from utilizing single-use plastics and Styrofoam; and protecting its marine environment through the adoption of the world's strictest national sunscreen standard. This bold new initiative, which is being led by Sustainable Travel International, builds upon the country's past efforts to specifically address the tourism sector's climate impact.



This project will reduce the carbon footprint of tourism in Palau by increasing the proportion of food that is sourced from local producers and reducing the industry's dependence on imports. Among other activities, the project will accomplish this by celebrating the islands' gastronomic heritage and building the capacity of farmers and fishers to market their products to tourists. Along with combating climate change, this will create income-generating opportunities for local communities and improve food security on the islands. A specific emphasis will be placed on sustainable production and empowering women producers to participate in the tourism value chain.

To compensate for tourism's unavoidable emissions, the project will develop a first-of-its-kind carbon management program for tourists to Palau. The new online platform will allow visitors to calculate and offset the carbon footprint associated with their trip, including both their travel to and activities in Palau. In line with Palau's leadership in marine conservation, the offset contributions will be invested in blue carbon initiatives, such as mangrove restoration, or sustainable production activities in the region that reduce CO_2 emissions. It is estimated that this program has the potential to raise over USD $1 million a year for these carbon reduction initiatives.

"If the current COVID-19 crisis has taught us anything, it's that we must strengthen our nation's resilience to external threats – the greatest of which is climate change," said Kevin Mesebeluu, Director of the Palau Bureau of Tourism. "Palau is blessed with some of the world's most pristine natural resources, inherited through culture and tradition, and placed in our trust for the future generation. We must work to actively protect them, while

also investing in our people. Palau embraces sustainable tourism as the only path forward in the new era of travel, and we believe that our destination can and must be carbon neutral."

"This project has enormous potential to transform the traditional tourism model and is a notable step towards lessening the industry's climate impact. Destinations around the world face these same challenges of balancing tourism growth with environmental protection. Carbon neutrality is the future of tourism and the direction that all destinations must head as they recover from COVID-19. We commend Palau for their continued leadership, and hope this inspires other destinations to strengthen their own climate resilience strategies," said Paloma Zapata, CEO of Sustainable Travel International.

"The rapid growth of an unsustainable tourist industry based on broken food systems has been a key driver of the climate crisis and ecosystem destruction. This project represents the antithesis, a solution that strives to strengthen and restore value to local food systems, reduce the cultural and environmental damage caused by food imports, and improve the livelihoods of food producers both in Palau and beyond," said Paolo di Croce, General Secretary of Slow Food International.

The Bureau of Tourism has hired Ms. Ivory Vogt as a sustainable tourism consultant. Ms. Vogt is assisting in the carbon neutral project, and is currently working on consultations with accommodation providers for the Accommodations Regulations for BOT. These regulations will be the foundation on how we work with Hotels and other accommodation providers to provide the "Carbon Receipt", to allow visitors to eventually "offset" their stay in Palau.

For more information on this project, please contact Director Kevin Mesebeluu, km.palau@icloud.com, or call 488-8695.

Sustainable Tourism Consultant Supports Bureau of Tourism Projects

Ms. Ivory Ilse Irorou Vogt

As a sustainable tourism consultant, Ms. Ivory Ilse Irorou Vogt recently began supporting the Bureau's projects and initiatives given her unique experience and qualifications. Ms. Vogt was born in Koror and has grown up most of her life as a global citizen. Her papa, Dieter Vogt, is German and her mom, Irene Techereng Olkeriil, is Palauan. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in International Communications with a minor in Business at Walla Walla University, Washington and recently graduated with a Master of Science degree in Tourism, Environment and Development at King's College London (UK). Ms. Vogt wrote her Master's dissertation on the issue of land and tourism in Palau, specifically touching on the subject of the 99-year lease, economic imperialism by the Chinese and traditional clan ownership of land. After submitting her dissertation, she became a Sustainability & Social Responsibility Associate at the Pacific Asia Travel Association in Bangkok, Thailand working on environmental audits, carbon offsets, community-based tourism and co-writing a plastics toolkit.

When COVID-19 hit, Ms. Vogt came back to Palau and began working with the Quad-Org on a plan and guidelines for a safe and sustainable restart of the tourism industry. Now she is currently working as a sustainable tourism consultant on several projects for the Bureau of Tourism, including a project to make Palau

a carbon neutral destination, getting feedback on accommodation regulations being developed, reviewing audits for a sustainability certification and recently submitting the COVID-19-safe guidelines in the *restart toolkit* being incorporated into a certification and training program for tourism businesses.

She is passionate about her country, about sustainability and about tourism. Ms. Vogt believes that tourism can be a tool for sustainable development, with the potential to create livelihoods, celebrate cultural heritage and conserve life on our planet.

She is grateful for the opportunity as a young Palauan to gain valuable work experience in the policy and regulation side of our tourism industry.

Update on Boat Owners Association for Tourism

In accordance with national tourism regulations for the Boat Owners Association for Tourism (BOAT), which took effect on April 17, 2019, individuals who own boats that are used to carry tourists on commercial tours within the Republic are required to be members of this Association. The Bureau, in its capacity as the secretariat, is mandated to register all boat owners and boats used for commercial tours.

In August 2020, the Bureau, in collaboration with partners from Carnegie Mellon University, acquired a database registry which will be used to house all data and information collected from registered BOAT members. This registry will also be used to generate reports for the Bureau's reporting mandate. As of this month, there has been a total of 36 approved BOAT members totalling over 80 boats registered and 25 boat owners awaiting approval. With this registry, the Bureau will have the capability to provide reliable and current information.

COVID-19 Pandemic Regulations Published

The COVID-19 Pandemic Regulations would require that businesses take steps to ensure they are COVID-19 safe for the eventual *restart* of tourism in Palau.

Since the start of the pandemic, the tourism sector has seen a steady decline in visitors and tour operator activities. Palau has been very fortunate that the closing of the borders has kept the virus out of our small island but, as the leadership has stated, it is impractical to remain closed. Our economy, health and services need essential air services.

To build on the Emergency Air Services (EAS) plan, the next step would be to open Palau again for tourism. Although a firm opening date has not been set, likely scenarios predict that at the earliest, a first quarter opening in 2021 might be possible with plans being drafted for bubble tourism with low risk countries like Taiwan. To prepare the tourism industry for this eventual reopening, Executive Order 442 and the Presidential Directive for EAS has mandates the Bureau to conduct awareness and readiness for COVID-19 safe operations for all tourism related businesses.

With the finalization of the *restart tourism toolkit* and the *restart tourism plan*, the Bureau is in a state of readiness to deliver on the Presidential mandate. Both projects - the toolkit and the plan, were initiated by the Bureau and completed in collaboration with the Belau Tourism Association, Palau Chamber of Commerce and funded by the Palau Visitors Authority.

The COVID-19 regulations, which were published on October 1st, would allow the Bureau to ensure a safe reopening. The regulations, which were developed in consultation with the Palau Visitors Authority, the Palau Chamber of Commerce and the Belau Tourism Association, would mitigate health risks for visitors and residents during a pandemic and protect Palau's reputation as a safe and responsible tourism destination. It does this by ensuring that when an emergency is officially declared due to a pandemic, businesses within the tourism sector will not be able to engage in business with visitors unless they are implementing measures that align with international standards and best practices.

The regulations also provide penalties for non-compliance, as well as the opportunity for those that are not compliant to take steps to retrofit and provide safety measures for guests and get certified. The Bureau has assigned Mr. Fabian Iyar to lead this training and certification process. He is actively working with the Small Business Development Center and other partners to ensure that Bureau staff develop the capacity to support training and guidance to tourism-focused businesses. The *restart tourism toolkit* contains the guidelines and protocols endorsed by the Ministry of Health with consultation and input from tourism stakeholders.

The training and workshop for certification and COVID-19 safe preparedness for all tourism related businesses will be finalized in October and immediately rolled out. The Bureau will engage the sector in phases with each stakeholder group having a chance to be invited and attend this important and required workshop.

A Farewell Note from the Bureau of Tourism Director

Dear friends and colleagues,

I hope this letter finds you in good health. It is with a heavy and determined heart that I inform you about my abdication as the Director for the Bureau of Tourism. Above all others, I am making this life decision so I can devote more time to family and to focus on a healthy mind, body, and spirit. I am forever grateful for the trust you placed in me as I have led the work here at the Bureau for the

BOT Director Kevin Mesebeluu (center) with staff and ministry employees during his farewell luncheon.

last two years. Together we have achieved many initiatives that will begin the transformation of our tourism sector as well as beginning many great projects.

Together we have accomplished and undertaken many projects and initiatives, including: the Palau carbon neutral project, establishing the Boat Owners Association for Tourism, enacting the sun screen regulations, the Palau community eco-based tourism project with states, the Palau-developed *Green Boots* program, the tour operators regulations, the Carnegie Mellon University project for a data and reporting system, a new strategic plan for the Bureau, the adoption by congress of the responsible tourism policy framework, the Responsible Tourism Education Act, the restart tourism plan and restart tourism toolkit, the national pandemic safety regulations, a new organizational chart and partnership with the Palau Pledge, and many more world leading initiatives in progress.

Although there are still projects to complete such as the accommodations and transportation regulations, the business COVID-19 safe certification and training, the establishing of the tourism bubble with Taiwan and the tourism development center among others, I believe that the processes, guidance documents, partnerships and regulations developed for the Bureau will ensure the success of the team for the near future.

I understand that during this time it is critical that the tourism sector be responsive to the fluidity of the pandemic and the new era of tourism, so along with this resignation letter, I will be presenting a transition report with updates and next steps for current and future projects. I hope this transition report assists the Bureau and the next Director to realize the great vision as articulated in the responsible tourism policy framework - that of a sustainable and equitable tourism sector that delivers on the promise of a Pristine Paradise, a Palau for everyone.

I requested from our honorable Minister Sengebau that my last day as Director be on October 9, 2020, with official duties and title ending on the same day and he granted my request and we will continue to work through other opportunities on initiatives for the good of our Republic. I will remain available at his request, or the next Director's request to provide advice or guidance on any of the work that we have accomplished and on any pending work that the next team will see to completion.

And finally, I express my sincere gratitude and heartfelt appreciation to the wonderful extended family here at our Ministry of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism for welcoming me and working so diligently together to accomplish so much. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to our partners at the Palau Visitors Authority, the Belau Tourism Association, the Palau Chamber of Commerce, the Palau Pledge, the Boaters Association, the tourism sector and the state governments. May the Lord continue to bless you and your families, and our Republic of Palau.

Sincerely,

Kevin N. Mesebeluu

Updates on Project to Integrate Biodiversity Safeguards into Development

Babeldaob JCB Adopts Island-wide Vision

JCB, accompanied by secretariat, adopt Island-wide Vision.

The Babeldaob Joint Coordination Body (JCB) adopted an Island-wide "Vision and Core Values for Development on Babeldaob, Palau" on September 23, 2020. The Babeldaob JCB includes diverse representatives from all 10 States. The Vision balances biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, equitable benefits, respect for culture, and traditional values with sustainable growth and economic development. Read the Vision online: https://sites.google.com/view/gef6palau/babeldaob-jcb/vision. A similar visioning and planning process is underway with Koror and Peleliu via their JCB. This actionable Vision will guide future Landscape/Seascape Plans, marine spatial and land use plans, and Master Plans.

GEF6 Completes First PIR

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) 6 Project completed its first Project Implementation Report (PIR) in September, and received a rating of "Moderately Satisfactory." This is the first time the Project has analyzed its impact on biodiversity, threats, and gender and social inclusion. Indicators were updated, with increases in total protected area, capacity scores, and gender representation. An Indicator Tracking Tool is publicly available to help with mainstreaming of nationwide reporting efforts. "For a first PIR, the reporting against the Development Objective progress tab is excellent. The project is proceeding well with its foundational work that will support achievement of targets," according to the UNDP-GEF Technical Advisor. Download the 1st Palau GEF6 PIR.

Knowledge Management with GEF

Ms. Charmaine Bitlaol.

The GEF6 website is regularly updated and is an access point and repository for policies, laws, information, and reports. National policies and plans, a continually updated library of Best Practices,

Ms. Ongelibel Remengesau and Ms. Carol Emaurois.

templates, GEF6 documents, lessons learned, and links to photos and the INFORM Database are on the site. A Digital Library now has a search feature: https://sites.google.com/view/gef6palau/digital-library. Ongelibel Remengesau (GEF6) and Charmaine Bitlaol (GEF5) gave an excellent overview of knowledge management and government transparency at the 3rd National Environment Symposium.

3rd National Environment Symposium

The ministry played many key roles in organizing the 3rd National Environment Symposium (NES) held on August 18, 2020. From participating in the planning teams to conducting interviews to preparing the policy brief, every office and project in the ministry participated in some way. All materials from the NES are on the GEF6 website: https://sites.google.com/view/gef6palau/national-environment-symposium.

Participants at the 3rd National Environmental Symposium.

Together with other partners, the NES Planning Team is continuing the conversation (#dolemolem) and pushing for uptake of NES Recommendations. At a recent candidate briefing, one candidate said "If I win the election, the first bills I will do will involve Economic, Food, and Energy Securities."

Enforcement Partners Collaboratively Draft Assessment

The ministry facilitates recent workshop with regulatory or enforcement authority - Environmental Quality Protection Board, Division of Fish & Wildlife Protection (DFWP), Biosecurity, ministry (legal counsel), Bureau of Agriculture & National Invasive Species Coordinator, Bureau of Tourism, Koror State Department of Conservation & Law Enforcement, Protected Areas Network and Bureau of Marine Resources. The group is working sector-by-sector to identify gaps and capacity needs for better enforcement of existing laws and regulations and identifying needs for improved legal structures. They are collaborating online using Google Docs to develop a single Enforcement Assessment Report. In addition to identifying gaps (e.g. DFWP can only prosecute cases, they don't have the capacity to issue citations), the work is streamlining messaging and processes (e.g. all new aquaculture farms are to be directed to BMR first for mainstreaming of best practices).

State Actions on the Ground

Ngchesar restoration team.

From the tip of Babeldaob all the way to Peleliu, states implemented GEF6 restoration activities on the ground to improve Palau's environment. Degraded lands were restored through community planting efforts in Ngarchelong,

Ngeremlengui, and Ngchesar; streams were cleared following traditional practices in Ngardmau, Ngiwal, and Aimeliik; and invasive species were cleared in Peleliu. Ngaraard finalized its Action Plan to plant an agro-forest on a burn site, and Koror continued revising its management plan and conducted research on carrying capacity. Each state worked closely with the ministry and GEF6 to draft action plans, use best practices and mainstream gender and social benefits. Airai, Melekeok, and Ngatpang are partners on the Babeldaob JCB.

KAP Survey reaches 100 individuals

The GEF6 Project surveyed 100 youth (18-34), adults (35-59), and elders (60+) to determine baseline Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) towards invasive alien species (IAS), biosecurity, and land use planning. Analysis is underway.

Ms. Remengesau conducting survey in Peleliu.

The survey also collected information on how respondents get information. 91% of youth and ~64% of adults access the internet via a smartphone or use Facebook or Instagram. Elders and adults were more likely to get information from newspapers or printed announcements. Radio listenership appears to decrease with distance from Koror; however commutes remain important for listening to the radio. 85% of surveyed adults were aware of IAS followed by 76% of youth; 46% of elders were not aware of the term "IAS".

Protected Areas Network Project Update with Ministry of Justice

July 23, 2020 – The Protected Areas Network hosted a meeting with Minister Sengebau and Vice President & Minister of Justice Raynold Oilouch to give an update on the progress of the enforcement project, a collaborative project with the Ministry of Justice and PAN Fund, to create a conservation academy curriculum tailored to meet the needs of the states' conservation efforts and its rangers.

During this meeting, the Ministry of Justice and our ministry's coordinators for the project discussed other challenges as well as timelines of the deliverables for the project as they are working with off-island consultants to finalize the conservation curriculum.

Vice President Oilouch with Minister Sengebau and officials from PAN and partners.

Both Minister Sengebau and Vice President Oilouch advised to continue the project and focus on building the capacity of the rangers in terms of needed skills and competency through the newly adopted PAN Ranger Manual. The Network will work together with its partners and state programs to see this project through despite its challenges and delays.

Workshop on Implementing Ranger Manual Conducted

August 26, 2020 – The PAN Office in collaboration with state PAN coordinators and various partner agencies have developed a comprehensive PAN Ranger Manual that was endorsed by Minister Sengebau in November 2019 that now requires all PAN sites to execute. A workshop was conducted to familiarize senior PAN Rangers and coordinators on implementing the manual.

During the workshop, coordinators and senior rangers went over several chapters in the manual that covered topics such as building ranger capacity, law enforcement, ranger responsibilities, conduct, uniforms and disciplinary actions, to name a few. The group went over inspection procedures and finalized an inspection checklist in addition to discussions about skills and competency needs. Understanding the purpose and content of this manual will help PAN rangers effectively carry out their responsibilities under their respective state PAN programs as well as support the national government enforce its environmental laws and regulations. The manual is a working document and will be revised as necessary to address emerging issues, best practices and adaptive management needs.

Photos of recently conducted workshop with PAN officials and state program representatives.

PAN and State Governments Discuss its Future in the Global Pandemic

September 2, 2020 – The Protected Areas Network met with the Governors Association to discuss funding concerns for what their state PAN Programs will look like in the future due to the global pandemic. Through the PAN Act, funding is received through the collection of green fees from visitors to Palau. With the sudden decline in visitors due to the global pandemic, fees collected are not enough to fund operations for the Network, which is a concern for state governments. Through this meeting, PAN Office and PAN Fund assured state governments that they are actively exploring opportunities to ensure that state programs continue. In turn, the state programs agreed to limit and prioritize activities to surveillance and monitoring to save costs, as well as avoid hiring new personnel, among other things, for the time being.

PAN would like to assure state governments and the wider community that it is doing all it can to ensure continued operations to safeguard Palau's natural and cultural resources. Currently, both PAN Office and PAN Fund are looking into its savings as well as working on obtaining grants to cover costs beyond the minimum of personnel funding, such as eco-tourism and communications and marketing. PAN asks for continued cooperation and support from the community and its leadership to get through this pandemic together. The ministry and PAN are confident that with the support of the state governments and the people of Palau, we will discover more innovative ways to support Palau's conservation efforts.

Meet Ms. Sahar Hanser

Our Ministry's Profiled Employee for the Quarter

Ms. Sahar Hanser.

Ms. Sahar Hanser, born and raised here, is grateful to call herself a Palauan. After graduating Palau Community College in 2006 with an associate degree in Liberal Arts, Ms. Hanser eventually moved to Guam and received a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Guam in 2015. Two months after graduation, Ms. Hanser found herself sitting at a job interview at the Palau International Coral Reef Center for a position as a Communications & Outreach Officer. Ms. Hanser knew this position was perfect for her because it allowed her to be part of the conservation movement despite having no science background or the technical expertise. During her year at PICRC, Ms. Hanser was able to work with various local and international conservation experts and leaders, including Minister Sengebau himself.

After a year working at PICRC, Ms. Hanser decided to branch out and eventually found herself applying for a project assistant position within the Ministry in 2017 where she supported a lot of communications and outreach work for sustainable land management and watershed protection for two years. She then moved to the PAN Office as a Communications Officer in 2019 and has been there for nearly two years now. Her main responsibilities as Communications Officer includes supporting the PAN Program by developing and implementing the PAN communications plan as well as support and maintain PAN program communications with various PAN stakeholder groups, collaborators and partner agencies, maintain project documentation and support the ministry's goals in environment and natural resource management.

Ms. Hanser mentions how she is fortunate to have found a place in the community where she can help Palau advance its work in conservation, without having to be a technical expert herself. She expresses that she is happy to work with a lot of local and knowledgeable experts from the ministry and from the communities. Her goal is to document and communicate all the experiences, challenges and lessons in Palau's conservation movement to the communities that depend on the environment and its natural resources so that they are able to make better informed environment and natural resource management decisions.

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 December.