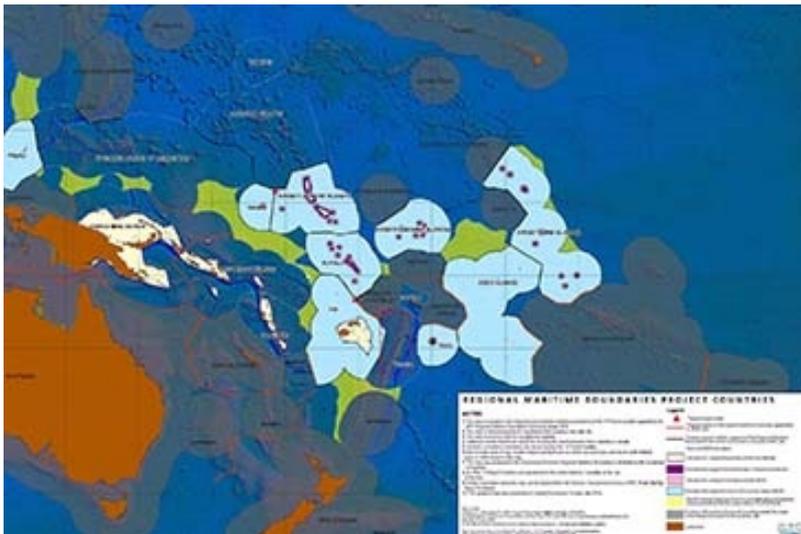




Media release



3 September 2015, Pohnpei

This month the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) is responding to requests from the Republic of Palau, Republic of the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) to assist these countries to formalise their maritime boundaries and Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs).

Under international law, a country has the right and responsibility to delineate and map its own maritime boundaries.

“In the Pacific, due to the close proximity of islands, Exclusive Economic Zones often overlap,” explained SPC’s Maritime Boundaries Technical Officer, Emily Artack.

SPC supports maritime boundary progress in the North Pacific

Written by

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“Thus, there’s a need for countries to negotiate maritime boundary agreements. Once an agreement or treaty is formalised and signed by the leaders, then the countries know exactly the limits of their own extended maritime areas,” Ms Artack said.

This is particularly important when it comes to the management of resources within those EEZs, including fisheries and deep sea minerals.

According to annual data collected by SPC’s Oceanic Fisheries Programme, 40% of the global tuna catch is fished in the EEZs of Pacific Community island members, making the tuna industry the most lucrative and critical export for the Pacific Islands region at present.

In 2013 alone, 230,000 metric tonnes of tuna were caught in Palau, Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) alone—a value of almost USD 600 million.

A workshop began on Tuesday (31 August) at the National Oceanic Resource Management Authority office in Pohnpei, FSM, on maritime boundaries development for relevant stakeholders in FSM.

To further build capacity and awareness in the North Pacific, SPC will also coordinate a sub-regional workshop for the representatives from Palau, Marshall Islands and FSM next week.

Both workshops involve facilitation by SPC and Australia’s Attorney General’s Department and are supported under the Enhanced Pacific Ocean Governance (EPOG) grant from the Government of Australia.

In the past, the maritime boundary negotiations of the Northern Pacific countries were often assisted by external consultants, but the countries are increasingly taking the lead on this responsibility.

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To facilitate this transition, Ms Artack relocated from the SPC Geoscience Division in Suva to the SPC North Pacific office in Pohnpei, FSM, in late July for a period of two months.

Countries have expressed their appreciation to SPC for this additional support. It is hoped that this initiative will open the door to more short-term skill transfer opportunities from SPC to the North Pacific.

The Chairman of Palau's Territory and Boundary Task Force, Fritz Koshiba, was grateful to have SPC's technical support during negotiations with Indonesia and the Philippines at the end of July.

"Ms Artack helped in reviewing satellite imagery, developing maps for internal and external use, contributing to the development of Palau's positions and providing general advice based on her past experiences," said Mr Koshiba.

From her Pohnpei base, Ms Artack is better able to work with the Maritime Boundary Taskforce teams and other key stakeholders in the North Pacific.

"Interacting on a daily basis with the relevant government officers on the ground shows SPC's level of commitment to the countries and it is really appreciated," said Ms Artack who has been assisting Pacific Island countries and territories in delimiting, negotiating, and preparing their maritime boundaries submissions to the United Nations since 2004.

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