

## Atoll restricts collection of the Napoleon wrasse, sharks

Ailuk Atoll's local government and community are being praised by Majuro-based officials for having a strong interest in sustainable development.

As part of this effort, the atoll is getting technical assistance from the Marshall Islands Marine Resources Authority and Natural Resources Assessment Surveys (NRAS), a local non-government organization (NGO).

Underwater surveys were conducted at Ailuk in May and June last year under the leadership of Dr. Silvia Pinca of NRAS.

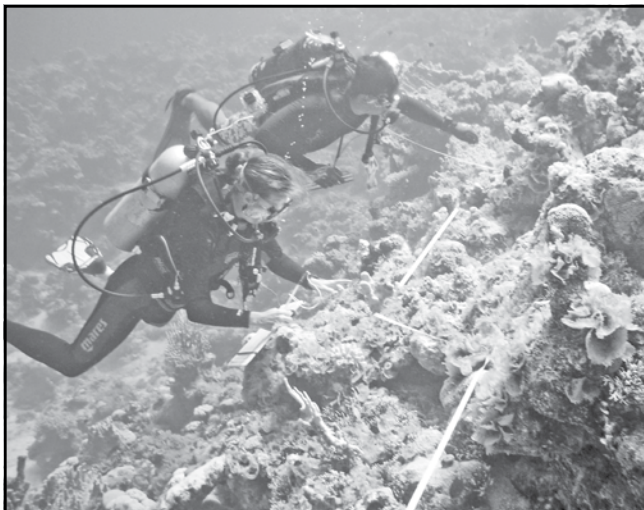
MIMRA officers and NRAS technical advisors held meetings with the community before, during, and after the surveys. The aim is for community ownership of this project, which is intended to help them in the effective management of their marine resources, said Frankie Harriss NRAS's project manager.

"Because the community of Ailuk was so progressive in their thinking, and dedicated to making positive changes in order to develop in a sustainable manner, further projects were undertaken by NRAS, with assistance from MIMRA officers, and in-kind support from CMI," she said. These projects were primarily funded by a grant from the Australian government, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Regional Natural Heritage Program (RNHP). A community-based approach to management and conservation of marine resources and biodiversity in Ailuk has been successful.

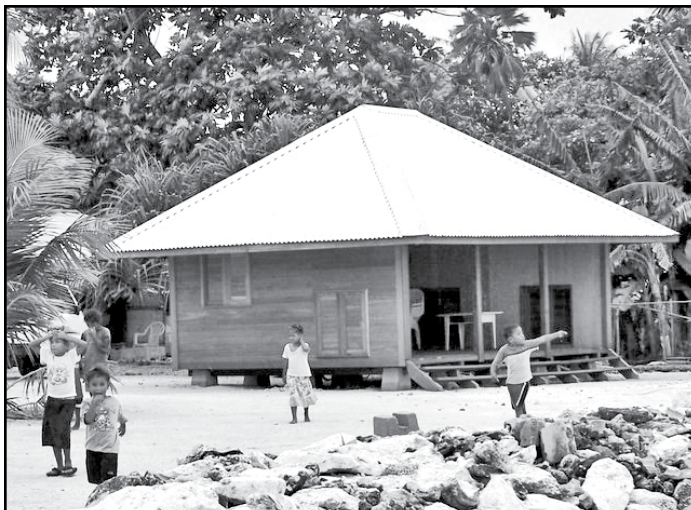
Harriss pointed out that years of local traditional knowledge should not be discounted and the community needs to actively participate in decision-making. Having the local community play a central role in the fisheries management plan has given them ownership and a more vested interest in its successful implementation, she added. To do this, the community formed a special committee, the Ailuk Ook Fisheries committee, made up of representatives from local government and all major groups within the community, including traditional leaders, women's groups, fishermen, peoples of the main populated islands, and the youth group.

The committee has established marine conservation sites as part of its fisheries management plan. In addition, they have put restrictions on the collection of the Napoleon wrasse, sharks, manta rays, lobsters, sea turtles, and cetaceans, not only for conservation purposes, but also keeping in mind the extreme value of these species in association with future tourism efforts.

In January 2007, to promote sustainable jobs, six trainees were selected by the fisheries committee to receive training in the



Left: Frankie Harriss and Alejandro Gonzalez collect data from Ailuk reefs in June 2006. Right: The educational center. Below: The Ailuk Ook Fisheries committee, including Mayor Cradle Alfred (third from right) with MIMRA officer Albon Ishoda (fifth from right).



*'To promote sustainable jobs, six trainees were selected by the fisheries committee to receive training in the farming of corals.'*

farming of corals, both hard and soft, from Simon Ellis of the Marine and Environmental Research Institute of Pohnpei (MERIP). Also during that time, Dr. Joanna Ellison, of the University of Tasmania, worked with community members to conduct a mangrove population study and assessed the atoll for potential means to mitigate coastal erosion. Workshops were held to inform the community about coral farming, sea level rise, and on simple ways and practices they could employ to reduce

the amount of erosion occurring along their shorelines.

An educational awareness and information center was built in Ailuk with the assistance of Dennis Alessio and John Kawakami of Waan Aelon in Majel in June.

The Ministry of Public Works provided support in delivering the building materials and more than twenty local volunteers assisted in completing the construction.

The center houses educational materials related to conservation of marine resources intended for both the community and tourists. In addition, it will provide office space for the fisheries management officer, Jommy Bunglick, which will include a radio, as part of the Island Radio Network headed by Marshall Islands Conservation Society.

Both Harriss and MIMRA officer Albon Ishoda have both been impressed by the initiative of the local government, traditional leaders, fisheries committee, and the community as a whole.

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