

# IWRM in Palau : an achievement story

By Governor Victoria Kanai



## Community to Cabinet at work: Palau's 1st National Water Summit

The IWRM Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) in collaboration with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environmental and Tourism (MNRET) prepared for and ran the 1st Palau National Water Summit. The Summit was organised as the first step in the development of a National Water Policy and was an opportunity to bring together various stakeholders from community to government, providing the space to openly discuss important water issues in Palau. Through the Summit it was anticipated that we would engage a wide section of the community and receive feedback from the community about what they saw as their vision for Palau's Water Policy.

The PCU along with the MNRET put a lot of effort into promoting and advertising the Summit to ensure that it was well attended by as wide a range of people as possible. We were able to provide an incentive for community members to attend by offering a free t-shirt to the first 100 people that registered for the summit. This proved to be an excellent way of getting a lot of the general public to come along who may otherwise not have. The PCU visited with different stakeholder groups such as the Governors Association and the Council of Chiefs and gave small presentations about the summit and what we were hoping to achieve in the form of the Water Policy.

We advertised for a month prior to the Summit to provide people with ample time to prepare their schedules. Advertising included a TV show on OTV with members of the wider IWRM team and a Radio Talk show discussing the Water Summit and the outcomes that we were looking forward to. Newspaper ads and flyers inviting all members of the community to the Summit were also distributed. We realised that achieving good attendance at a high level event would require plenty of advance advertising, briefing different stakeholder groups to spark their interest and ensuring they are involved in the process.

Because of these preparatory measures we were able to achieve a high turnout at the Summit and generate a lot of interest in what the

IWRM project was doing. In his opening address, President Toribiong urged participants to work together as the creation of the Water Policy was only the first step in ensuring the conservation and protection of Palau's water resources in the years to come stating, "Only together can we ensure water forever".



President Toribiong giving his keynote address

In order to create this space for community engagement we understood the importance of reaching the community and getting feedback on what information they required. As a team we incorporated information that community members wanted to know into the summit proceedings, thus tailoring the meeting to the actual needs of the community, ensuring their genuine participation in



Mr. Jinx Brikul participating in the water summit

its outcomes. During the meeting we facilitated a question and answers session and group discussions where people could raise opinions and concerns. Mr. Jinx Brikul a water operator said "I am happy I came to the Water Summit because, as my shirt says 'Community Choice', and the summit provided me with an opportunity to raise concerns about my needs as a water operator in Palau".

I was proud that we successfully provided Palau's first water summit. I learned the importance of planning ahead and on proper advertisements that ensure people are well informed about the event ahead of time. We were equally pleased when people continued to attend subsequent Policy meetings. Mr. Joe Aitaro, the Protected Areas Network Coordinator, said, "These are important events in a small island like Palau where the emerging impacts of climate change are even more of a reason to manage the water we have today, in order to secure our children's future." Seeing community members involved in the development of their own Water Policy showed a commitment to the future and made the policy development a truly participatory process.

Before this event I wasn't sure of people's willingness to be involved in high level meetings and policy development; however during the Summit I realised that with enough appropriate information they do. As a result of attending the National Water Summit people became more aware of the issues facing water resources in Palau, the need for a National Water Policy and how it can alleviate problems with water and sanitation, and gave them a chance to participate in its development. Because of so many people attending the summit, the Palau Water Policy can now say it is representative of the visions of the people of Palau.

The meeting was a catalyst to subsequent meetings that led to the finalization of a National Water Policy and its endorsement by His Excellency President Johnson Toribiong in April 2011. It was a great achievement for IWRM because not only did it encourage people to find out more about water resources in Palau, it allowed us to tailor the Water Policy according to the actual needs of the Palauan people.