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Responsibility

Palau to develop aquaculture sector with UNEP support

26 July 2022

By Responsible Seafood Advocate

UNEP-led aquaculture project to complement marine conservation initiatives

In 2015, Palau designated 193,000 square miles of its maritime territory a protected reserve, where no fishing can occur. While it's helped protect marine life, it has also created a challenge: How can the country ensure its focus on conservation does not come at the expense of job creation and economic growth?

Palau, with support from the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), is examining one possible solution: aquaculture. The country's officials are hoping to build an environmentally friendly aquaculture industry, which will provide jobs and ensure its 18,000 residents are not dependent on wild fish stocks.

"Palau's aquaculture industry has huge potential," said Tsunghan Lee, an aquaculture consultant who works for the Palau government. "But it is still nascent. There are only two commercial-scale aquaculture farms, which produce fish for bait, and eleven fish farms at sea."

The country has one of the most biologically diverse underwater ecosystems globally. Yet unsustainable development practices, the impacts of climate change, overharvesting of natural



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resources and ongoing expansion of tourism represent significant threats to Palau’s environmental quality and biodiversity.

A blue banner for the Responsible Seafood Conference (GOAL) in Seattle, 2022. On the left, there is a silhouette of the Seattle skyline with the Space Needle. The text reads: "FAIRMONT OLYMPIC HOTEL", "OCTOBER 3-6", and a large "REGISTER" button with a mouse cursor icon. In the center is the "goal" logo, which features a stylized fish and the text "SEATTLE • 2022". On the right, it says "THE RESPONSIBLE SEAFOOD CONFERENCE" and "CONNECT. COLLABORATE. COMMIT."

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“Many of the human-induced ecosystem changes currently occurring on and around these fragile islands are irreversible,” Sang Jin Lee, task manager within the UNEP – Global Environment Fund Biodiversity Unit.

These issues extend to the country’s aquaculture industry, which according to Sang Jin Lee has suffered from limited planning, capacity and coordination: “This has often resulted in unintended ecosystem impacts, and mismatches in seedling production, needs, and sites for aquaculture farms,”

he said.

The UNEP-led project will guide the development of the aquaculture sector to complement Palau's legacy of marine biodiversity conservation.

"When developed responsibly, aquaculture represents a significant opportunity to simultaneously meet the three pillars of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: ending poverty and hunger and promoting prosperity, while protecting the planet from degradation," said Lee.

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