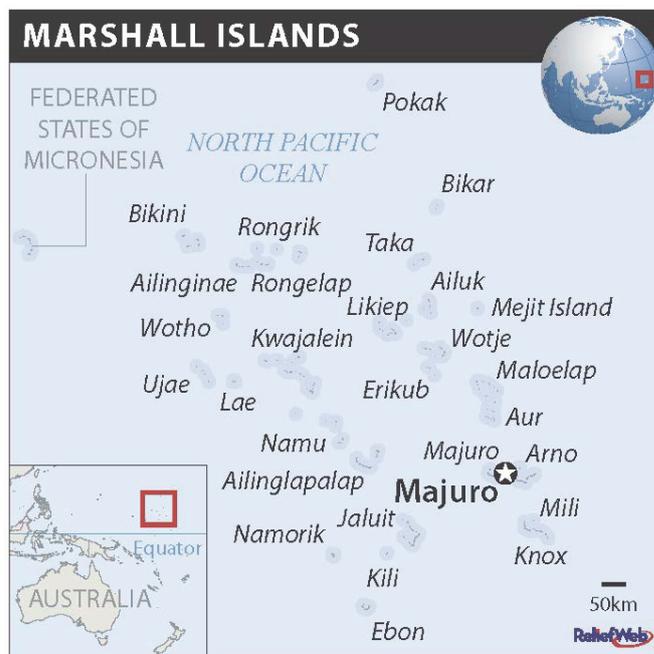




This report is produced by OCHA in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It was issued by the OCHA Regional Office for the Pacific. It covers the period from 1 May to 9 May 2013. The next report will be issued on or around 16 May 2013.

Highlights

- The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) Cabinet issued an elevated state of disaster on 7 May as the prolonged and severe drought in the northern parts of the country worsens.
- There is a high likelihood that RMI will remain in drought conditions through July based on ENSO Pacific updates.
- An UNDAC team has been deployed arriving in RMI on 9 May.
- Assessments are on-going, however, water tanks are empty and wells are unsafe for drinking. Most of the seven reverse osmosis units are operating below-capacity.
- Additional reverse osmosis units, spare parts, delivery of water bladders, immediate and long-term assistance on food security, and a crisis support plan for communicable health issues related to water security are needed.
- The National Disaster Committee established an Emergency Operations Centre on 9 May.



Map Sources: UNCS, Gov't. of U.S.A.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created Jun 2010 - www.reliefweb.int

3,200 – 5,000

People living in the affected atolls

Situation Overview

Republic of the Marshall Islands

A state of emergency declared on 19 April in Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) was elevated to a state of disaster on 7 May as a prolonged and severe drought affecting the northern islands continues unabated, putting lives at risk. The declaration of disaster was made after initial assessment reports (from four of the more than six affected atolls) indicated that water scarcity in some communities is severe; desalination units put in as a measure to reduce scarcity were failing, and cases of diarrhea and other drought-related illnesses were on the rise.

The Pacific El Niño-Southern Oscillation Update issued on 2 May indicates below average rainfall is forecast through July over RMI. The likelihood is for northern RMI to stay in drought conditions for at least another month and probably two, however, seasonal rainfall is expected to increase in June as the monsoon establishes over continental Asia and the northwest Pacific. It will take several months of normal rainfall for groundwater to be replenished and longer still for food crops to recover.

Assessment reports from four atolls with an est. pop. 1,500 people found that Reverse Osmosis (RO) units were not fully operational on the islands. On most atolls surveyed the majority of domestic water tanks are 100 per cent empty and water from a high proportion of wells are considered unsafe to drink due to bacterial contamination and salinity levels. The assessment highlighted the high risk/concerns for health issues, particularly relating to diarrhea in children. Food crops including breadfruit, banana and taro are also reportedly devastated due to the prolonged drought.

RMI Government operated ships (MV Landrik and MV Ribukae) have begun transporting relief items including full water containers and hygiene kits stocked in IOM-managed warehouses, to 567 households in the worst-affected communities. The first ship was deployed to the north-east section of the Marshall Islands and the second ship was deployed to the north-western section.

Government financial resources to meet the demands of the emergency response are reportedly rapidly depleting and making it more difficult for the RMI Government to provide adequate relief and assistance to the affected communities.

Following requests for international assistance USAID/OFDA and AusAID have responded with grants of approximately US\$100,000 each to support logistics and additional desalination units. The RMI Government will also receive an OCHA Emergency Cash Grant of US\$50,000 to assist with immediate response efforts.

A three-member United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has been deployed to RMI to assist with response coordination, assessments and information management for an initial two-week period.

The PHT WASH cluster lead by UNICEF has been activated. On 7 May, the Pacific Humanitarian Team met and held a conference call with the RMI Chief Secretary and National Disaster Committee Chair to discuss the current assessment results, outstanding needs and current levels of international support. PHT partners also discussed international response committed and pledged.

Humanitarian Response



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Needs:

- Immediate access to fresh water supplies.
- Assessment reports from Mejit and Utrik Atolls from 2-3 May recommend:
 - Drinking water to be increased from 2 gallons/day/household to 1.5 gallons/person/day.
 - Every island to have a minimum of 2 RO units, with enough water produced per unit to rotate daily the usage of the units.
 - Each RO unit has at least ten 5-micron filters, a complete o-ring and gasket set, 6 membrane preservative chemicals, 4 alkaline membrane cleaners, silicone grease and ample tools to perform regular maintenance tasks.
 - Local technicians trained in the operation and maintenance of the RO units.

Response:

- Seven RO units have been donated by USAID and deployed in February/March to alleviate the acute shortage of water and related drought impacts. These RO units are on Ujae Atoll, Lae Atoll, Wocho Atoll, Namu Atoll, Ailuk Atoll, Wotje Atoll and Mejit Atoll.
- Two RMI Government operated ships have been deployed to the north-east and north-west islands between 6 May and 8 May, carrying full water containers and hygiene kits.
- NFI/hygiene kits have been provided by IOM.
- One water expert has been provided by USAID for an initial two-week period.
- One WASH technical expert can be provided by UNICEF (under consideration).
- Four desalination units are being provided by AusAID with a value of US\$100,000 (under consideration).
- UNICEF has provided the RMI Government with information on relevant and available WASH supplies including WASH kits and messaging material for the affected communities.

Gaps & Constraints:

- The existing RO units are operating at below-capacity despite filter changes. Some units require urgent delivery of spare parts.
- The RMI Chief Secretary (and National Disaster Committee Chair) reported that the additional seven RO units committed may not arrive in time to meet affected people's needs.
- It is unclear what measures are in place and what the needs are for water purification (to reduce bacterial contamination).



Logistics

Response:

- USAID committed US\$100,000 towards logistics costs for the assessment.

Gaps & Constraints:

- There are noted logistics and financial constraints for delivering relief items to the outer islands, particularly high fuel costs.



Food Security

Needs:

- Immediate and long-term assistance on food security.
- Assessment reports from Mejit and Utrik Atolls from 2-3 May recommend increasing availability and access to other sources of nutritious staple food in the short- and long-term.

Response:

- One Food/Agriculture expert has been deployed by USAID for an initial two-week period.
- One SPC Food Security Expert has been deployed with the assessment teams.
- The two RMI Government operated ships which left between 6 and 8 May, carried food supplies to 567 households in the worst-affected communities. The staple items included rice, tinned food and vegetables to meet a family's needs for 10 days.
- One FAO Food Security Expert (PHT Food Security Cluster Coordinator) will be in RMI from 19 to 24 May to support the response as requested by the RMI Government.

Gaps:

- Composition of food supplies to be reviewed to ensure that the nutritional needs of children and pregnant and lactating mothers is being met.



Health

Needs:

- On 7 May, the RMI Minister of Health confirmed that there have been cases of diarrhea and influenza. He confirmed that more medications and pharmaceuticals would be needed.
- Assessment reports from Mejit and Utrik Atolls on 2-3 May:
 - Reported cases of gastritis, diarrhea with vomiting, abdominal pain, fever among children and hepatitis. More males than females suffered from gastritis.
 - Recommended basic hygiene materials e.g. soap and toothpaste be provided to households by international partners i.e. IOM.
 - Recommended provision of medicine, awareness training on basic hygiene practices.

Response:

- WHO is collecting information on health implications of this disaster from various sources and will explore the possible options of relieve support from the Health and Nutrition Cluster in collaboration with the WASH Cluster.
- UNICEF has provided the RMI Government with information on relevant and available health supplies including oral rehydration salts.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Surveillance of diarrhea and disease outbreaks need strengthening.

General Coordination

Following an RMI Government request, OCHA has dispatched a 3-member United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team to assist with response coordination, assessments and information management. The UNDAC team will arrive in the capital city Majuro on by 9 May.

UNICEF continues to lead the PHT WASH cluster response. A PHT Partners Meeting was held in Suva, Fiji on Tuesday 7 May. The RMI Chief Secretary and National Disaster Committee Chair provided an update on discuss the current assessment results, outstanding needs and current levels of international support. PHT partners continue to share information and coordinate international response efforts.

The RMI Government will direct specific requests for international assistance through the UN joint-presence representative in RMI.

Background on the crisis

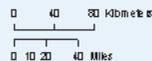
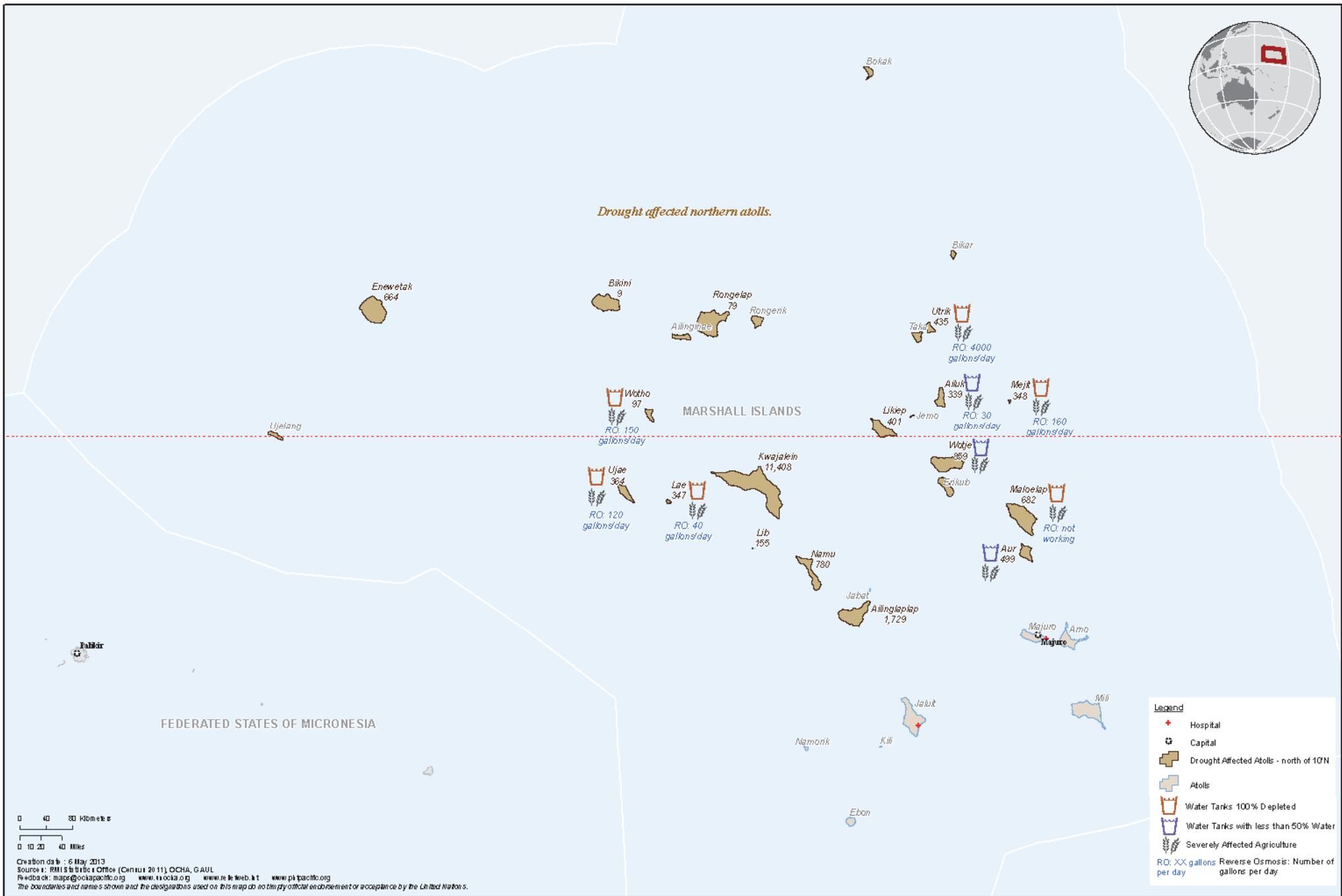
Located just north of the equator in the Pacific Ocean, the Republic of the Marshall Islands is made up of 1,200 islands, islets and atolls with a land area of 180 square kilometers. On 19 April 2013, the Government of the Republic of Marshall Islands declared a state of emergency due to a severe drought conditions in the northern atolls/islands of the Republic.

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For more information, please visit www.phtpacific.org, www.unocha.org/roap, www.reliefweb.int



Creation date : 6 May 2013
 Source : RMI Statistics Office (Census 2011), OCHA, GAUL
 Feedback: maps@oicapacific.org www.oicapacific.org www.ocha.org www.rmiweb.net www.pacific.org
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