



The pristine and famous Rock Islands of Palau, attracting tourists from all over the world

Participation in the Sub-Committee on Aquaculture held in India

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This is to briefly reflect on my experience while attending the FAO COFI's Third Session of the Sub-committee on Aquaculture held in New Delhi, and a visit to Bangkok to see their aquaculture farms in September, 2006.

Palau is known as one of the world's most beautiful places, lined with rivers and mangroves up north, and pristine beaches and coral reefs in the south. Our main industries are fishing and tourism. Our economy is heavily subsidized by the United States of America under the Compact of Free Association funding, and grants from Japan and Taiwan, Province of China.

We recently started aquaculture in Ngatpang State, and I was invited to attend the Conference in India to learn more about aquaculture as it is done in other countries. This meeting was a rewarding experience for me in many ways. It showed me how important aquaculture is to the world, but also how different the problems we are facing in Palau are, compared to those of most other aquaculture island nations. It also made me more aware of how careful we have to manage our resources to avoid some of the problems these other nations are facing at present, and the need for better long-term management plans.

We are lucky in Palau that there is yet no hunger, poverty, pollution, or shortage of seafood in our islands. In fact, from an aquaculture point of view, Palau is unique in that it still has an abundance of seafood. The reason we started aquaculture here is that we start seeing the increase in demand for fresh seafood from our Asian tourist markets, and we want to avoid over-harvesting our coral reefs and mangroves before it becomes a real problem. So we are starting aquaculture here not to feed the poor, but to preserve our wild stocks and prevent damage due to over-harvesting.

Challenges facing Palau's aquaculture are many, including a high minimum wage and limited number of local workers/farmers interested, so workers and all expertise have to be hired from outside, making it an expensive undertaking. Traditional fishing methods here are slowly getting lost, and these traditional fishermen are the people we need to train to become aquaculture farmers, but they are used to the old ways, so more training programs are needed.

We are glad that FAO has taken notice of our efforts, and we hope to work more closely with them in developing our aquaculture here. We need organizations like the FAO to reach out to small island nations like ours and to educate and train our people about the importance of aquaculture to our islands, as well as share the information from the different island nations so we can compare and learn from each other.

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Conference on "FAO International Conference on Organic Agriculture and Food Security", 3-5 May 2007, Rome, Italy. Further information may be obtained at <http://www.fao.org/organicag/>, or via e-mail: Matthias.Halwart@fao.org



Aerial photo of Ngatpang State dock, showing the aquaculture farm, in Palau



First harvest of milkfish with local dignitaries including the President of Palau

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Further information can be obtained by writing to Jochen.Nierentz@fao.org or visiting the website <http://www.globefish.org/index.php?id=3551>