



## GOVERNMENT OF KIRIBATI

GoK(12)DPF.(Presentation 3)

### DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS FORUM

*Tarawa, Kiribati*  
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### AGENDA ITEM 3: PHOENIX ISLANDS PROTECTED AREA (PIPA)

#### Purpose

1. The purpose of the project is to ensure effective, long-term protection, conservation and management of the terrestrial and marine biodiversity in the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA), including its cultural heritage and values, through sustained financing for PIPA's management, investment in sustainable development, and financial support to applied research. The successful accomplishment of this objective presupposes (a) improved public and donor community awareness of the benefits of PIPA to the Kiribati economy and to the fishery industry, both regionally and globally; (b) increased strategic management capacities; (c) improved targeting of investments in line with identified priorities as per the PIPA Management Plan 2011-2014; and (d) PIPA's financial sustainability.

#### Background

2. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) is the Government of Kiribati's conservation and sustainable use strategy for the Phoenix Islands and surrounding marine environment. It is an integrated approach to biodiversity conservation with key elements of sustainable financing, atoll restoration, coastal coral reef and lagoon/offshore/open-ocean/deep-sea fisheries conservation management, conservation of threatened and globally important species, market for biodiversity goods and services, and adaptation to climate change. Importantly, PIPA underscores Kiribati's commitment to regional and international agreements and conventions such as Party to the Nauru Agreement, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), World Heritage Convention, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and many more.
3. PIPA is currently the world's second largest declared marine protected area (MPA), the largest in the Pacific Ocean (not for long), and the largest committed to by a developing country. It contributes an estimated 9.8% by area of global MPA effort.

4. With a size of approximately 410,000 Km<sup>2</sup> - about the size of the State of California in the US - PIPA hosts an interesting and huge diversity of terrestrial and marine habitats – birds, atoll, low reef islands, submerged reef, seamount and deep seabed as well as open ocean habitats. It embraces a range of associated marine environments that display high levels of marine abundance as well as a full spectrum of age and size cohorts, increasingly rare in the tropics, and specially in the case of the apex predator fish, sea turtle, seabirds, corals, giant clams and coconut crabs, most of which have been depleted elsewhere.
5. The biodiversity and ecosystem structure in PIPA does not resemble the typical coral reefs of today. In contrast, because of their remoteness, these reefs are what a reef might have looked like one thousand years ago, before humankind's impacts, such as coastal development and over fishing, were felt so strongly in the global oceans. In addition to the discovery of new species, biologists were surprised to find normally rare Pacific coral reef species in abundance in the Phoenix Islands. One such species is the Napoleon Wrasse, a large, hump-headed fish that is disappearing from other Pacific reefs at a rapid rate due to over fishing. The healthy shark populations are another rare and amazing site. With the global shark fin trade decimating shark populations worldwide, PIPA is a sanctuary where these crucial top predators can revive their populations.
6. PIPA is of crucial scientific importance in identifying and monitoring the process of sea level change, assessing growth rates and age of reefs and reef builders (both geologically and historically), and evaluating absolute and relative efforts from climate change. The reef systems are so remote and exhibit such near pristine conditions that PIPA can serve as a benchmark for understanding and potentially restoring other degraded hard coral systems in Kiribati and elsewhere in the Pacific. Because of the relative absence of anthropogenic influences, PIPA is in itself a unique natural laboratory for understanding the growth of reefs, the evolutionary process of reef systems, biological behavioural studies, recruitment processes in isolation, size classes and population dynamics of marine organism groups and reef species diversity studies.
7. As a known breeding site for numerous nomadic migratory and pelagic marine and terrestrial specials, PIPA makes a significant contribution to the understanding of ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of global marine ecosystems and conservation of plants and animals.
8. It is because of these unique values of PIPA and its importance to science and global conservation efforts that the Government of Kiribati and its partners, New England Aquarium and Conservation International, took a bold decision in 2006 to declare the Phoenix Islands a protected area. This decision culminated in the historic inscription of PIPA on the UNESCO World Heritage list in August 2010. At this time PIPA is the largest and deepest listed World Heritage site on earth.

9. Expected global environmental benefits that the PIPA programme will generate include: (i) demonstration of an integrated MPA development across all tropical marine ecosystems (atoll, lagoon, coral reef, offshore and deep sea habitats); (ii) conservation of possibly the World's last relatively pristine coral atoll archipelago; (iii) protection of globally important threatened species e.g. seabirds (18 nesting species, world's largest breeding site for lesser frigate birds, green and hawksbill turtle feeding and nesting grounds) and conservation of largest known remaining population of key fish species, e.g. Napoleon Wrasse; (iv) first conservation of a tuna spawning ground; (v) the recognition of an outstanding universal value (World Heritage) of the Phoenix Islands.

## Issues

10. Development of protected areas in the Pacific Islands region and globally faces a fundamental set of issues to demonstrate effectiveness and success. These include the need to: (i) promote investment at a scale or size to achieve necessary national, regional and global benefits; (ii) successfully demonstrate marine protected areas (MPAs) as a useful tool for fisheries management, including pelagic fisheries (e.g. tuna); (iii) demonstrate MPA utility in managing a state's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) as part of an effective marine spatial planning and inclusive of coastal, offshore, deep-sea/seamount and open ocean habitats and the connectivity between them; (iv) address critical urgent invasive species management on vulnerable islands; (v) effectively conserve at an appropriate scale for globally important and threatened species (e.g. seabirds and turtles); and (vi) ensure sustainable financing to achieve success in such protected area objectives.
11. The Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA) offers an unparalleled opportunity to demonstrate effective solutions to these issues by using new innovative approaches such as conservation contracting (e.g. 'reverse fishing license'), a new scale of site investment, support by public-private partnerships and up-scaling to effect new level of conservation achievement in developing states.
12. Marked progress to date on the operationalisation of PIPA and implementation of its strategic action plans as per its Management Plan to address the issues outlined above has been achieved, thanks to the invaluable financial and technical supports by PIPA's overseas partners (Conservation International and New England Aquarium and associate private foundations), Global Environmental Facility (GEF4 PAS), AusAID, and NZAID who, together, have contributed more than \$6 million worth of assistance. However, the focus of assistance has been primarily on conservation objectives (such as strengthening resilience to climate change, restoration of coral reef ecosystems, etc) with little attention to analyse the potential contribution of PIPA to the national and global economy in addition to conservation benefits. Neither was there a rigorous effort to analyse the benefits that might accrue to fisheries through this conservation programme.

This is crucial for the raising and strengthening of awareness by the public, and especially the donor community, of the economic and fisheries importance of the PIPA conservation model which, in turn, is crucial to attract donors' interest to contribute to and support PIPA achieve its objectives. This also has important implications for the financial sustainability of PIPA.

13. There is also the need to develop an integrated investment framework for PIPA that clearly defines the optimal targeting and sequencing of the implementation of strategic action plans as the PIPA Management Plan, as opposed to the haphazard and 'random' implementation of those action plans. For instance, should the strengthening of management and surveillance capacity be of first-order importance in the implementation sequence and what components need to be targeted to make this work?

### **Recommendations**

14. To support the ongoing momentum and current good progress on the implementation of PIPA's Management Plan 2011-2014 and to ensure PIPA's effectiveness and sustainability, concerted effort should be made to explore with potential donors possible assistance and collaboration in the following:
  - 1) A comprehensive study to analyse the potential economic benefits and development outcomes of PIPA's biodiversity conservation programme, in addition to conservation benefits, both at the national and global level. This necessarily includes analysis of potential benefits to the fisheries industry.
  - 2) Development of an integrated framework that clearly defines a package of investment necessary to make the whole PIPA programme work and how this should be implemented and sequenced in an optimal manner to maximize synergy and effectiveness.
  - 3) Strengthening PIPA's management and surveillance capacity.