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FSM Ratifies Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention

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In February 2018, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) Congress ratified the Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention. This formal consent outlines good practice in the protection and management of underwater cultural heritage in the Pacific. Upon receipt of Instrument of Ratification by UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, the process of ratification will be complete for the FSM. March 6-8, 2018, Chuuk State, FSM Office of NACH, and UNESCO hosted the National Consultation on the Underwater Cultural Heritage Safeguarding in the FSM.

Why is FSM interested to ratify/benefits to FSM?

With the destruction, pillage and commercial exploitation of UCH as well as the industrialization of the seabed increasing, the protection of UCH becomes increasingly relevant to FSM's economy and path to self-sufficiency. Underwater Cultural Heritage supports the tourism industry, cultural sustainability, and local subsistence economy of Federated States of Micronesia (FSM).

What is Underwater Cultural Heritage?

Underwater Cultural Heritage refers to the intangible and tangible aspects of culture located in the water, partially or fully submerged. Article 1(A) of the Underwater Cultural Heritage Convention recommends UCH to be at least

100 years old (however it is up to each country to decide period of time). UCH can include sites, structures, human remains, vessels, their cargo, any object of prehistoric character, and marine life related to UCH. For example, the lagoons of the island states support women's roles in societies such as are found in Kosrae and Chuuk, traditional knowledge of navigation, and fish species traded between villages which demonstrate respect from one village to the other as well as promoting peaceful relationships.

Dr. Jun Kimura, Junior Associate Professor of Tokai University in Japan reminds that marine resources in the past have referred only to the natural aspects. Kosrae and Pohnpei State Historic Preservation Offices (HPO) identified the marine resources as cultural resources in Kosraean culture. Discussions at the UCH Workshop raised awareness to UCH resources in each of the FSM States.

UCH in the FSM and its States

Kosrae State Government approaches its resources holistically as is evidenced by the semi-autonomous government agency, Kosrae Island Resource Management Authority (KIRMA). The KIRMA Director, Mr. Blair Charley, reinforces the interconnected relationship between its five units (Historic, Marine, Forestry, Permitting, and Education) of which each unit carries out their part. In particular, the Kosrae HPO identified four UCH sites: Women's roles in lagoon subsistence, traditional routes (terrestrial and aquatic), shipwrecks from whaling or World War II in the harbors of Lelu, Utwe, and Okat, and PMB plane wreck in Lelu Harbor. Through their participation in the Kosrae Association of Tourism Operators (KATO, meaning "beautiful in Kosraean)) Pacific Treelodge, Nautilus Resort, tour guides, Kosrae Visitor's Bureau, and KIRMA on Kosrae assist in the protection of Kosrae's UCH through their business models and respective projects.

Pohnpei State Government recently inscribed Nan Madol onto the UNESCO World Heritage List, hosting UCH components. Pohnpei State looks forward to securing additional protection in the context of climate change and the Micronesian Challenge.

Chuuk State hosts the largest shipwreck graveyard in the world, hosting more than 40 ships from World War II in the Chuuk Lagoon. Chuuk's Truk Stop Dive Center promotes cultural heritage through its celebration of Women's Dive Day (offered for free to women) and education on the wrecks.

Yap State UCH includes fish weirs (which are at times partially or fully submerged), traditional knowledge in the transportation of stone money from Palau to Yap, and trading certain marine resources as demonstrations of respect and to promote peaceful relationships between the villages of Yap.

While each of the FSM States hosts their own unique UCH, as a nation, there is also unique UCH. The FSM UCH includes navigation, the traditional knowledge embedded in inter-island travel, and traditional cultural knowledge of marine resources.

A Way Forward with UCH in FSM

The first consultation was held in Chuuk State 6-8 March, 2018. During these meetings, each HPO presented on their UCH. Through the consultation in conjunction with ratification, FSM HPOs learned legislation requires some updates to address the protection of its UCH. One of the outcomes for the consultation was to create a five year

action plan which identifies five main components for success in the protection of UCH in FSM. These five components include: UCH awareness, capacity building, cultural sustainability, improved protection, management of UCH and develop National database and expand State databases.

On the last day, all parties came together to develop an action plan for the country. Resolutions were signed by all parties involved to be to be considered by each FSM State Government.

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