

RMI is getting Energized



Plans for outer islands replanting could pump up the copra industry.

The Marshall Islands has several lines out to donors for alternative energy developments that, if funded, would have major impact in the RMI.

Among the projects for which RMI officials are seeking international support:

- Waste-to-energy plant for Majuro, estimated to cost \$15 million.
- Site feasibility study for an Ocean Thermal Energy Conversation (OTEC) plant, estimated at \$3 million.
- Implementing a package for the outer islands that involves replanting coconut trees, expanding coconut oil biofuel use, developing coconut furniture spinoffs, and completing solarization of remote islands.

“For the first time, we’re seeing the ducks line up in a row (to support RMI developments in these areas),” said Steve Why, RMI’s Climate Change Advisor. Funding opportunities through Japan, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and Small Island Developing States group known as SIDS-DOCK are coming together mainly because “the RMI is raising its ambitions by going after these developments.”

Why attended a SIDS-DOCK meeting in the Caribbean last month for the RMI at which several funding requests for alternative energy and climate change-linked projects were submitted. “The Marshall Islands is leading the pack at SIDS,” he said. A primary reason for this is the energy plan developed by R&D Secretary Tommy Kijiner, Jr. and his ministry’s Energy Division that gives donors a point of entry for partnering with RMI, Why said. “It’s a tremendous energy plan,” he said.

But, said Why, the RMI itself “can only go so far” in addressing its climate change and energy needs.

“We need technology that can transform the whole energy scene,” he said. This is where plans like the proposed OTEC plant for Kwajalein, a waste-to-energy plant for Majuro, and power grid-connected solar in the urban centers are essential developments, he said.

“The RMI needs to make the transition from diesel-powered electricity to renewables,” he said, pointing out that developments

‘The RMI needs to make the transition from diesel-powered electricity to renewables.’
— Steve Why

Ministry of Resources & Developments Secretary Tommy Kijiner, Jr.



RMI aims to get coconuts resowed

Replanting of coconut trees on the outer islands could get started in the near future with the support of Asian Development Bank seed funding.

A plan to hire a project manager to kick the long-planned program into gear, however, has been delayed when ADB recently rejected the applicant for the position.

“We hope to raise the issue with the ADB when they visit the RMI in a couple months time, and plan to come to some understanding as to the best way forward,” said R&D Secretary Tommy Kijiner, Jr., whose ministry is supervising the project.

ADB has approved about \$650,000 for the initial phase of the project. Kijiner estimates the cost of replanting

coconuts in all islands will be between \$3 million and \$4 million.

“This project will take the whole of the nation to implement successfully,” he said. “Everyone must be involved, local governments, non-government organizations, and others.”

The replanting program opens spin-off opportunities for entrepreneurs.

“This project will require cutting down old trees to make room for new ones,” Kijiner said. “As far as what to do with the coconut lumber, we are still exploring options. We could use the lumber for domestic use in-country, or we could look for additional assistance from development partners to expand to furniture making. This is still being thought through.”

Talks on waste-to-energy plant for Majuro

Marshall Islands officials are talking with representatives of the United States-based Clinton Foundation about supporting a package of sustainable development programs in the RMI.

Climate Change Advisor Steve Why said he met with Clinton Foundation representatives during the Small Island Developing States meeting last month in Barbados.

The foundation is “keen to establish high level memorandum of understanding with RMI — their interest being Micronesia-wide economies-of-scale projects and energy benefits,” he said.

Among the areas under discussion with the Clinton Foundation are:

- Locating development funding and financing of \$15M Majuro waste-to-energy plant.
- National coconut oil biofuels and replanting program, an area in which the “RMI is currently leading the region,” Why said.
- Fuel purchasing agreements to reduce the high cost in Micronesia of imported fuels and switch to efficient, less-polluting fuels.

- Completion of outer atoll and main islands solarization of households and large buildings, energy audits, energy use monitoring, installation of energy efficient equipment, hybrid electricity generating systems for Jaluit and Wotje, solar street lights, and introduction of electric vehicles.

“I also raised discussed with the Clinton Foundation improving RMI inter- and intra-atoll transportation,” Why said. “Seventy percent of our national energy expenditure is on transportation, in common with most island countries.”

Looking to future possibilities, Why said the RMI needs to move to hybrid, efficiently-designed vessels that combine locally generated coconut biofuels, wind and more efficient diesel systems and fuels needed to improve outer atoll transportation and island economies.

“The United Nations Development Program has indicated improved efficiency in transportation is lacking globally,” he said. “The Clinton Foundation agreed vulnerability to energy shocks — especially in transportation — was the greatest economic

hazard for RMI, Micronesia and other small island developing states (SIDS). Increasing fuel efficiency and gradually substituting renewable biofuels and energies in transportation would reduce RMI’s socio-economic vulnerability to external oil price rises and also move us towards energy independence — and, so the argument currently goes, allowing government and private sector funds saved on fuel imports to be used more beneficially.”

Given the current high level of spending on transportation by the RMI, however, the country needs tangible ideas for improvements in transportation and practical demonstrations, said Why.

“Our foremost opportunity at a local transportation level is RMI’s favorable position to scale-up Waan Aelon in Majel (Canoes of the Marshall Islands) traditional and hybrid canoe building and youth-skills program to as many atolls as possible, through grant funding,” he said.

“All of which was raised with Clinton Foundation for suggested memorandum of understanding development.”

like the solar panel arrays on Majuro Hospital and at CMI that are tied into the MEC grid are the way to go.

“This is why OTEC is key,” he said. “It is about ‘business as

unusual’ to get out of the situation we’re in.”

There are significant opportunities for improving quality of life for people in the RMI by expanding sustainable energy

and an outer islands economy that emphasizes use of coconut oil for fuel, a hybrid transportation system weaning the RMI off diesel-powered vessels, and income-generating options related

to coconuts. “We can create reasons to be on the outer islands,” he said. “If the household economy is doing okay, then it will translate to the national economy doing okay.”