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New NOAA Maps Show Coral Covers Large Parts of Palau

New coral reef ecosystem maps released today by NOAA reveal that live coral covers approximately 35 percent of the Republic of Palau's shallow-water sea floor, a high percentage relative to other areas that NOAA has mapped. The maps are the result of the first comprehensive assessment of the extent and types of Palau's coral reefs.

The NOAA mapping effort covered 946 square miles and was the most extensive coral area mapped by the agency to date. The government of Palau requested the maps and data to support development of a biological monitoring program. Resource managers and scientists will use the maps and other data collected by NOAA to evaluate the effectiveness of local marine conservation areas and identify new areas for protection.

"NOAA is leading efforts to map coral ecosystems of the U.S. and Pacific Freely Associated States," said Timothy R. E. Keeney, deputy under secretary for oceans and atmosphere and co-chair of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force. "NOAA was proud to partner with Palau in this important effort to better understand and characterize that island nation's abundant and diverse coral reef habitats."

Palau President Tommy E. Remengesau Jr. called on Micronesian nations in 2005 to conserve 30 percent of near shore marine resources and 20 percent of terrestrial resources by 2020, according to Youlsou Bells, Palau's national environmental planner. This "Micronesia Challenge" was endorsed by the chief executives of the Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Territory of Guam, and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

"The tools provided by NOAA were a crucial piece for us to strengthen our efforts to establish a biological monitoring program for Palau," said President Remengesau. "Through enhanced monitoring and understanding of our delicate resources, we can support and achieve the goals set forth in the Micronesia Challenge."

NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science's Center for Coastal Monitoring and Assessment prepared the coral reef habitat maps and data on behalf of the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, which supports effective management and sound science to preserve, sustain and restore valuable coral reef ecosystems.

The maps and data are available online at
<http://ccma.nos.noaa.gov/products/biogeography/palau/welcome.html>.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and

marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 70 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

NOAA National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science: <http://coastalscience.noaa.gov>

NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program: <http://www.coralreef.noaa.gov>