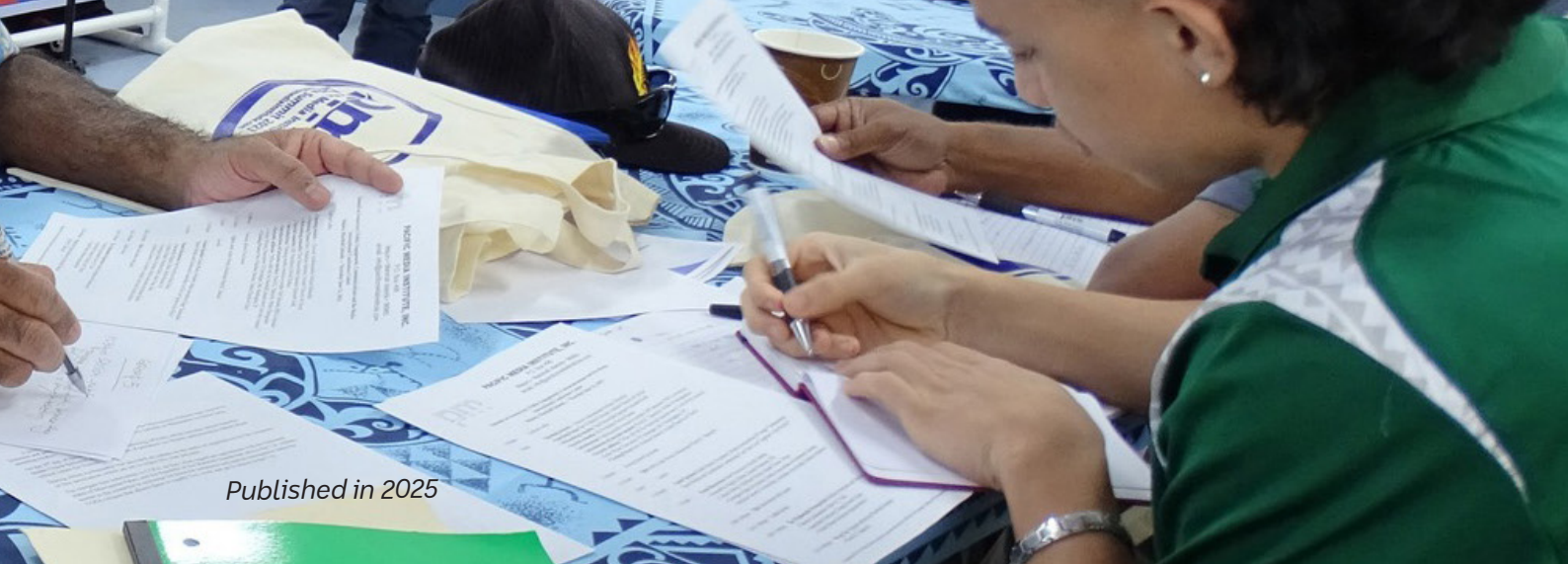


State of the Media: Republic of the Marshall Islands



State of the Media: Republic of the Marshall Islands

This study was led and designed by ABC International Development (ABCID), informed by our Pacific partners. The University of Adelaide's (UoA) Stretton Institute were implementation partners across the 12 countries studied. Fieldwork and data analysis was conducted by Pacific researchers. We would like to thank all the expert advisers and study participants for their time and generous contributions.

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Any opinions represented in this report are those of the authors and research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation or the University of Adelaide.

Photos in this report are from ABCID programs, ABC staff, and ABC archives, unless otherwise specified.

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ACRONYMS

2G	second-generation mobile networks
3G	third-generation of mobile networks
4G	fourth-generation of mobile networks
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABCID	Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development
ADSL	Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line
AI	artificial intelligence
AFN	American Forces Network
AM	amplitude modulation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DAMA	Demand Assigned Multiple Access
FM	frequency modulation
GEDSI	gender equality, disability and social inclusion
GSM	Global System for Mobile Communications
ICT	information and communications technology
IPTV	Internet Protocol television
LGBTIQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and other sexually and gender diverse people
LTE	Long-Term Evolution
MIRC	Marshall Islands Revised Code
NGO	non-government organisation
NTA	National Telecommunications Authority
PacLII	Pacific Islands Legal Information Institute
PMI	Pacific Media Institute
RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
UN	United Nations
VSAT	very small aperture terminal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides a detailed snapshot of the media landscape in 2024 in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (“Marshall Islands” hereafter). The following themes were identified in the research.

Print media remains the most trusted source of news

Media practitioners and audiences consider print media to be the most credible source of news and information. The country’s only print newspaper, The Marshall Islands Journal, has been operating for more than five decades and has sustained its reputation as a trusted source of news. Although increased digitisation poses a threat to the resilience of print media, perceived increases in mis/disinformation have reinforced the value of print journalism that upholds accuracy, impartiality, and independence.

Connectivity challenges persist for audiences in remote islands

There are persistent challenges to media connectivity, reach, and access in the Marshall Islands, especially for audiences in the remote outer islands. Key contributing factors are the country’s geographical spread across numerous atolls and islands and the slow pace of media infrastructure development. The state-owned AM radio station, V7AB Radio Marshall, has the farthest reach. Some media practitioners travel long distances to obtain interviews and audio recordings in remote communities.

Increased interest in a representative industry body to promote media freedom and training

There is increased interest in developing a dedicated media association in the Marshall Islands that actively represents the interests of practitioners. The Marshall Islands is recognised for having one of the most free and independent media sectors in the world. Following the establishment of the Pacific Media Institute (PMI) in 2022, which advocates for free press and democracy, there has been growing interest in having a representative industry body in the country that can also protect media freedom, develop journalistic standards, and provide trainings to media professionals.

Rise of social media and increased digitisation create new challenges and opportunities

The emergence of social media and the digitisation of information and communications are creating new challenges and opportunities for the Marshallese media. Respondents report a rise in misinformation and disinformation on social media but acknowledge that there are new opportunities to connect more extensively with dispersed Marshallese audiences, especially the large and growing diaspora.



Veteran Pacific journalist Floyd Takeuchi mentors students at a workshop (Facebook: Pacific Media Institute).

Media's role in passing on generational knowledge and culture

Media in the Marshall Islands, aside from providing public-interest news and information, plays an important role in passing cultural and historical knowledge to younger and future generations. This ranges from preserving and communicating cultural knowledge relating to traditional dances to collecting stories from survivors of the nuclear weapons testing, to capturing images of rapidly changing landscapes impacted by climate change and sea-level rise.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Republic of the Marshall Islands is an archipelago located near the equator, in the Micronesian region of the western Pacific Ocean. It comprises five low coral islands, 29 coral atolls and 1,151 islets, of which 24 are inhabited. More than two-thirds of the population live in urban centres on the islands of Majuro and Ebeye. The population is estimated to be approximately 42,000 people, with an additional 25,000 Marshallese estimated to be living in the United States.¹ As the atolls on which the population lives are low-lying, the Marshall Islands is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, particularly rising sea levels and increasingly serious natural disasters.²

¹ [Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade - Republic of the Marshall Islands Country Brief.](#)

² [World Bank, Concept Project Information Document Digital Republic of the Marshall Islands \(World Bank, 2021\), 11.](#)



Kwajalein Atoll, Marshall Islands.

The Marshall Islands was administered by the United States from 1944 through 1986, when it regained its sovereignty under a Compact of Free Association with the US. The Compact was first renewed in 2003 and was amended again in 2024 with additional economic assistance.³ The currency is the US dollar, and the official languages are Marshallese and English.

Media in the Marshall Islands consists primarily of print and radio. While there is no television station or online news organisation, Internet Protocol television (IPTV) services are available, along with digital copies of the one Marshallese newspaper. To respond to the rise of social media and shifting news consumption habits, media outlets use social media to direct their audience to their print, radio, and streaming content. Internet access is expanding, and by 2024 had reached 73 per cent of the population. However, infrastructure challenges across the islands means that stable internet access remains limited.⁴

This report provides a detailed, up-to-date snapshot of the state of the media in the Marshall Islands. It is part of the State of the Media project, which comprises 12 country reports and one regional report. These reports serve as an accessible resource for media, civil society, and government organisations in support of development goals in the region. In addition to the Marshall Islands, the countries studied are: Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

³ [*U.S. Department of the Interior - Interior Department Applauds Renewed Economic Assistance for Compacts of Free Association.*](#)

⁴ [*Simon Kemp, Data Reportal - Digital 2024: The Marshall Islands, February 16, 2024.*](#)



2. METHODOLOGY

The study's methodology was guided by core research questions identified by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's International Development unit (ABCID). It was designed to foreground the expertise of Pacific researchers and media professionals. Data collection, analysis, and report drafting were conducted by Pacific researchers.

The study adopted a multi-method approach. The research team began with a desk-based review of relevant primary and secondary literature. Additionally, seven detailed stakeholder interviews were conducted. At each step, feedback and advice were sought from the Marshall Islands media expert advisers, Divine Waiti and Hilary Hosia, who cross-checked the accuracy of findings and co-authored this report. The research was approved by the University of Adelaide Human Research Ethics Committee, and steps were taken to mitigate risks to all research participants, including maintaining their anonymity.

A more detailed discussion of the project methodology is contained in the regional report.⁵

⁵ [ABC International Development.](#)



Samuel Barton speaks at the PMI's Telling Your Pacific Story workshop. (Chewy Lin)



3. MEDIA ORGANISATION FOOTPRINT

Print

The Marshall Islands Journal, locally referred to as “the Journal”, is the only newspaper in the country. Set up in the 1970s by a former US Peace Corps volunteer,⁶ it has an established presence in the Marshall Islands media scene and is one of the longest-running newspapers in the Pacific region. It is a privately owned weekly newspaper produced in English and Marshallese, available in print and digital copies. The English-language copy is published first, with the digital version made available to subscribers the following day.

⁶ [Radio New Zealand- Marshall Islands media icon leaves a lasting legacy \(article\).](#)



Media preparing to report from the streets of Majur.

The Marshallese translation is then circulated the following week. Print copies are mainly distributed in the capital, Majuro, with some copies distributed to the second-most populated island, Ebeye, and the US army base on Kwajalein Island. A very limited circulation is available in the remote outer islands. The Journal also has a Facebook page and website where content is posted to encourage readers to subscribe. As of 2024, the Journal's newsroom is run by nine staff (five male, four female).

The newspaper covers local news stories, including politics and stories related to the parliament, police, court cases, and sports. There is a page dedicated to cartoons and a two-page news section, *Are You Aware?*, that provides one-sentence summaries of local stories and events. As one media practitioner respondent noted: "I have people who tell me that's the first thing they read in the newspaper" (RMI 01).

Radio

There are two main local radio stations, one radio station operated by the US military, and several smaller stations run by churches and civil society organisations. The larger stations include:

- V7AB Radio Marshall, the state-owned national public broadcaster airs on FM, AM and SW. It has a mandate to "inform, educate and entertain the people of the Marshall Islands". The station also broadcasts parliamentary sessions.⁷ V7AB broadcasts on the 24 inhabited atolls giving it the furthest geographical coverage.⁸
- Power 103.5 FM is a commercial radio station owned by Six9Too Productions, which focuses on providing music entertainment and promoting local musicians.⁹
- American Forces Network (AFN) Kwajalein is run by the US military based on Kwajalein Atoll.

⁷ [Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union - Radio Marshalls V7AB](#), accessed August 15, 2024.

⁸ [Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union, "Radio Marshalls."](#)

⁹ [Marshall Islands Guide - Hot Radio Station: Power 103.5 FM](#), September 27, 2016.

The smaller community radio stations include the church-run stations Joy 90.7FM, Eagle Christian Radio 99.9 FM, and V7AA The Change 104.1 FM. V7WU WUTMI Radio is a station established by Women United Together Marshall Islands, a women's rights organisation. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted smaller radio stations, several of which ceased operations at this time

International broadcasts are also available, including ABC Radio Australia 89.1 FM (since May 2024)¹⁰ and the BBC World Service on 98.5 FM.

Television

There is currently no television station dedicated to local television programming in the Marshall Islands. However, the National Telecommunications Authority (NTA), a private corporation with significant government ownership,¹¹ has provided Internet Protocol television (IPTV) services since 2022. This includes livestreaming of parliamentary meetings, sports, and other local community events on their website and Facebook page. It also includes the subscription video on-demand service MHTV, which offers Marshallese audiences more than 40 channels of entertainment, news, sport, and education content produced in other countries.

Additionally, TV AFN is operated by the US military at the army base on Kwajalein Atoll. This content is available on Kwajalein Atoll and the neighbouring island Ebeye.

As of 2024, the privately owned Marshalls Broadcasting Company (which previously operated MBC TV) is no longer in operation.

Online

Aside from the digital version of the Marshall Islands Journal, there is no media organisation dedicated to online news in the Marshall Islands. The Kwajalein Hourglass, owned by the US Army Garrison, provides community news and announcements in the form of a local online paper, mainly to the US army community based on Kwajalein Atoll.

Additionally, there are several freelance media practitioners providing digital content production services, such as photography and videography, who publish media content about community events on their social media accounts. All media outlets in the Marshall Islands also have a social media presence, especially on Facebook.

¹⁰ [*Australian Broadcasting Corporation - ABC Launches ABC Radio Australia in Micronesia*](#), (press release), May 14, 2024, updated May 28, 2024.

¹¹ [*Marshall Islands National Telecommunications Authority - About Us*](#).



DJ Yastamon set for a shift behind the mic at Power 103.5FM. (Facebook: Power 103.5 FM Marshall Islands)

04

4. GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Government departments, non-government organisations (NGOs), advocacy and community groups, churches and other faith-based organisations disseminate public information and announcements through a variety of communication channels. Most use social media as a hub for information sharing. The most prominent entities and their channels are outlined below.

To make public announcements about health emergencies and natural disasters, the Ministry of Health and the National Disaster Management Office use National Telecommunications Authority (NTA) services to send mass texts to the Marshallese population.

The Pacific Media Institute (PMI) is a non-profit organisation that advocates for media freedom. It disseminates information on social media about its activities. Founded in 2022 by three practitioners who lead independent media outlets in the Marshall Islands, PMI aims to “promote independent media and transparency in government in the Marshall Islands” and neighbouring Pacific Island nations.¹² Its activities include journalism training, workshops on topics such as media freedom and democracy, and collaborations with other like-minded civil society organisations.¹³ During the PMI’s Summit on Democracy in June 2023 in Majuro, it was highlighted that media can contribute to a strong civil society.¹⁴

The College of the Marshall Islands has a media and communications unit run by staff and students, called the CMI Media Club. This covers events happening at the college and in the wider community.

The Marshall Islands Council of Non-Governmental Organizations (MICNGOs) is a coalition of community development NGOs that plays an influential role in the country’s broader media landscape. It aims to be a voice for NGOs, and liaises between coalition members and the government.¹⁵ It has a communication officer and is active on Facebook, where it provides news and updates of its activities and programs.

Women United Together Marshall Islands is a prominent women’s rights advocacy organisation. It has a website, an FM radio station, and a Facebook page where it raises awareness about gender equity issues and communicates about its activities.

The Marshall Islands Disabled Persons Organisation is the national organisation representing people with disabilities. Communications about its activities are delivered mainly through partner organisations’ websites or social media platforms.

Churches and other faith-based organisations mostly use Facebook to disseminate information about their activities. For example, the United Church of Christ in Majuro, the largest religious group in the country, uses Facebook to stream Sunday services and special events. Other faith-based groups, such as the Bahá’í and Ahmadiyya Muslim communities and other Christian denominations, also use Facebook to communicate about their activities.

¹² Daniel Kramer and Fred J. Pedro, quoted in Pacific Media Watch, [Asia Pacific Report - New Media Freedom Advocacy Institute Formed in Marshall Islands](#), March 25, 2022

¹³ [Asia Pacific Report - Majuro Workshop and Summit Spotlight Media and Democracy](#), June 26, 2023.

¹⁴ [New Toolkit Launched for Pacific Journalists Reporting on Corruption,” Regional Office for Southeast Asia and the Pacific, UN Office on Drugs and Crime](#), June 21, 2023.

¹⁵ [Idealist - Nonprofit: Marshall Islands Council of NGOs \(MICNGOs\)](#), accessed August 15, 2024.

Target audience

Media practitioner respondents reported that the target audience of news stories is mainly the general Marshallese public. Audience feedback on news content, according to respondents, is generally relayed through letters, phone calls, emails, face-to-face conversations, and social media platforms. Given the relatively small population and media scene, it is not uncommon for media practitioners to receive audience comments directly. One respondent indicated that “since I live in Marshall Islands, a lot of people know me. I get feedback from them directly or through comments on my social media platforms” (RMI 02).

In terms of reaching audiences, respondents explained that, due to the Marshall Islands’ geographic spread, reaching audiences outside the two urban centres of Majuro and Ebeye (on Kwajalein Atoll) is a significant challenge – especially those on remote outer islands. Additionally, it was noted by one respondent that media also tries to cater for the diverse literacy needs among audience members (RMI 03).

According to media practitioner respondents, the state-owned V7AB Radio Marshall has the largest audience reach, however exact audience numbers were not available to corroborate. Respondents commented that listenership via AM and FM analogue radios has declined dramatically over the last decade:

Now people only tune in to radio stations when commuting on the road in vehicles or at home where there might be an actual AM or FM radio. AM and FM radios are a thing of the past now and has been heavily replaced by iPhones, iPads, and laptops. (RMI 03)

Respondents highlighted the recent audience increase on social media platforms, which is changing the way Marshallese people consume news and access and disseminate information. One respondent reported that these platforms, and especially Facebook, have become a popular source of information for audiences in-country as well as for the large Marshallese diaspora, who use them to stay connected to what is happening in the Marshall Islands (RMI 02).

The diaspora is a significant component of the Marshallese media audience. In the last decade, emigration has been increasing due to poor socio-economic conditions, especially to the US. Between 2011 and 2021, the population declined by 20 per cent, with a particularly significant increase in emigration between 2017 and 2021.¹⁶

Aid donors were also mentioned by one media practitioner respondent as a target audience of the Marshallese media, so they can see the country’s situation and development needs (RMI 02).

¹⁶ [RNZ - Heavy out-migration underlines economic conditions in Marshall Islands](#), Nov 22, 2022.



PMI meets with NGOs and Public Information Officers to discuss working together. (Facebook PMI)

05

5. MEDIA CONTENT COVERAGE

Locally produced content mainly focuses on issues affecting communities in the Marshall Islands.

Prominent issues covered include local politics, local events and Marshallese culture, community stories from remote islands, leadership accountability on issues such as illegal drugs and human trafficking, climate change, and the ongoing impacts on Marshall Island communities of the nuclear testing in the 1940s and 1950s. Each of these is discussed further below.

Media practitioner respondents noted the important role the media play in covering community issues and holding authorities accountable for addressing them (RMI 01; RMI 03). One example mentioned was media coverage of illegal drugs, which has prompted police investigation and prosecution of drug dealers.

The Marshallese media cover a number of important social issues. One respondent explained that investigative reporting on human trafficking by an RMI journalist (in partnership with US media) led to prosecution in the US (RMI 03).

Another important current issue is climate change, especially the impacts of sea-level rise on the Marshallese community. These issues are often covered in the form of documentaries or long-form journalism aimed mainly at aid-donor audiences (RMI 02).

A significant historic problem that has been covered by the Marshallese media over many decades is the ongoing impact on the Marshallese community of the US's nuclear weapons testing between 1946 and 1958. During this period, the US conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands.¹⁷ The media continue to raise ongoing issues in public discussions – relating, for example, to nuclear waste and compensation for survivors, including medical care.¹⁸ One media practitioner respondent emphasised the importance of keeping the stories of the nuclear survivors alive and preserving them for future generations (RMI 02).

Some of the challenges that the media face in covering local issues include providing impartial media coverage of local news because the community is so close-knit. As one respondent described: “Everyone is related to everyone in our country. Many stories we report often conflict with our relatives. Then your morale [sic] is in question when you report on others and tend not to report on your relatives” (RMI 03). The ethical challenges facing journalists reporting on stories in close-knit communities are widely acknowledged, with some displaying “ethics of care” as a principle value.¹⁹ Another challenge faced by the Marshallese media is reporting on community stories from the remote outer islands as accessing these islands to obtain stories is logistically challenging due to their geographical spread (RMI 02).

Media coverage of cultural stories and performances is popular. Media practitioner respondents indicated that cultural stories not only resonate with both local and international audiences, but are also important for passing down cultural knowledge to younger and future generations:

People are interested about their culture because I have captured many Marshallese culture that people don't often. Marshall Islanders are not really known for their traditional dancing. We're known for handicrafts, so dancing was only performed for the high chief. But today we encourage the younger generation to perform, to learn the traditional dance. So, I was working on this project to capture the traditional Marshall Islands dance and got much positive feedback from Marshallese in the country as well as overseas. (RMI 02)

¹⁷ [Atomic Heritage Foundation - Marshall Islands](#), accessed August 15, 2024.

¹⁸ Lauren Beldi, [ABC News - Bikini Atoll Beer Draws Criticism From Marshall Islanders Still Recovering From Nuclear Tests](#), August 16, 2019.

¹⁹ Ann Auman, [Pacific Journalism Review - Media Ethic in the Pacific: Ethical challenges in the Marshall Islands](#), *Te Koako* 29, 1 & 2 (July 2023): 36.

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

The stakeholder interviews with media practitioners aimed to capture top-level themes including gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) representation in media content coverage in Republic of the Marshall Islands. The findings below should not be viewed as exhaustive due to a small sample size. Rather, these insights provide an indication of potential trends in media practitioner perceptions of GEDSI issues.

Media practitioner respondents reported that they were not aware of any representative groups advocating for gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) in the media sector in the Marshall Islands. However, there are some civil society organisations and advocacy groups dedicated to advancing GEDSI more generally. These include, but are not limited to, Women United Together Marshall Islands and the Marshall Islands Disabled Persons Organisation.

There are several overarching legal and policy frameworks related to GEDSI that the Marshallese media are bound by. These include the Gender Equality Act 2019, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2015, the Child Rights Protection Act 2015, and the Births, Deaths and Marriage Registration (Amendment) Act 2016.

One of the challenges of reporting effectively on GEDSI-related issues in the Marshall Islands is a lack of gender and disability disaggregated data on key social and economic issues. For example, as of December 2020, data was unavailable for almost 90 per cent of the indicators required to monitor the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals from a gender equality perspective.²⁰ Gender disaggregated data is especially lacking on unpaid care, domestic work, employment rate, ICT skills, poverty, physical and sexual harassment, ... access to assets (including land) and the environment.²¹

Similarly, data on disability is scarce and unreliable.²² There are approximately 6,000 people with disability in the Marshall Islands,²³ many of whom face challenges accessing employment, education, and essential services such as health care and transportation on an equal basis with other citizens.²⁴

Media practitioner respondents noted there is a newsroom culture in the Marshall Islands Journal that facilitates social inclusion in public discussions by actively covering stories of under-represented groups. According to respondents, GEDSI issues are reported as part of community news, stories, and events, and there is openness and willingness to discuss sensitive or controversial topics as part of public debates. One media practitioner respondent reflected that “at times, it may be controversial with religious groups. ... If people get angry, that is fine. It’s part of the conversation. We are open to things that are going on in the community” (RMI 01).

Another media practitioner respondent described the time they had reported on the introduction of the Islamic community in Majuro, at a time when the faith was being discriminated against due to other anti-Islam coverage. The respondent noted that reporting inclusively on this under-represented group, helped clear up misunderstandings in the community (RMI 03).

²⁰ [UN Women - Marshall Islands](#), accessed August 15, 2024.

²¹ [UN Women, “Marshall Islands.”](#)

²² [UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific - Building Disability-Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific \(PDF\).](#)

²³ [Marshall Islands census, 2011, in UNESCAP, Building Disability-Inclusive Societies, 73–74.](#)

²⁴ [U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor - 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Marshall Islands.](#)

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P6

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Minimum wage to jump to \$5.25

GIFF JOHNSON

Minimum wage up, taxes down and the launch of a universal basic income program for all Marshallese citizens in RMI. These are the “low hanging fruit” that Hilda Heine’s new administration plans to rollout as quickly as possible.

Finance Minister David Paul told the Journal Wednesday that the government has just received a detailed assessment on RMI’s \$3.50 minimum wage that recommends an immediate increase to \$5.25 per hour to address cost of living challenges in RMI.

“Because of inflation since the last minimum wage adjustment, the report recommends increasing it to \$5.25 an hour,” Paul said. “We will introduce legislation...to bump up the minimum wage.”

This increase would amount to a 50 percent rise in the minimum wage in RMI.

This is one piece of a three-prong plan to energize the economy of the Marshall Islands by “putting money into people’s pockets,” Paul said, adding “we need to dial back government spending and boost consumer spending.”

The second step is to cut the income tax rates that are presently set at eight percent of income up to \$10,400 and 12 percent on income above that amount. The new government wants to lower these taxes to give workers more take-home pay, he said.

The third step is to roll out a universal basic income program (Enra Bwe Jen Lale Rara program) as endorsed by the Nitijela in 2023. This requires the RMI Trust Fund Committee, with representatives of both the US and RMI governments, to agree to the

Continued page 2

Strike derails Hilda return

HILARY HOSIA

A coordinated strike by airport workers last Friday resulted in the temporary closure of Amata Kabua International Airport’s runway.

The situation caught the attention of the highest level in government as President Hilda Heine was on the United Airlines flight scheduled to return to Majuro that day. President Hilda and her delegation were forced to deplane on Kwajalein at the US Army installation after being briefed on the matter. President flew to Majuro the following day on Air Marshall Islands.

United Airlines initially announced its plan to overfly Majuro, which caused President Hilda and her delegation to stay overnight at Kwajalein, after fire fighters and airport traffic controllers walked off the job in Majuro a dispute with the RMI Ports Authority over overtime payments. But after Ports authorities were successful in getting its staff back on the job later in the evening, the United flight landed in Majuro and flew to Honolulu the next day, 24 hours delayed.

That protest became a topic of discussion Monday in Parliament as Cabinet Ministers expressed disapproval of the strike.

Minister of Transportation, Communication and IT Hilton Kendall classified the incident as “human tragedy” that caused embarrassment to the country. RMI President and the Lieutenant Governor of Kosrae were among pas-

Continued page 2



Photo: Sadhna Gautam

Bar iøkwe Laura lady Kelly Lorennij graduated with her BA last Friday from Japan’s Asia Pacific University. See story, photo page 17.

Nitijela focuses in on Compact

GIFF JOHNSON

On Nitijela’s first day back in session Monday, Foreign Minister Kalani Kaneko was joined by multiple ministers in introducing a resolution to endorse the new funding package in the Compact of Free Association and a companion bill for implementation of the new Compact for the 2024-2043 period.

Nitijela has scheduled two weeks

of public hearings in Majuro and Kwajalein this week and next to get public reaction and input on the new Compact.

Resolution No. 11 “to approve the amendments comprising the 2023 Compact of Free Association, as Amended...” spells out in detail the intent of Nitijela and the nation for the use of funding in the new Compact, including to address

the nuclear legacy. The resolution states clearly that in relation to the RMI Trust Fund, “it is the understanding of the Nitijela that along with other purposes, the 2023 Trust Fund Agreement is repurposed to provide revenues ...for people in the Marshall Islands to address unmet needs of communities and people impacted by nuclear testing.”

The 11-page resolution devotes

two pages to the nuclear test legacy and the RMI government’s intention to use funding from the new Compact meet needs people affected.

But the Compact’s new trust fund agreement, through which the US government will contribute \$700 million over four years, does not mention the word nuclear because

Continued page 2

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6. MEDIA BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Media practitioner respondents explained that there is hardly any competition in the media market in the Marshall Islands, given that there is only one newspaper and very few radio stations.

The Marshall Islands Journal has been a noteworthy example of media resilience since 1970. Over the first 15 years of its operation, the newspaper was subsidised by its parent company, Micronitor News and Printing Company (RMI 01). The Journal is now a well-established, self-reliant business, supported by advertising and sales revenue (RMI 03).

As a traditional print media platform, remaining relevant in the digital age is a significant challenge. Yet despite the increased digitisation of media globally, the Marshall Islands Journal remains an important source of original, public-interest content, especially on Marshallese issues. As one respondent commented:

If people want original stories about the Marshall Islands, news, and comment, the Journal is providing that, so the print edition still has relevance. It may not last, and in another 5 or 10 years, we may have lots more media outlets writing about the Marshall Islands. But for now, that keeps the print edition going. (RMI 01)



Technicians from Six9Too sound check at a concert. (Facebook: Six9Too Production Studio)

Power 103.5 FM, a commercial radio station operated by Six9Too, is supported by revenue from its advertisement and announcement packages. Individual content producers depend largely on funded projects and grants for financial support (RMI 02) and to source or purchase new equipment (RMI 04).

Artificial intelligence

There is growing interest in artificial intelligence (AI) in the media sector in the Marshall Islands. Half of the media practitioner respondents noted that AI has been used for grammar and spelling checks, solving technical errors, and improving workflow. One respondent stated that it is being used only to improve work efficiency: “[I use AI] only as a tool to help draft contracts, solve technical errors, and so forth. In my case, it’s to improve workflow, and has no public impact outside of the working process” (RMI 06).

Others indicated that AI has not been used yet in the newsroom but is being considered. One respondent commented:

I think it’s something that certainly we’re going [to] look at because I’ve been listening, reading, and tuning into the development on this. It’s pretty startling what you can do with some of this AI stuff and a little sobering about the future of journalism. But we’re not doing anything with it now. (RMI 01)

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7. MEDIA POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Freedom of expression

The Marshall Islands is recognised as having one of the most free and independent media sectors in the world. In the 2024 Freedom in the World report, the country scored 4 out of 4 for its level of media freedom and independence, with an overall score of 93 out of 100 for its level of political rights and civil liberties.²⁵

²⁵ [Freedom House - Freedom in the World 2024: Marshall Islands](#), accessed September 5, 2024.



Marshall Islands Journal reporter Wilmer Joel speaks at a workshop. (Chewy Lin)

One media practitioner respondent stated: “Compared to some other Pacific Island countries, and certainly other places in the world, we have a very free media environment” (RMI 01). Another respondent noted that “although there are [few] media service providers in the Marshall Islands, there is protection of media freedom and freedom of speech in the Marshall Islands” (RMI 07).

Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are protected in the Constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Article II, section 1 (1),²⁶ subject to laws enacted to preserve public peace and national security, or to protect the rights or freedoms of other people.

With the increasing uptake of social media, one respondent noted that there have been discussions in recent years about drafting a new bill to regulate defamatory materials on social media platforms, especially defamatory posts aimed at authorities and politicians (RMI 01).

²⁶ [*Marshall Islands Consolidated Legislation - Constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands 2005*](#), accessed December 16, 2024.

Accessing official information

There is no specific provision for right to information in the constitution. Currently, there is also no national legislation or policy in place giving a legal right to the public to access government information (RMI 07). However, the Marshall Islands is a State party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides for the right to access information under Article 19.²⁷

According to one media practitioner respondent, government officials are often reluctant to provide information that has not been approved by the cabinet (RMI 01). However, in some cases government information is accessible because of good working relationships between the media and government departments (RMI 06). One media practitioner respondent stated that, when working on an investigative story, it is hard to obtain information from government agencies who face public scrutiny (RMI 03). Furthermore, according to media practitioner respondents, accessing information from government entities is often time-consuming, with information shared with the media slowly.

Print

There is only one law that applies specifically to written media that requires the use of standard spelling by organisations that educate the public.²⁸

Broadcast media

The Political Broadcast Access Act 2014 allows political candidates to freely access and use state-owned broadcasting facilities to broadcast political content, without censorship from the government.²⁹

The Radio Communication Act 1993 regulates radio and television communications and broadcast services. It also regulates the use of radio and television frequencies, licensing and fees for licensed users, examination of commercial and amateur radio operators, and inspection of radio and television stations.³⁰

The secretary of the Ministry of Transportation and Communication is responsible for issuing the relevant regulations. The scope of these regulations includes foreign and domestic radio and television communications, including those relating to national defence and public safety. Three citizens band (CB) radio channels are restricted exclusively for emergency, disaster, and government use.³¹ A general penalty of \$US10,000 or one-year imprisonment, or both, applies for non-compliance.³²

27 [United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(CCPR\), art. 19 \(Sep. 12, 2011\).](#)

28 [Marshall Islands Consolidated Legislation - Marshallese Language Orthography Act 2010.](#)

29 [Marshall Islands Consolidated Legislation - Political Broadcast Access Act 2014.](#)

30 [Marshall Islands Consolidated Legislation - Radio Communication Act 1993.](#)

31 *Radio Communication Act 1993*, s. 304.

32 *Radio Communication Act 1993*, s. 308.



Co-founder of the PMI Giff Johnson opens the Democracy, Elections and Media Workshops. (Chewy Lin)

08

8. TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Telecommunication services are regulated by the Marshall Islands National Telecommunications Authority Act 1990. The NTA is the regulator, with broad responsibilities of planning, establishing, managing, operating, and maintaining domestic and international telecommunication services for the country.³³ The Marshall Islands does not have national cybercrime legislation. However, authorities are considering introducing a Cyberbullying Prevention Bill.³⁴ Article 250.4 of the Criminal Code 2011 provides for harassment using telecommunications as a misdemeanour.³⁵

³³ [Marshall Islands Consolidated Legislation-Marshall Islands National Telecommunications Authority Act 1990.](#)

³⁴ Divine Waiti, Parliamentary Counsel, Parliament of the Marshall Islands.

³⁵ [Marshall Islands Consolidated Legislation-Criminal Code 2011.](#)



Setting up for a live interview at Power 103.5FM. (Facebook: Power 103.5 FM Marshall Islands)

09

9. MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

Mis/disinformation was highlighted by media practitioner respondents as a challenge in the Marshallese media landscape, especially on social media. One respondent observed that social media has encouraged the distribution of unverified information and that people share information without considering the consequences. This trend was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Media practitioner respondents also expressed concern about the spread of disinformation during election campaigns, noting examples of political party factions intentionally using disinformation about their rivals to advance their own positions. There is not yet any legislation relating to mis/disinformation. Respondents observed that the small size of the Marshallese population and the prominence of direct communication help to partly mitigate the damaging effects of mis/disinformation, because online conversations tend to be limited or can be verified in face-to-face communication.



Speaker
Kenneth
Kedi at ICC.

Workshop, Summit spotlight media and democracy

A five-day Media, Elections and Democracy workshops wrapped up Thursday June 22 in Majuro with the first-ever Summit on Democracy: Public Engagement, Communications and the Media.

Over 40 students, journalists and public information officers from government and NGOs participated in the program organized by the Pacific Media Institute in the Marshall Islands.

The workshop featured an experienced team of Pacific Island journalist trainers and resource people led by Honolulu-based writer/photographer Floyd K. Takeuchi.

Nearly 20 journalists and college students from the Marshall Islands participated in a morning track of the workshop, while close to 30 PIOs from the Marshall Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Federated States of Micronesia and Palau took part in an afternoon workshop track. The workshop focused on learning to "write tight," with techniques such as haiku and the four-paragraph story employed.

Numerous special presentations were



Taiwan Ambassador
Steve Hsia



United States Chargé
Henry Hand



Australian Chargé
Derek Taylor



Dr. Irene Taafaki
CMI President

offered during the lunch hours, including:

- How media organizations support independent journalism and what they've accomplished in Tonga and the Solomon Islands, led by Kalafi Moala, President of the Media Association of Tonga, and Georgina Keke, President of the Media As-

sociation of the Solomon Islands.

- Domestic violence and prevention initiatives, led by Kathryn Relang, Country Focal Officer, Marshall Islands, Human Rights and Social Development Division, SPC
- Teieniwa Vision for Journalists: Anti-Corruption Reporting Toolkit for Journalists, led by Rimon Rimon, investigative journalist, Kiribati.

The workshop culminated in an all-day Summit on Democracy at the government's International Conference Center. It featured speeches by Marshall Islands President David Kabua and Parliament Speaker Kenneth Kedi, both of whom said they supported the Summit concept from the time that Pacific Media Institute sought their endorsement early this year. The Office of the Speaker co-sponsored the Summit with Pacific Media Institute.

Each day of the workshop, including the Summit, workshop participants, individually and in small groups, had writing assignments they delivered to the team of Pacific media trainers for review and editing.

Donor partners support-

ing the Media and Democracy Workshops and Summit on Democracy include: Aus-AID, Republic of China/Taiwan Embassy in Majuro, USAID PROJECT Governance that is managed by the East-West Center and SPC, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, Pacific Anti-Corruption Journalists Network, New Zealand North Pacific Development Fund, and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat.



RMI President David Kabua
speaking at the Summit.



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Pacific Community
Communauté
du Pacifique



UNODC
United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime





10. MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE

Telecommunications

Telecommunications infrastructure in the Marshall Islands has developed at a slower pace than other Pacific Island nations. This has been due to the large geographic area of the archipelago – the total land area of the Marshall Islands is just 181 square kilometres across 1,942,491 square kilometres of ocean – combined with a small population dispersed over 25 islands and atolls. This geography has not produced the economies of scale required for private telecommunications companies to invest.³⁶

The National Telecommunications Authority (NTA), with majority government ownership, is the sole provider of telecommunications, internet and television services in the Marshall Islands.³⁷ The NTA provides 2G, 3G and 4G LTE mobile services and fixed-line

³⁶ [Pacific RSA \(Research on Island Solutions for Adaptation\) - Republic of the Marshall Islands.](#)

³⁷ [National Telecommunications Authority - About Us.](#)

internet via DSL to the islands of Majuro, Ebeye, Jaluit, Kili and Wotje³⁸ and DAMA systems on the outer islands.³⁹ Just 35 per cent of mobile connections in the Marshall Islands are broadband connections (classified as 3G and above).⁴⁰

Internet access is expensive for both individuals and businesses⁴¹ and sits many times above the affordability threshold suggested by the International Telecommunication Union.⁴² Although 4G LTE services have been rolled out in the main urban centres, the majority of the population cannot access the network due to the prohibitive cost of data plans and a lack of compatible mobile handsets.⁴³ A World Bank investment of US\$30 million (2021-2027) aims to address both the affordability issue in the Marshall Islands and improve digital access through “promoting private-sector investment in climate-resilient digital infrastructure and establish the foundations for digital government services and the digital economy”.⁴⁴

The HANTRU-1 submarine cable (connected April 2010), effectively provides the current ‘data backbone’ to the country. Majuro and Kwajalein atolls are linked to Guam via the undersea cable, providing a 6 Gbps link, with a 2Gbps capacity onward cable linking Majuro to Ebeye.⁴⁵ On October 2023, a joint Australian-United States deal was announced to expand a commercial undersea internet cable project by Google to the island nations of Micronesia, including the Marshall Islands.⁴⁶ There is no certainty that the new cable will have an impact on reducing prices and increasing access to high-speed internet for the Marshallese population. Other Pacific Island nations such as PNG and the Solomon Islands have not seen more affordable internet access as a result of submarine cables reaching their countries.⁴⁷

The Starlink website states that Starlink coverage is available in the Marshall Islands “starting in 2025, subject to regulatory approval”.⁴⁸ In July 2024, the Marshall Islands Journal reported on the donation of Starlink equipment by the Marshall Islands Red Cross Society to 24 mayors representing each Marshallese atoll. The local governments are required to pay for service and maintenance fees.⁴⁹

38 [Logistics Cluster, Logistics Capacity Assessment Tool - Marshall Islands \(RMI\), Telecommunications, assessment conducted March 2023.](#)

39 [Logistics Cluster, Logistics Capacity Assessment Tool - Marshall Islands.](#)

40 [Simon Kemp, Data Reportal - Digital 2024: The Marshall Islands.](#)

41 [National Telecommunications Authority - 4g LTE Plans.](#)

42 [The World Bank - Project Information Document: Digital Republic of the Marshall Islands PDF.](#)

43 [The World Bank - Project Information Document: Digital Republic of the Marshall Islands PDF.](#)

44 [The World Bank - New World Bank Project will Expand Internet Access for Marshall Islands, August 31, 2021.](#)

45 [Logistics Cluster, Logistics Capacity Assessment Tool - Marshall Islands \(RMI\) Telecommunications, assessment conducted March 2023.](#)

46 [Trevor Hunnicutt, Reuters - Google to run internet cables to Pacific islands in Australia-US deal, October 25, 2023.](#)

47 [Colin Clark, Breaking Defense Indo-Pacific - US, Aussies funding Google undersea internet cables for Pacific Islands, with geostrategic implications, October 26, 2023.](#)

48 [Starlink - homepage.](#)

49 [Hilary Hosia, Marshall Islands Journal - Red Cross donates Starlink devices, July 18, 2024.](#)

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations on strengthening the Marshallese media sector are informed by data collected from interviews with media practitioners respondents and a desk review of existing literature.

Establishing a media association to promote media freedom and independence

Respondents emphasised the need to establish a media association in the Marshall Islands. The establishment of the PMI, which promotes media freedom, was noted by respondents as a welcome addition to the media landscape; however, this has reinforced the need for a media association that could actively represent the needs and interests of journalists and media practitioners in the country.

In addition to advocating for media freedom and media independence, respondents indicated that such a media association could develop a journalists' code of ethics and set a quality standard for journalists and the media sector. Developing a policy that promotes the public's right to access government information was also suggested as a key action a media association could take on, to enable the media to facilitate more informed public discussions.



Lita Flood and Eve Burns at the PMI's 'Telling Your Pacific Story' workshop. (Chewy Lin)

Skilled and well-supported media critical to quality public-interest content

Respondents noted that media freedom and independence are strengthened when there is a growing diversity of independent media that are well supported. Respondents emphasised the need for more support for emerging, smaller independent outlets beyond established media organisations.

Building the capacity and skills of media practitioners was also raised by respondents as an important need. Short trainings, courses, or workshops that focus on news content skills and digital technology skills were mentioned as particularly useful (RMI 06; RMI 01).

Apart from training, internships for journalists were also recommended by respondents. One idea suggested is an arrangement that creates opportunities for second- or third-year students in journalism schools around the region – such as in Hawaii, Australia, and New Zealand – to work in newsrooms in countries like the Marshall Islands.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings from this report highlighted the continuing prominence of newspapers as a trusted source of information for Marshallese people, the ongoing challenge of reaching remote communities, and a growing interest in establishing a representative media body. While the rise of social media and digitisation presents both challenges and opportunities, the Marshall Islands media continues to play a crucial role in preserving and passing on cultural knowledge, while covering local news with independence, accuracy and impartiality.