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# Japan launches \$450m aid program for Pacific

GIFF JOHNSON

With the hosting of a Pacific Islands Tourism Ministers meeting in Tokyo Sunday, Japan has begun launching a promised US\$450 million aid package for the Pacific region.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced at the PALM7 Pacific leaders summit held in Japan in May that his government would provide 55 billion yen (US\$458,150,000) over the next three years to its Pacific neighbors in seven major focus areas ranging from climate and disaster risk response to fisheries and trade. Briefing a team of Pacific media representatives last week in Tokyo, Japan government representatives said the new three-year aid program is already underway.

Fulfilling one of the objectives of the PALM7 summit, tourism ministers from 13 island nations gathered in Tokyo last weekend to discuss opportunities with Japan. R&D Minister Mike Konelios represented the RMI at the Tokyo tourism talks. Although details of the discussions were not made public, officials said the talks focused on how Japan can help boost tourism opportunities in the region.

Among other major developments now in the pipeline:

- A climate change center that will be built in Samoa in conjunction with the Secretariat of the Regional Environment Program (SPREP). Japan will fund the building of a new facility and provide resources for training initiatives to be sponsored, said Soichiro Kojima, the senior coordinator in the Country Assistance Planning Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "We hope the center will be open in the next three-to-four years," he said.

- Establishment of a Pacific LEADS (Leaders Educational Assistance for Development of State) program that will offer graduate study at Japan universities and follow up internships in government agencies for 100 emerging leaders under the age of 40. It will start in 2016.

- The regional Japanese Promotion of Regional Initiative on Solid Waste Management (J-PRISM), which is being extended for a second five-year period. "The next five years aims to

## Region's wealth of minerals and fish extremely attractive



JICA's Masayoshi Ono and Takashi Toyama.

### 'The aim of Japan's significant aid program for the Pacific region is to create a peaceful and prosperous region'

- Hiroaki Shinohara, Senior Deputy Director for Pacific Island Affairs, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

expand, modify and strengthen the capacity of Pacific countries to handle waste," said Masayoshi Ono, the country officer for Pacific and South-east Asia Division of the Japan International Cooperation Agency. Waste management is a big issue in small islands that have "no place to put it," Ono said. J-PRISM has worked in 14 island nations, including RMI, since 2010.

- The "Hybrid Islands Initiative," focused on expanding renewable energy use and optimizing diesel power generation. Japan is providing technical expertise and other support to assist island nations to get the right balance between fossil fuel and renewables to avoid disruptions to power service. "It's important to have diesel power," said Ono. "Solar relies on good weather but it is not sunny all year around, which is why the islands still need diesel." But, he added, there is scope to further re-

duce reliance on diesel power, and one initiative is the plan to introduce wind power generation to Tonga. Although some Pacific leaders have called for entirely phasing out use of fossil fuel for power generation in the next 10 years, Ono said it won't be possible to replace diesel in the next five-to-10 years. "Renewable energy cannot be reliable for 24/7, 365-days of the year power provision," he said. "It's not possible."

In addition to the nearly US\$458 million in development grant funding, JICA is providing infrastructure loans to three nations in the region — Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Samoa. Loans are supporting redevelopment of the international airport in Port Moresby and the Port Vila port.

"Island nations are important partners of Japan," said Hiroaki Shinohara, the senior deputy director for Pacific Island Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Japan has historical ties with many island nations that it governed or traded with in the pre-World War II period. The Pacific is also a site of natural resources important to Japan, said Shinohara.

"The Pacific is very rich in minerals and fish," he said. "About 80 percent of Japan's tuna catch comes from this region." The aim of Japan's significant aid program for the Pacific region is to "create a peaceful and prosperous region," said Shinohara.