

Marshall Islands plan seawall to block rising seas

November 1 2010, by Giff Johnson



A high tide in 2008 floods the main road in Majuro Atoll, home to nearly half of the Marshall Islands' 55,000 population. The low-lying islands, a Pacific atoll chain that rises barely a metre above sea level, have announced plans for a wall to hold back rising sea levels.

The low-lying Marshall Islands, a Pacific atoll chain that rises barely a metre above sea level, has announced plans for a wall to hold back rising sea levels.

"We want to prevent erosion and stop flooding," UN ambassador Phillip Muller said at the weekend, launching an appeal for 20 million dollars in international donor funds to get the project under way.

The full cost of the protective sea wall has not been released and Muller said the initial plea for donor funds is for detailed engineering work on

the project.

The vulnerability of the Marshalls was highlighted two years ago when floods hit the eastern shore of the main Majuro Atoll causing several million dollars in damage and forcing dozens of islanders to live in temporary shelters.

The Honolulu-based National Weather Service, a US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-supported agency, recently warned of possibly more severe flooding in the next two months.

"The sea level should be similar or higher than those seen during 2008, when waves flooded parts of Majuro and other atolls in the country," the report said.



Graphic fact file on the Marshall Islands, , a Pacific atoll chain that rises barely a

metre above sea level, which has announced plans for a wall to hold back rising sea levels.

The Marshall Islands, a nation of 29 coral atolls and five single islands stretches across 800,000 square kilometres (500,000 square miles) of Pacific Ocean but has only about 116 square kilometres of dry land, most of which is not more than a metre above the high tide mark.

Muller said the government is asking donors to put up climate change funding to help his country forestall pending floods.

The plan is to build a five-kilometre seawall on the leeward coast of Majuro Atoll for shore protection as well as to landfill small bays to increase landmass as a buffer against [rising sea levels](#) and high waves during storms.

Nearly half of the country's 55,000 population live in Majuro where few homes are more than 10 metres from the ocean and many are considerably closer.

The floods in December 2008 resulted from exceptionally high tides which peaked at the same time as powerful waves generated by storms at sea surged ashore to inundate many parts of Majuro's eastern coastline.

From his UN office, Muller has been pushing for access to billions of dollars in promised [climate-change](#) aid for vulnerable countries.

But, he said, not much of the pledged money has flowed to the countries that most need it.

"We have only a short window of opportunity for accessing these funds,"

he said. "The money pledged is only for two-to-three years. We need to move fast."

The 20-million dollars towards the protective seawall was only an "initial" amount to get the protection work going and additional funding would be required.

The Marshall Islands, the scene of the US nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s, was a US-administered trust territory until becoming independent in 1986 under a Compact of Free Association between the two countries.

It is nearly 70 percent underwritten by donor grants, with two countries providing the bulk of funding -- the United States injects about 75 million dollars a year into government coffers, and Taiwan, which has diplomatic ties with the Marshalls, adds another 10 million dollars.

The meagre national budget for the current fiscal year is only 130 million dollars, down five percent on the previous year to reflect declining tax revenue, partly as a result of cutbacks at the US Army's Kwajalein missile range.

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