

Drought-hit Palau could dry up totally this month

April 4 2016



The tiny Pacific island of Palau has a population of about 18,000 people

Drought-stricken Palau could dry up completely this month, officials warned Monday as the Pacific island appealed for urgent aid from Japan and Taiwan, including shipments of water.

The tiny country of about 18,000 people declared a state of emergency last month, the latest Pacific island nation to do so as one of the worst

ever El Nino-induced droughts in the region worsens.

"We're still in the state of emergency, there's a sense of urgency to address the crisis," a government spokesman told AFP as the National Emergency Committee (NEC) met to discuss strategy.

An NEC report prepared for President Tommy Remengesau offered a bleak outlook for the already-parched country.

"Based on the current water level and usage rates, and assuming conditions persist unabated, a total water outage is likely to occur in the next two to three weeks," it said.

Access to tap water is already rationed to three hours a day or less in the capital Koror and schools are only open half days because they cannot give students enough to drink.

"The NEC has been in contact with the governments of Japan and Taiwan regarding support of materials and equipment, as well as direct shipments of water as necessary," it said.

Palau



Palau has rationed tap water after declaring a state of emergency in March 2016

The Japanese embassy in Palau confirmed it had received a request for assistance and discussions were ongoing about what form it would take.

"The nature of what type of assistance and in what volume is expected to be finalised as soon as possible," it said in a statement.

Palau also expects help from Taiwan, one of the few countries to

maintain diplomatic relations with Taipei in the face of opposition from China.

The NEC report added that the US military had been asked to supply portable water filtration systems to alleviate the increasingly desperate situation.

The US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said last month the El Nino weather pattern—associated with a sustained period of warming in the central Pacific which can spark climate extremes—was unlikely to ease before the second half of the year.

The Marshall Islands and the Federated States of Micronesia have also declared states of emergency, while Guam and the Northern Marianas are experiencing low rainfall.

In Koror, bottled water has become scarce as people stockpile dwindling supplies.

Resident Rolynda Jonathan said she constantly worried about her two children.

"There are no words to describe the level of stress, worry and burden of hauling water from one place to another," she told AFP.

"Every morning we struggle to shower, clean up and prepare for the day with the limited amount of [water](#) we have."

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