

# Making an Impact

## The story of Helen Reef Atoll: When a Pacific Islander and a business-savvy philanthropist partner for a healthier, more beautiful world.



Helen Reef Atoll is one of the Republic of Palau's largest, most biologically diverse coral reefs. The area has been managed and conserved by the community for generations.

Thomas Patris is an avid fisherman and a state governor. He co-led a pioneering local effort to stop illegal fishing at this remote coral atoll, which is owned by his community.

However, since the 1980s, increased unauthorized commercial fishing and the effects of a changing climate have presented global challenges to the community's efforts. Unchecked, these pressures can rapidly deplete populations of reef species that are important to a community's fishing needs and critical to maintaining the reef's ability to resist the ongoing effects of climate change.

Barrett Walker is a successful entrepreneur and board member at the Alex C. Walker Foundation. He is an ocean lover with a flair for market-based solutions, and has a keen interest in Asia-Pacific cultures and the environment. He is clearly focused on measurable impact that he can see with his own eyes.

Together they are working to protect Thomas' atoll from poaching. The ingredients? The right resources, scientific monitoring of progress, and an approach that gives respect to all involved yet leaves the community in the driver's seat.

OneReef negotiated an explicit Marine Conservation Agreement that spells out their commitments to protection and finance. And now we are helping them live up to it, to ensure this special place remains beautiful and beneficial to people.

OneReef is now building the systems required to take this approach to a very large scale. We're creating a mobile ranger station that resists typhoon-force winds and water, is easy to assemble and maintain, and can be shipped almost anywhere. Working with the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, we are investing in a cost-effective, go-anywhere system for ecological monitoring, including photo mosaic images of reefs that provide a scientific archive. With the Micronesia Conservation Trust and Thomas' community, OneReef has established a community-based reserve and endowment fund, a cornerstone in the system that will keep this work sustainably financed.

**The result will be over 40,000 acres of vibrant coral reef, protected, managed and supported by an agreement that will stay in place for 20 years.**

**The Hatohobeian community has always had the desire to protect Helen Reef. Now that we have the tools and support we need, we'll put all our efforts into making it happen.**

— Thomas Patris  
*Present Governor of Hatohobei State, former congressional delegate, and avid fisherman*

**I love measurement. I love impact. I love ideas. But most of all, I love the ocean and the coral reefs that make it amazing.**

— Barrett Walker  
*Global partner, Alex C. Walker Foundation*

**Ecological monitoring on Helen Reef Atoll in 2000, 2006, and 2013 shows a big change. Not only is fish biomass the highest observed in Micronesia, but a suite of ecological measurements indicates that Helen Reef shows resilience to the effects of a shifting climate.**

Here's how it happened:

