



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Final Report of the Joint Mariana Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, March 25, 2023

10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. (ChSt)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) vice-Chair, opened the meeting at 10:10 a.m. Members in attendance included Richard Farrell, Clay Tam (AP Chair), Michael Fleming, Perry Mesngon, Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Ray Tebuteb, Lino Tenorio, Lawrence Concepcion, Anthony Guerrero, Judy Amesbury (Guam Vice-chair), Michael Duenas, James Borja, Dale Alvarez, Dominick San Gil, Jesse Rosario, Jason Miller and Mike Gawel. David Cabrera and John Deloso were excused.

Others in attendance include Zach Yamada, Felix Reyes, Mark Fitchett, Joshua DeMello, Asuka Ishizaki, Amy Vandehey (Council staff), Judith Guthertz (Council member), Sylvan Igisomar and Michael Tenorio (CNMI DFW).

2. Setting the Direction for the Marianas Advisory Panel

Zach Yamada provided a review of the AP Training Workshops held in Guam during January 2023 and provided the AP an opportunity to discuss issues they want to address during their term.

3. Marianas Projects and Activities 2023

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided a report on the 2019-2022 Guam and CNMI AP Action Plan. His report included a status update on each priority and issues by program area for the AP to decide which priorities should be carried over and added to their 2023-2026 action plan.

The CNMI AP said that the lack of resources for enforcement and issues with scuba spear fishers encroaching on Rota were local issues. Another member said people should consider CNMI as a whole, and fishers have no restrictions to fish around other islands.

Regarding military closures and fisheries access, the Guam and CNMI APs said this continues to be an ongoing issue for both fishing communities. A Guam AP member reported that Mark Cruz, US Navy, provided a report on Guam military activity at the Guam Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee. She said there were concerns about the Ritidian firing closed area displacing fishers from their fishing grounds for three-fourths of the year. Cruz said fishermen should continue to raise their local concerns with their governors to ask for mitigation. Judi Guthertz, Council member, reported that the US Military did not prohibit fishing in the area and wanted to ensure they provided proper notices to the community. If a boat is in the area, they will not arrest those fishers; instead, they will wait for each boat to leave the site and continue their training. An AP member said the fishing community could negotiate a mitigation plan due

to fishery displacement. The mitigation plan could include marking their operations with buoys, building a pier on the east side of Guam, and engaging the community in providing proper notices to the communities.

The Guam and CNMI AP members said that shark depredation had become a bigger problem over the years. The fishermen complained that they were not involved in the shark studies conducted in the Marianas or compensated appropriately, giving them the short end of the stick. Another member said they invite scientists onto their boat to understand how shark depredation affects their fishing trips. A Guam AP member said that they should conduct any shark projects moving forward through Cooperative Research to ensure that fishers are a part of the solution rather than identified as the issue.

A Guam AP member said that the cultural take of green sea turtle (GST) should be kept on the agenda. Each island nation surrounding the Mariana Islands can harvest GST. Harvest of GST has been a part of the local island culture for so long, and the AP should continue to fight for cultural take. A CNMI AP member supported the take of GST and recommended the local territorial agencies consider different avenues to allow the take of GST. Council staff said there is a local Hawaiian organization pursuing the cultural take of GST. Still, there is a need for more data to change the status of the endangered GST to threatened possibly. The AP endorsed for more data to understand their distinct population size better.

Regarding the AP's Outreach and Education efforts, the Guam and CNMI AP want to encourage sustainable fishing and increase participation in the fishery. A Guam member said there is a need to change the perception that fishermen are not bad folks. As fishers, they want to protect their resources, but they also want to continue fishing too. A Guam member said the AP could work with the University of Guam Sea Grant and 4H program toward a collaborative effort to pursue sustainability for fishing and counter the anti-fishermen sentiment. Amy Vandehey, Council staff, said the Council will develop a speakers' bureau to provide local schools to provide fishers a platform to give talks on fishing at community meetings, local high schools, and local colleges. In addition, a CNMI member said that the outreach and education programs need to extend beyond the high school level to inform fishers about the benefits of providing their data to inform better management.

Regarding Mariana fishery issues, the Joint Marianas AP recommended the Council request the local government to work with the Department of Defense to expand the warnings to the Mariana fishing communities for temporary restricted areas, and work with the local fishing community to develop a mitigation plan that could include the construction of a boat ramp on the east side of Guam and provide access military resources (i.e. gas), and the deployment of FADs.

4. Feedback from the Fleet

A. First Quarter Fishermen Observations in the Marianas

The Guam AP reported a good mahi run at the end of 2022, but the first quarter of 2023 started with bad weather and rough fishing. A Guam member observed a strong marlin bite for the first quarter of 2023. Another member said there was bad weather on the Agana Channel, and fishers are looking at different options to feed their families. A member observed an increase in turtles and sharks in the marina. Another member said the price of fish had stayed the same, and there is a need for better market strategies to promote better prices for locally caught fish.

The CNMI AP reported they experienced rough weather for the first quarter of 2023 but observed a great catch with little shark depredation in the Northern Islands. The demand for fresh fish is there for the CNMI, but they cannot keep up with that demand. A member from Rota observed an earlier atulai run than its summer run. Another member said the markets complained about the price of atulai decreasing with decreasing tuna catch. The birds were still there, with little tuna and more sharks on the main islands. A member reported two algal blooms near Smiling Cove, Rota, and Tinian. He observed a lot of erosion west of Saipan and a lot of opelu off of the preposition ships. There was an increase in hammerhead shark and turtle interaction with one siting of a leatherback. The mahimahi run started early in 2023, and the wahoo bite continued from the 2022 fishing year. Another member said fishing is healthy from shallow to deep, and they observed a new species of Spanish mackerel (achuman). A member from Tinian observed larger sharks coming into their marinas.

B. Marianas Archipelago Fishery Issues and Priorities

A CNMI member from Tinian reported there are rumors of fishing closures from Agile Reaper and Cope North military trainings. Another member said they observed the NOAA white ship conducting research in the Mariana Archipelago. The community was informed on this cruise and would like to see a report on the recent and past research that was conducted in the Marianas.

The Joint AP requested that NOAA provide a report to the Advisory Panel on past and ongoing research being conducted in the Marianas.

5. Council Issues

A. Options for a Multi-Year Bigeye Tuna Catch and Allocation Limits

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, presented options for setting a framework for a multi-year bigeye tuna (BET) catch and allocation limits applicable for American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI to US-flagged Hawaii longline vessels. Under Amendment 7 to the Pelagic FEP, the Council specified annual fishing agreements to support the territorial marine conservation plan and fishery development projects. This action could remove the requirement for annual catch limits and amend the Pacific Pelagic FEP to specify multi-year allocation limits from US Participating Territories to US longline vessels.

A Guam member said the tuna allocation was nothing new and wanted to see a chart by catch for each territory on how much the fleet got for the quota value given to the territories. The joint CNMI and Guam AP should look at how much they are getting. Council staff said the fishing effort has been low for the last few years but has exceeded 3,000 metric tons in the past.

A Guam member said the CNMI has benefited from the BET agreements and had projects funded. He said if the Hawaii longline fishery reached their quota in June or July with heavy tuna consumption in Hawaii year round, what would be the revenue of their quota following other trip cost expenditures. Another member said the Hawaii fleet only sometimes uses the quota but are willing to purchase the allocation every year. A Guam member said their governor has either failed to act on the offer or believes the offered amount needed to be higher. Therefore, each of the territories should be equal with the allocations.

A CNMI AP member said the Council should move forward with removing the requirement for an annual BET longline catch limit and proceed with a multi-year allocation framework for U.S. participating territories.

The Joint AP recommended the Council remove the requirement for a bigeye tuna longline catch limit for US Participating Territories and proceed with a multiple year allocation framework for those US Participating Territories.

The Joint Marianas AP recommended Council staff provide any available information on previous allocations, including how much each attribution may be valued from previous specified agreements. This should be used to inform a preferred allocation limit.

B. Guam and CNMI Marine Conservation Plan Review

Michael Duenas, DAWR, and Sylvan Igisomar, DFW, presented on a three-year Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) developed by the Territory of Guam and the CNMI which identifies high priority projects to expend funds that are collected through fines from foreign fishing violations in the US Exclusive Economic Zones. A second method of funding the MCP is through territorial fishing agreements and sustainable fisheries funds. As part of the development process the local agencies held meetings in the community to determine what type of projects the community would like to include in the MCP. Additional solicitations were made to other Guam agencies and will be working to complete a final MCP for review by the Council in June 2023.

A CNMI AP member said to ensure they consult communities from the Northern Islands, Tinian and Rota in the planning of the MCP. Another member said they should consider a project to install lights around Rota for navigational purposes.

6. Marianas Fishery Issues and Activities

A. Bottomfish Fisheries

i. Bottomfish Management Unit Species Revision Update

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, provided a status update on the territorial BMUS revision highlighting changes to the proposed timeline, which include amending only the American Samoa FEP given the timing of the stock assessment for American Samoa. The Action team will develop alternatives for the Council to consider amending the American Samoa FEP at its upcoming 195th Council meeting.

A Guam member said a DAWR report from July to September reported 14,000 pounds of onaga was caught and thinks this is a far fetched estimate and there is a need for better data. Council staff said there was uncertainty on which catch was being attributed to which areas.

ii. Guam Data Workshop Outcomes and Next Steps

Felix Reyes, Council staff, provided a report of the Guam Bottomfish Data Workshops held in January 2023. These workshops were part of the new PIFSC Stock Assessment Improvement Plan (SAIP). In addition, they involved meetings with two groups of fishermen and the Guam Department of Agriculture to interpret historical catch data before developing the next bottomfish stock assessment for Guam.

A Guam AP member commended PIFSC for hosting the Guam data workshop and thought it was beneficial for the fishers to understand how data is important. He praised PIFSC

for ensuring the data was representative and they hope this will drive the local agencies to ensure they do the job right for any future assessments.

Another Guam AP member said they were able to take some of the fishermen fishing to help them understand the dynamics of the fishery and help the scientist see what is going on in the fishery. An AP member was impressed with how the change in PIFSC leadership allowed for their fruitful discussions.

A CNMI AP member said there is a need for fishery development for the bottomfish fishery and asked if there was funding to host workshops. Council staff said there are opportunities through the Young Fishermen Development Act and could work with the University of Guam Sea Grant Program.

B. Pelagic Fisheries

i. Exploratory Longline Fishing in the CNMI

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, presented options for exploratory longline fishing in the CNMI. This could entail foreign fishing, including charter arrangements, joint ventures or Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA) that comply with MSA provisions and support their MCP. In addition, the CNMI is in a strategic location for access to Asian markets and could partner with the Hawaii Longline fishery to develop a longline fishery.

A Guam member was concerned with entering a PIAFA and asked how this would affect their allocation quota. Council staff said it would not go towards their quota, but it would require the catch limits/allocations to be split up between the foreign countries and the Hawaii fleet.

A CNMI member asked if they wanted to make an informal request to see the feasibility of this kind of fishing. Council staff said they could do that, but there is a lot of uncertainty with that type of agreement, and other options would look at territorial country to country. So that member said it would be good if there were fishers out there showing that there are people fishing here and may push them away.

A CNMI member asked if the funding would have to be used for fishing. Council staff under PIAFA, the funds have to go to the MCP. A joint venture between a private entity and a territory, but they still must go via the US State Department.

ii. Council Pelagic Fisheries Research Priorities

Mark Fitchett provided a presentation on the Council Pelagic Fisheries Research Priorities (PFRP). Under section 302(h) in the MSA, each Council shall develop, in conjunction with the scientific and statistical committee, multi-year research priorities for fisheries, fishery interactions, habitats, and other areas of research that are necessary for management purposes. The Council has started to plan for the Pelagic Research Plan before March 2023.

An AP member said that if the Council pursues a shark depredation project, that is be a cooperative research project that integrate fishermen into the process. He said there have been previous projects conducted where there were no results reported back to the fishing communities. There is a new project that has proposed cost that may not compensate fishermen at a reasonable rate. To avoid this, scientist should continue to work with the fishing community and provide consultation.

A CNMI member reported Tinian fishers were concerned with stomach contents and parasites found in their pelagic species. In the past few months, they observed an unidentified parasite and would like to understand if this was caused by climate change or change in diet.

The AP further requested that PIFSC conduct a study on stomach contents and parasites in Pelagic MUS in the Marianas.

7. Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Public Comment

There were no request for public comment

9. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding Mariana fishery issues, the Joint Marianas AP recommended the Council request the local government to work with the Department of Defense to expand the warnings to the Mariana fishing communities for temporary restricted areas, and work with the local fishing community to develop a mitigation plan that could include the construction of a boat ramp on the east side of Guam and provide access military resources (i.e. gas), and the deployment of FADs.

The Joint AP recommended the Council remove the requirement for a bigeye tuna longline catch limit for US Participating Territories and proceed with a multiple year allocation framework for those US Participating Territories.

The Joint Marianas AP recommended Council staff provide any available information on previous allocations, including how much each attribution may be valued from previous specified agreements. This should be used to inform a preferred allocation limit.

Regarding Marianas fishery issues the Joint Marianas AP recommended the Council:

- *Request the Guam DoAg DAWR and CNMI DLNR DFW explore funding sources to gather the data to allow for the cultural take of green sea turtle.*
- *Request NOAA provide a report to the Advisory Panel on past and ongoing research being conducted in the Marianas*
- *Request NMFS PIFSC conduct a study on stomach contents and parasites in pelagic MUS in the Marianas.*

Meeting ended at 5:11 pm, ChSt.