

Potential Economic and Political Fallout of Tuna Fishery Closures in Proposed PRIA Sanctuary



US purse seine vessels in American Samoa

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On March 21, 2023, President Biden directed the Secretary of Commerce to consider initiating the designation process for a proposed National Marine Sanctuary covering all U.S. waters around the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA). NOAA launched the designation process in April and held scoping meetings in May 2023 throughout the Western Pacific Region. The public comment period closed June 2.

The draft sanctuary goals and objectives NOAA presented at the scoping meetings were vague and included language to "conserve, protect, and restore the marine biodiversity and ecosystems of the Pacific Remote Islands" and to "provide the necessary policy, programs, structure, and processes to ensure effective, integrated management..." The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council has had sustainable fishing regulations in place under the Magnuson-Stevens Act for this area since the 1980s. In restructuring its management framework from species-based plans to place-based plans in the late 2000s, the Council was the first to recognize the importance of a comprehensive ecosystem approach. By doing so, the Council aimed to maintain the overall balance and functioning of the ecosystem, thereby supporting the long-term viability of fish stocks and the preservation of vulnerable species. Achieving the presented goals and objectives would not be mutually exclusive to well-monitored and sustainable fisheries.

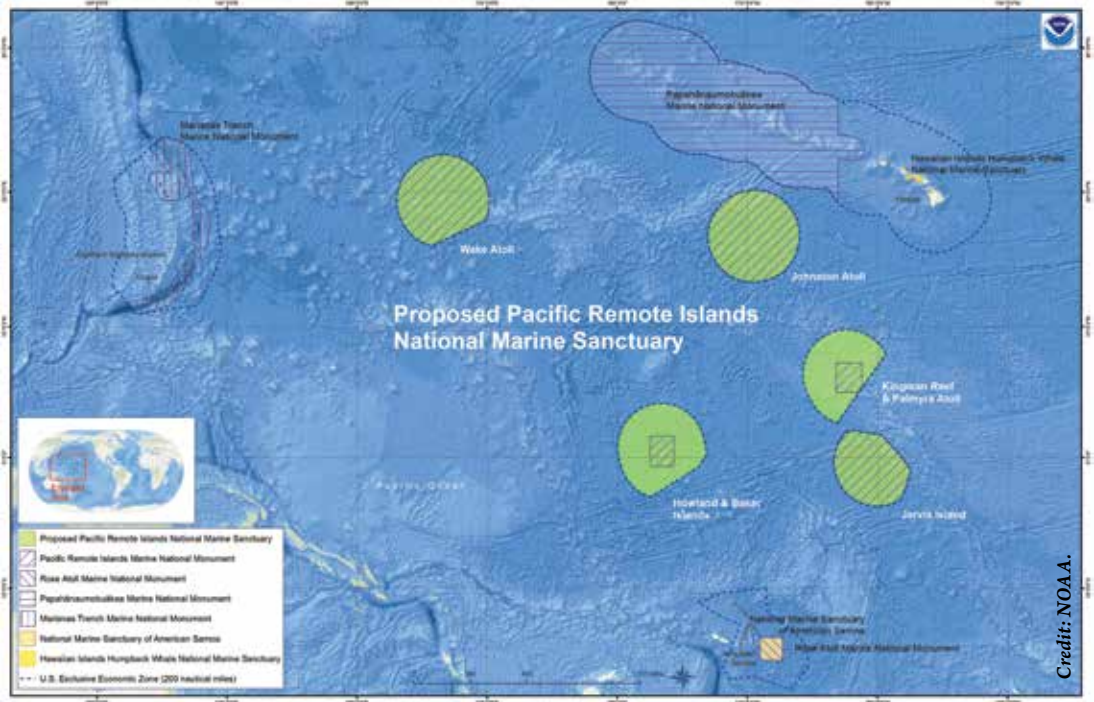
If the proposed sanctuary were to prohibit tuna fishing, the fishing industry and the communities that depend on it would face significant challenges. However, the conservation benefits of such a move to tuna stocks and the international landscape remain unclear as the proposal lacks supporting narratives.

Principal tuna species in tuna fisheries within the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) are not overfished or experiencing overfishing (yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack, albacore). This is based on internationally accepted best scientific information available.¹ These fisheries do not interact with vulnerable reef or deep sea habitats either. In fact, these fisheries cannot legally operate within 50 nautical miles of the PRIA, well beyond the range of coral reefs at any depths where they could possibly interact with tuna fisheries.



Proposed PRIA Sanctuary

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



In fact, MPAs can be counterproductive for conservation. The proposed sanctuary area is adjacent to the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA), which is to be reopened in Kiribati for fishing access for Chinese tuna purse seine vessels. A recent study conducted by Pacific Community tuna experts, led by John Hampton, PhD, found that the PIPA closure had no measurable conservation benefits for tropical tuna species (Hampton et al., 2023²). In reality, the PIPA simply displaced fishing effort. Further

to be more effective than current input/output fishery management controls or other area-based management tools. Pons et al. (2022⁴) used real case studies with verifiable data to demonstrate that existing fishery management tools and dynamic area-based management tools are significantly more effective at protecting biodiversity than large “set it and forget it” closed areas. On the other hand, closing all U.S. waters to fishing within the PRIA presents some serious negative consequences that need to be evaluated.

Science does not support the idea that large marine protected areas conserve or protect pelagic ecosystems better than existing management tools.

hypothetic closures throughout the WCPO yielded minimal conservation benefits, even when 30% of waters are closed to tuna fishing (Hampton et al., 2023). If closing waters to tuna fishing had demonstrable conservation benefits, it would have been evident in the PIPA, where significant fishing activity had occurred before the closure. However, any potential “spillover” benefits of the proposed sanctuary would likely benefit Chinese fisheries instead, creating a “transferred effect” that could diminish the United States’ relevance in the Pacific tuna economy, as described below.

Hilborn et al. (2022³) also found that protection of biodiversity using large, static closures in open ocean blue water ecosystems is not proven

Economic Impact

Tuna fishing is a significant economic activity in the Pacific region, and the PRIA provide important fishing grounds for commercially valuable tuna species for a small number of U.S. vessels that contribute a significant economic benefit to American Samoa. Otherwise, these vessels are limited in their fishing access on the high seas through international measures or must pay tens of thousands of dollars a day to fish within the exclusive economic zones of other countries. Closing these areas to tuna fishing would result in a loss of fishing opportunities and potential revenue for fishermen. It could also discourage purse seine tuna boats from continuing to operate under the U.S. flag, which means they would no longer need to offload their catch in American Samoa, where 5,500 jobs are supported by the StarKist cannery. Following the closure of one cannery in the territory more than a decade ago, the gross domestic production fell by 25%. Closing the only remaining cannery

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STORY ICON KEY

REGIONAL INTEREST



CONSERVATION



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GOVERNMENT



Federal



Hawai'i



Guam/CNMI



American Samoa

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due to an economically constrained tuna supply could be disastrous.

Transferred Effects

Closing the PRIA to tuna fishing could result in increased fishing pressure in other areas of the Pacific Ocean and tip the balance in favor of foreign fisheries in global tuna markets. Fishermen may redirect their efforts to alternative fishing grounds, leading to unforeseen impacts. Foreign fisheries that are not bound by U.S. standards do not have environmental laws that reduce bycatch and interactions with nontarget or protected species (e.g., turtles, mammals and seabirds) and ensure minimal habitat impacts. Chan and Pan (2012⁵) found that increased production of the Hawai'i-based fishery reduced sea turtle interactions by replacing foreign production.

Food Security

Tuna is an important food source, both locally and globally. Closing the PRIA to tuna fishing could reduce the availability of this protein-rich resource, potentially affecting food security in the region. It may lead to increased reliance on imported seafood or alternative protein sources, which can have economic and nutritional implications for local communities.



Community members, including employees of Starkist Samoa, rallied against the proposed sanctuary for the PRIA prior to NOAA's public meeting held in American Samoa May 24, 2023.

National Security

Tuna is the #1 commodity shared between the United States and the strategically important Pacific Islands Region. Impeding tuna commerce in the region is contrary to the Indo-Pacific Strategy and Economic Framework put forward by the Biden Administration to counter geopolitical and economic threats to U.S. trade, including China. Eliminating the small number of U.S.-flagged vessels from the PRIA removes an important layer of on-the-water surveillance. The presence of U.S. fishing vessels, which are themselves fully monitored, provides verifiable information about any illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and possible criminal activities in waters around the PRIA. IUU fishing is a significant problem in the Pacific, and the closure of the PRIA could create a "fishing vacuum" that could be exploited by foreign vessels.

The United States is competing for power in the Pacific region to counter the rise of China's growing influence. In the Pacific Islands, tuna fisheries are the leading source for economic development, so it is important for the country to have a strong fisheries presence. Fishery closures in the region could harm the economies of Pacific Island nations and send the wrong message about the United States' commitment to its Pacific Island Territories.

Fisheries management should strike a balance between conservation and the socioeconomic needs of communities. Any decision regarding the closure of the PRIA to tuna fishing would require careful consideration of these factors and the implementation of alternative measures to ensure the viability of U.S. tuna fisheries while minimizing negative consequences.

See the Council's new Marine Spatial Management web page for information on National Marine Sanctuary proposals, fishery management regulations in Monuments in the Western Pacific and more: www.wpcouncil.org/marine-spatial-management. 🐟

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- ² Hampton et al., 2023. www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmars.2022.1060943/full
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NOAA Meeting on the National Marine Sanctuary for PRIA



Council on Environmental Quality Chair Brenda Mallory (center) was in Honolulu May 10, 2023, to open NOAA's public scoping meeting on the proposed National Marine Sanctuary for the PRIA. Mallory met briefly with Council member from Hawai'i Matt Ramsey and Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds.

194th Council Meeting Highlights



CNMI Governor Arnold Palacios joined the first day of the 194th Council meeting in the Mariana Islands.

March 27–28, 2023, Saipan, CNMI

The Honorable Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Arnold Palacios opened the 194th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held in March 2023 by communicating his views on President Biden’s direction to the NOAA secretary of commerce to consider designating a national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA).

“It really is about communications, respect for each other, respect for what we represent, and respect for federal and regulatory agencies,” said Palacios. “Government policies have profound impacts on small communities. I am not opposed to conservation and management measures—that is the purpose of the Council. But we need to start talking, respecting and considering the consequences of our decisions.”

Archie Soliai, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) director, said all Pacific Island cultures have respect in common. He stated that these federal actions “are done without consultation of our Pacific communities and are very disrespectful. Where is the environmental justice and equity that this administration has prioritized?” He quoted American Samoa Congresswoman Amata who has said this announcement equates to “conservation by confiscation without consultation.”

Council member Will Sword of American Samoa said that further closures of U.S. waters in the Pacific would be “the death knell” of the tuna industry that supports almost a third of the territory’s workforce.

The Council asked NOAA, and all other involved agencies, to consult with the U.S. Pacific Territories beyond the public comment opportunity given in May 2023 on the proposed sanctuary. To better understand the Council’s role and responsibilities in the process, the Council requested the National Ocean Service give a presentation on the proposed sanctuary at its June meeting.

Governor Palacios also expressed apprehension over increas-

ing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and increased tensions with China in the region. “I continue to support the efforts of the Council to address these concerns, which are efforts to protect the interests of the three U.S. Pacific Territories,” he said.

The Council approved a 3-year Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) for the CNMI, which outlines priorities for fishery infrastructure, capacity, research and development projects. MCPs are developed locally to meet the needs of each territory and approved by the respective Governor and subsequently approved by the Secretary of Commerce.

The Council plans to engage with local leaders and stakeholders from the northern islands of the CNMI on community-based fishing management plans to ensure adequate representation from those communities. The Council also asked NOAA to tailor its equity and environmental justice (EEJ) community engagement plans to each island in the CNMI.

March 30–31, 2023, Guam

The Honorable Governor of Guam Lou Leon Guerrero opened day three of the Council meeting echoing Governor Palacio’s concern for increasing IUU fishing in the region.

“[IUU] vessels pose a threat not just to our national security, but also to our local fishing industries and up-and-coming industries,” said Leon Guerrero. “Left unchecked, this kind of fishing and associated labor abuses undermine our economic competitiveness, national security, fisheries sustainability, and the livelihoods and human rights of fishers around the world, and will exacerbate the environmental and socioeconomic effects of climate change.”

“Our territories have a long history of unfulfilled commitments. We need to feel our efforts are respected and show that our input counts.”

University of Guam Professor Judith Guthertz

The Governor also spoke to President Biden’s recent announcement about designating a national marine sanctuary in the PRIA, noting it threatens Pacific Islanders’ way of life.

“This is a matter that demands our respect and fluid communication. I don’t believe that any of us are against the intentions, but there are impacts hanging on those intentions. Impacts that fail to consider our food security or our fishing traditions. Pacific Islanders eat two to four times more fish than people in other nations, with most of the fish we eat from our own waters and reefs. We also contribute more than 30% of the global market for tuna.”



Right to left: Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds, Guam Governor Lou Leon Guerrero, Council Chair John Gourley, Council Vice Chair for CNMI Sylvan Igisomar and Council Vice Chair for American Samoa Will Sword at the Council meeting on Guam.

The proposal would have many unintended socioeconomic consequences and conflicts with the President’s Executive Orders promoting EEJ. Fisheries are the leading economic driver for underserved communities in the Pacific. A new sanctuary in the PRIA to help meet the Biden Administration’s “America the Beautiful” 30x30 conservation goal puts a disproportionate burden on U.S. Pacific Islanders, as 53% of U.S. waters in the western Pacific are already closed to fishing through Marine National Monuments.

“When we started hearing about recognition of EEJ issues in our government, I thought it would provide our region with acknowledgement, but in reality it’s only a paper commitment,” said Council member and University of Guam Professor Judith Guthertz. “Our territories have a long history of unfulfilled commitments. We need to feel our efforts are respected and show that our input counts.”

“I am not opposed to conservation and management measures—that is the purpose of the Council. But we need to start talking, respecting and considering the consequences of our decisions.”

Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Arnold Palacios

Diminished U.S. fisheries would severely decrease U.S. influence in the Pacific. In September 2022, the Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee found the proposal to expand the current Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument boundaries lacked supporting data and would provide limited conservation benefits. A 2018 National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) report also said permanent settlements in

the PRIA were unlikely due to the vulnerability of the low-lying areas to storms, lack of freshwater sources and inability to grow crops on the islands.

The Council requested the National Ocean Service meet with the Governors of Guam, the CNMI and American Samoa to describe the sanctuary designation process.

Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch Limits

The framework that establishes bigeye tuna longline catch and allocation limits for the territories requires an annually specified catch limit to transfer catch from any territory to U.S. longline vessels based out of Hawai‘i. The Council approved setting an allocation limit of bigeye tuna from each territory to U.S. longline vessels, without setting a catch limit. This allocation limit would be up to 1,500 metric tons per territory, in effect from 2024 to 2026.

Council members emphasized the importance of fishing agreements between the territories and the Hawai‘i-based fleet. These have often been the sole source of funds for fishery development in the MCPs of the territories.

Council member Manny Dueñas of the Guam Fishermen’s Cooperative Association expressed frustration over the low U.S. catch limit and that territories have to rely on these agreements to fund fishery development. “We are Pacific Islanders, just like the people the U.S. government spend hundreds of millions on through the Tuna Treaty, Economic Assistance Agreement, and the Compact of Free Association,” said Dueñas. “Why can’t we get just a fraction of that to support our fisheries?” 🐟

Council Finalizes Recommendations for Fishing Rules in NWHI at March Meeting



Council members discuss potential fishing regulations for the MEA in the NWHI at its 194th meeting in Guam.

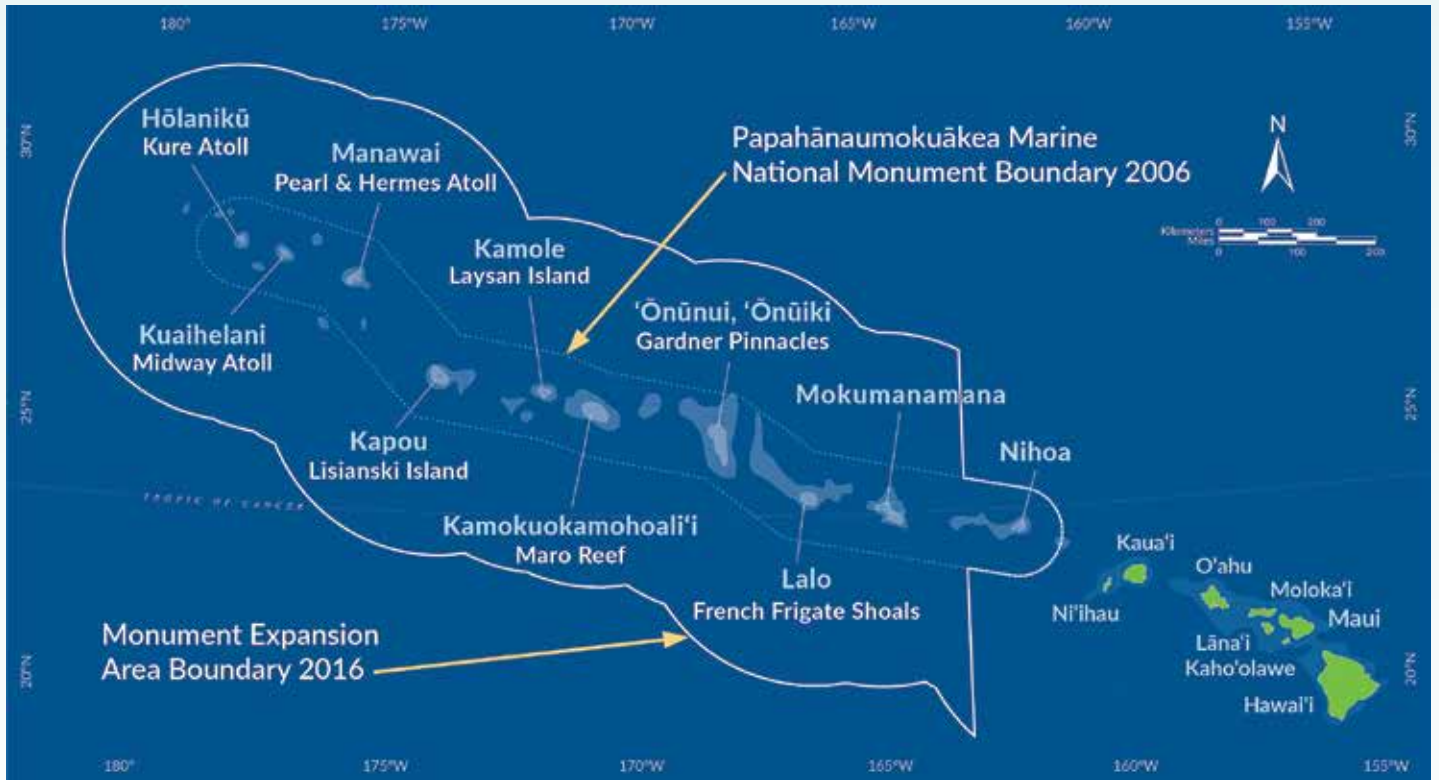


The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI) has been closed to fishing since 2014 when President Obama established the Monument Expansion Area (MEA) adjacent to the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM) through Presidential Proclamation 9478. Commercial fishing was prohibited at that time and noncommercial fishing was closed until regulations were developed. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council finalized those regulations at its 194th meeting in the Mariana Archipelago in March 2023.

The Council acknowledges the great distance, and therefore great costs, associated with a fishing trip to the MEA and stressed the importance of allowing cost recovery to address equity and environmental justice for those seeking to practice traditions and perpetuate culture.

Commercial fishing continues to be prohibited under the Council's final recommendations and noncommercial fishing would be allowed by federal permit. Permitted fishers could catch fish and bring it back to the main Hawaiian Islands for consumption or to share with friends and the community. Fishers would be required to report their fishing catch and effort, and abide by other federal laws and regulations. The Council also made recommendations for regulating Native Hawaiian subsistence fishing practices.

Those wishing to practice subsistence fishing in the MEA would be required to apply for, and receive, a federal permit to fish and would be able to bring their catch back to the main Hawaiian Islands for community sharing, barter or exchange. However, the Council recommended that permittees also be allowed to request that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) consider the ability to recover costs through the limited sale of catch associated with their trip. Permittees could explain why they are requesting the recovery of costs of fuel, ice and other trip costs. The Council acknowledges the great distance, and therefore great costs, associated with a fishing trip to the MEA and stressed the importance of allowing cost recovery to address equity and environmental justice for those seeking to practice traditions and perpetuate culture. Without cost recovery, the community would continue to be disenfranchised and be at a disadvantage as costs for trips to the MEA can reach into the thousands of dollars.



Credit: NOAA.

Equity amongst fishers, particularly for those of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island communities is a directive by President Biden through his Executive Orders 13985 and 14031. In addition to the allowance for limited cost recovery, the Council also requested NMFS to provide funding to existing grant programs under Section 305 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including the Community Demonstration Projects Program and Community Development Plans. Applications for funding under these programs would allow communities to participate in Native Hawaiian subsistence fishing practices in the MEA.

While the recommendations are final, there are still more steps until it is a final regulation, including further opportunities for public comment.

The Council's recommendations will be incorporated into an amendment to its Hawai'i Archipelago

Fishery Ecosystem Plan and be reviewed by NMFS and noticed in the *Federal Register* for public input. The Secretary of Commerce will make the final decision on whether or not the recommendations will be accepted. Fishing regulations will need to meet both the goals and National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as well as the goals and objectives of the proposed sanctuary. Both the Office of National Marine Sanctuary (ONMS) and NMFS will be weighing in on this decision and it will be a ONE NOAA decision, developing a consistent regulatory package between fisheries and sanctuaries. As of the date of this publication, the Council has not received a response from ONMS regarding its recommendations for fishing regulations in the MEA.

For more information, visit www.wpcouncil.org/nwhi.fisheries-2 🐟



Hawai'i longline vessels.

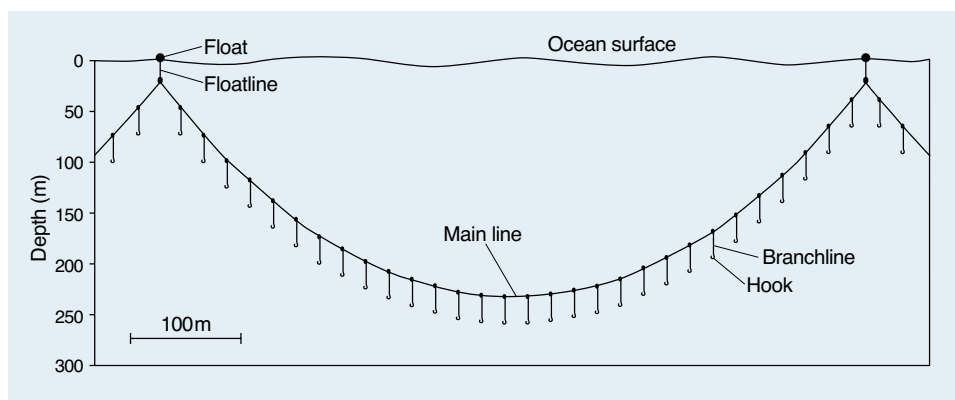
NMFS Determines Hawai'i and American Samoa Tuna Longline Fisheries Not Likely to Threaten Survival of Protected Species



At its March 2023 meeting, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council reviewed the draft biological opinions (BiOps) for the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery targeting bigeye tuna and the American Samoa longline fishery targeting albacore tuna. The documents, released by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) earlier in the month, analyzed the impacts of the two fisheries on species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that may be accidentally hooked or entangled during fishing operations.

NMFS concluded the fisheries are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of ESA-listed sea turtles, sharks and rays, and the main Hawaiian Islands insular population of false killer whales. This means that the number of incidental interactions (hooking or entanglement) of ESA-listed species in the two fisheries is not likely to appreciably reduce the likelihood of survival or recovery of those species. The impacts are not likely to cause significant changes to the species' numbers, reproduction or distribution.

In its review, the Council considered input from its advisory groups, including the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), Advisory Panels and Fishing Industry Advisory Committee.



A general depiction of the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery gear configuration. It shows the distribution of hooks in a typical set that deploys from 25-30 hooks between floats.

Over the four years leading up to these draft BiOps, the SSC evaluated statistical models that looked at how the two longline fisheries affect loggerhead and leatherback sea turtles at the population level. The SSC at its March meeting received the updated assessment that evaluated the impact of the Hawai'i deep-set fishery on the leatherback turtle population. The committee concluded that the models continue to represent the best scientific information available and show that the two fisheries did not have a significant effect on the population projections when compared to scenarios without fishery impacts. Based on the SSC's review, the Council agreed with NMFS's no-jeopardy findings for all ESA-listed species.

Both draft BiOps included two Reasonable and Prudent Measures (RPMs) to minimize fishery impacts to the species. One RPM requires releasing ESA-listed species in a way that minimizes injury and increases post-release survivorship. The second measure ensures the fisheries have monitoring and reporting programs in place to collect data on the interactions. NMFS issued the final BiOps for the American Samoa and Hawai'i deep-set longline fisheries on May 15 and May 18, 2023, respectively. The Council began working with the NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office on the implementation process for the RPMs and expects to hear an update at the June Council meeting in American Samoa. 🐟

Archipelagic Fisheries: Progress Through Management



As new scientific information becomes available on a specific fishery, there needs to be a conduit to ensure the data are incorporated into the fishery management process. This is done through the Archipelagic Plan Team (APT), which is comprised of scientists and managers from the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and Pacific Islands Regional Office, state and territorial agencies, and other select advisory groups.

The APT monitors the performance of the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plans through production of an annual report that provides information on the status of archipelagic fisheries and other components of the ecosystem, which in turn informs the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report. The APT also recommends conservation and management adjustments to the Council to better achieve management objectives. The APT typically meets annually in April or May, with intersessional meetings held if pressing issues arise. Each APT member provides insight on fishery data and management issues from the myriad of archipelagic fisheries in the region.

The APT met in April 2023 to discuss updates to the annual SAFE reports.

Various action items were also addressed including the refinement

of uku essential fish habitat (EFH) in the main Hawaiian Islands, establishment of status determination criteria and annual catch limits (ACL) for Kona crab, ACLs for CNMI bottomfish, and revisions to the American Samoa bottomfish management unit species list.

This busy meeting resulted in the APT developing eight recommendations and 20 work items to advance towards completion of the action items. Much of this work is done through subgroups and committees of subject matter experts. Behind the scenes, these subgroups work diligently to prepare options papers, draft amendments and other documents that support the Council's mission of ensuring sustainable and climate-resilient fisheries for years to come. Notably, the APT recommended the uku EFH working group develop an additional option to refine this parameter by using novel research on presence/absence and abundance of uku around the main Hawaiian Islands. The proposed option combines the alternatives presented in April with fishery-independent catch per unit effort data. The APT endorsed this recommendation as it adds necessary context to the proposed maps where known "hotspots" for uku were not being captured in the model due to being outside the model-defined depth ranges.

The APT also made recommendations to the Council to set ACLs for Kona crab and CNMI bottomfish. These recommendations built upon previous work the APT conducted when stock assessment information was made available in 2019. Since there is no new information and the last assessment represents the best scientific information available, the APT recommended status quo ACLs for these stocks.

What's Next?

At the June meeting in American Samoa, the Council will hear the APT meeting outcomes as well as input from the SSC and other advisory groups. The Council will then select preferred options and alternatives and direct staff to develop amendments that will adjust future management measures. Council staff has the ability to reengage with APT subgroups for guidance to develop any required actions to meet the needs of the Council. 🐟

For more information, visit:

Council Advisory Groups
www.wpcouncil.org/about-us/advisory-groups

Council Fishery Ecosystem Plans
www.wpcouncil.org/fishery-ecosystem-plans-amendments

Gray Snapper (Uku)

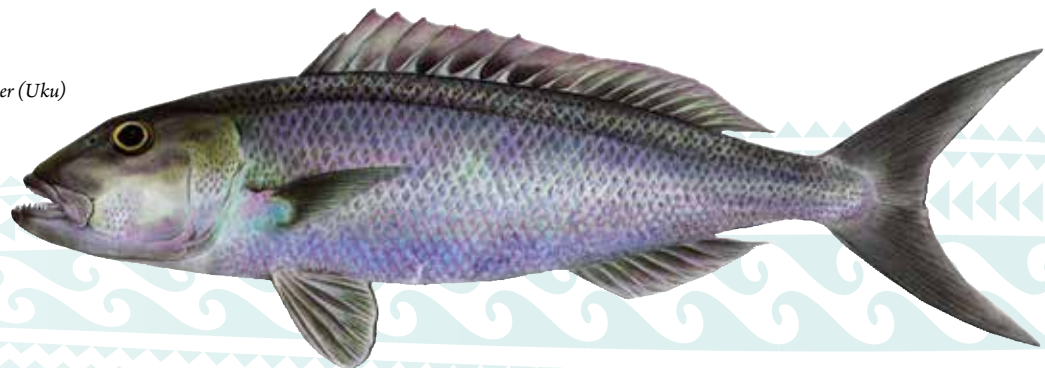
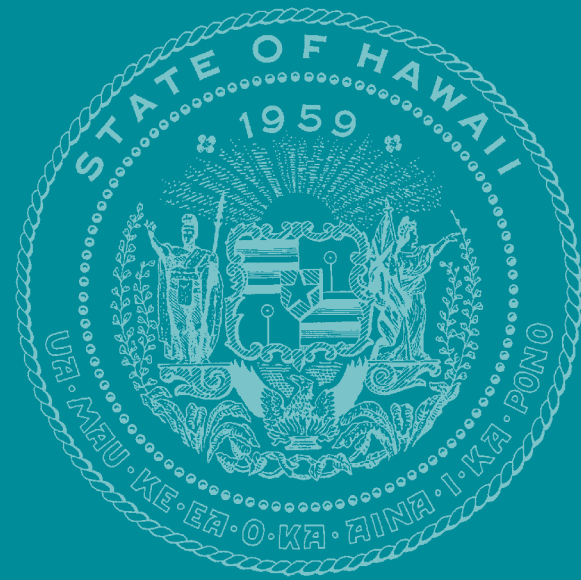




Photo: Ed Watamura.



State of Hawai'i Solicits Input on New Fishing Licenses



In March and April 2023, Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) asked for input from fishing charter owners and operators on the new nonresident recreational marine fishing license (NRMFL) and proposed commercial marine vessel license (CMVL) implementation.



On June 8, 2021, Governor David Ige signed Act 48 into law, establishing a NRMFL requirement for visitors to Hawai'i who wish to fish from the shoreline or a boat in Hawaiian waters. DAR will administer the new program and implement rules for the license.

The NRMFL was created because Hawai'i residents pay taxes that support state fisheries management programs, but nonresident recreational fishers benefit from enjoying the state's marine fishery resources without directly contributing to the management of those resources. The fees collected from the NRMFL will be deposited into DAR's Sport Fish Special Fund, which can be used to access federal funds through the federal Sport Fish Restoration Program. DAR has a number of continuing sport fish restoration projects, including fish aggregating devices, artificial reefs, fish stocking and others which benefit recreational fishers. The State estimates 50,000 licenses will be sold annually, resulting in more than \$1 million in revenue.

The fees are \$20 for a one-day license, \$40 for a seven-day license and \$70 for an annual license. Active military and their spouses and minor children (18

and younger) are exempt. DAR is proposing to create an online system where the public can purchase the NRMFL. This could be done at the dock prior to departure or in the days leading up to a fishing trip.

DAR is also considering implementing a commercial marine vessel license (CMVL) that would allow multiple individuals to be covered under a single license attached to a particular vessel. This would mean that crew working on a charter vessel with an assigned CMVL will no longer be required to have individual commercial marine licenses (CMLs) in accordance with HRS § 189-2. The proposed fees for the CMVL are \$300 for non-longline CMVL and \$1,500 for longline CMVL.

The fishing charter fleet is expected to be a major access point for boat-based nonresident fishing opportunities, as well as a primary adopter of the non-longline CMVL.

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council is planning to engage the community on non-commercial data and small-boat fishery issues in Fall 2023. This will provide the fishing community with an opportunity to participate in the management of small-boat fisheries in Hawai'i by determining issues and developing management solutions. Stay tuned to www.wpscouncil.org for more details on these meetings. 🐟



Ensuring Fishing Access in Light of Offshore Wind Development

In President Biden's first week in office in 2021, he issued Executive Order 14008 that calls for the nation's leaders to build a new American infrastructure and clean energy economy to create new jobs. As part of this initiative, the President set out a goal to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and have 30 gigawatts of offshore wind generation capacity by 2030.

With the big push for offshore wind development, many different fisheries sectors have expressed concerns. What impacts will this have on fishing communities, habitats, ecosystem functions and protected species? To address this, in November 2021, the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management and the National Marine Fisheries Service began developing a guidance document to mitigate impacts to commercial and recreational fisheries from offshore energy development.

The agencies sent out two requests for information in May and August 2022. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council provided comments that to avoid negative impacts, developers should engage early with its members, its advisory groups and the community in the planning, permit and construction process. To ensure equity and environmental justice issues are addressed, the recreational and commercial fishermen in the Pacific Islands must maintain access to their traditional fishing grounds and their ability to provide locally produced seafood to their families and communities.

The Council's Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) recognizes that offshore energy is a priority for the President. However, with new ocean spatial management actions like offshore energy potentially further closing off areas to fishing, the Hawai'i AP decided to launch a participatory mapping project called "FishMaps" to characterize Hawai'i's fisheries. The purpose of the tool is to show that there are fishing ko'a (traditional fishing areas) that should be preserved for the fishing communities. It will improve data collection and data gaps in

the bottomfish, pelagic, coral reef, crustacean and precious coral fisheries.

The Hawai'i AP recognizes fishermen revisit locations where they grew up fishing, areas close to home and comfortable access points. Fishermen go to different ko'a based on their observations of the moon and tide, and ocean temperatures, currents and waves. Closing one fishing area restricts fishers from one location rather than allowing them to circulate through their different spots. This project intends to demonstrate that fishers rely on many ko'a around the state.

In the coming months, the Hawai'i AP will call on local fishermen to kokua (help) and contribute towards the ko'a map. Panel members need to know who they should contact to get a seat at the table during discussions with managers or developers. The AP isn't looking for fishermen's exact fishing spots, but rather which areas are good for certain species (e.g., ono are typically found around this contour; this particular area outside of the westernmost point is important for hapu'upu'u, etc.). The Hawai'i AP plans to hold sessions with fishermen to provide background on the project, share current information and solicit additional input to make the map as complete as possible. Keep an eye on www.wpcouncil.org for more information. 🐟



The coexistence of fishing and offshore wind development requires careful planning and collaboration between the potentially competing interests. Photos: Principle Power (top) and Abraham Apilado Jr. (above).

WPRFMC *Out in the Community!*



Fishers Forums in the Mariana Islands



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held its first in-person Fishers Forums in the Mariana Islands since 2018 in conjunction with the March 2023 meeting on Saipan and Guam. Both free and family friendly outreach events focused on the history of bottomfishing, different fishing gears and methods, and the science and management of bottomfishing in the region. Local newspapers and a Guam TV station covered the events.

The CNMI forum, held March 27 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel's Hibiscus Ballroom, was opened by Council Chair John Gourley and emceed by CNMI Advisory Panel Vice Chair Richard Farrell. Six partner government and private organizations joined the Council as exhibitors to share their



conservation and management messages with approximately 60 community members. Attendees enjoyed a buffet dinner sponsored by Governor Palacios.

Renowned Saipan deep bottom fishers Lino Tenorio and Tony Guerrero gave a brief training session on their gear preparation, best bait and techniques used to catch bottomfish. They shared their knowledge on using environmental cues and ocean characteristics to determine the best time to fish for certain snappers, especially onaga, opakapaka, lehi, gindai and the ubiquitous monchong (pomfret). Monchong is better known in the Mariana Islands as Wonder Woman, a name coined by Tenorio.

Guam Department of Agriculture Director and Council member Chelsa Muña opened the forum at the Guam Museum March 30,

which was emceed by Council member Judith Guthertz. Approximately 100 participants enjoyed hearing from 13 exhibitors from government and private organizations. Master bottomfisher Tenorio shared his knowledge with a rapt audience and made connections with attendees for future training sessions.

Community outreach to draw awareness to the two events included street banners, in-studio and call-in radio interviews, a Trivision large digital screen ad, and radio ads. Fishers Forum flyers were shared extensively on social media and with fishing chat rooms in the CNMI and Guam. The events were also posted on the Council's website. Donated prizes from vendors combined with Council items to recognize participation were given away to lucky attendees.



American Samoa DMWR Flag Day Fishing Tournament

On April 14-15, 2023, the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR) hosted its annual Flag Day Fishing Tournament, which had a fantastic turnout of both fishers and community members. Despite the rainy weather, participants still managed to land a good amount of fish during the event. The tournament showcased various fishing categories, including the largest marlin, sailfish

around 90 feet long and are powered by a team of rowers who use their strength and coordination to navigate the waters. The race was a thrilling display of Samoan culture and tradition, as teams from different villages competed against each other in a test of strength, skill and teamwork. The race was a testament to the rich maritime heritage of American Samoa and was enjoyed by both locals and visitors alike. Manulele Tausala from the village of Nu'uuli was victorious this year.



practices and raise awareness about marine resource management. The Malaloa Fishing Marina hosted activities for both children and adults throughout the day. Participants were able to take part in boat rides, visit educational tables and enjoy a range of games.

Several divisions within DMWR organized educational booths along with representatives from the newly formed Search and Rescue Department, and the Department of Public Safety's Marine Patrol Division, who were giving out presentations on protected species in American Samoa. The Coral Reef Advisory Group conducted an outreach program on managing coastal fisheries and also provided a fishing game in which kids used a toy fishing rod to "catch" and name a species of fish.

Council staff joined DMWR in educating the public with an outreach table sharing information about the Council through handouts, cookbooks, newsletters and 2023 lunar calendars. Adults and students both tested their knowledge with crossword puzzles and word find games designed to help participants learn more about concepts and terms related to fisheries management.



and yellowfin tuna. It was a great opportunity for the participants to demonstrate their skills and passion for fishing.

The second day of the tournament kicked off with a traditional fautasi race, a long-standing Samoan tradition that is deeply rooted in the country's history and culture. A fautasi is a traditional Samoan longboat that was once used for both transportation and racing. Now used strictly as racing vessels on Flag Day each year, the boats are typically

Following the races, day two of the fishing tournament began and the fishermen continued their pursuit of the biggest fish. The largest fish was a massive 428.8-pound marlin, caught by the skilled crew of the F/V Deep Calling. This impressive catch was just two pounds shy of breaking the all-time record for largest fish ever caught in American Samoa.

The tournament is not just a fun-filled event, but it also serves as an opportunity to promote sustainable fishing



CONTINUED ON PAGE 14



Bishop Museum Science and Sustainability Festival

The Bishop Museum in Honolulu organized its annual Science and Sustainability Festival on Earth Day, April 22, 2023. It was a huge success with 2,112 registrants and attendees, the result of an extensive outreach campaign the Museum’s Communication Team organized through social media, website and TV promotions.

The one-day festival featured keiki (children) activities, workshops, exhibition highlights, special presentations, and interactive performances with scientists and cultural practitioners to highlight biodiversity research and conservation efforts in Hawai‘i.

Council staff joined more than 30 community partners that had educational booths throughout the Museum’s central grassy areas and buildings. Magnet making was a huge hit at the table and visitors of all ages lined up to color and create mementos of their pledge to support local seafood. Visitors also learned about different inside and outside parts of a fish and took home Council 101 handouts, newsletters, fish facts and recipe handouts, 2023 lunar calendars, fish activity sheets, and more.

Maui Spring Wahine Fishing Tournament

Hawai‘i Advisory Panel member Amanda Padilla participated in the 2nd annual Spring Wahine (Woman) Fishing Tournament since the pandemic on April 22, 2023. Twenty-three boats registered this year and Padilla’s boat F/V Shiso Phat placed 3rd with ‘ahi. She also organized a fishing education table with information from the Council, NOAA and the Hawai‘i Division of Aquatic Resources. The materials including lunar calendars were a huge hit with adults and kids alike. 🐟



New Licensing System for American Samoa-Based Purse Seine Fleet



U.S. purse seine vessel in Pago Pago Harbor, American Samoa.

On April 6, 2023, the Honorable Governor of American Samoa Lemanu Mauga signed House Bill 38-8 into law that requires purse seiners operating in territorial waters have a valid fishing license issued by the government, effective June 15, 2023.

The Department of Port Administration and the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources have identified a strong need to establish a local licensing system for U.S.-flagged purse seiner vessels that will aid the territory in seeking full Small Islands Developing State/Participating Territories benefits within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. The American Samoa economy is highly dependent on the tuna industry and sustaining this sector is of critical importance. The development of this local licensing system enables the U.S. purse seiner fleet that supplies the StarKist Samoa cannery to be recognized as an American Samoa-based fleet, and to establish a record of locally based purse seiner vessels that regularly land tuna in the territory. 🐟



American Samoa longliner (left) and purse seiners. Photo: D. Hamm



Congressional Corner



To keep up to date on the latest legislation affecting fishing in your region and the nation, visit www.congress.gov.

The 118th Congress kicked off in January 2023 with many bills making their way through that could affect the way fisheries are managed across the nation. There are many bills that look to amend the

Endangered Species Act to include additional provisions such as for anadromous species (migrate between fresh and marine ecosystems), economic impacts and improved precision in listings. Other bills focus on marine debris, offshore energy and ocean acidification. Currently, there have been no Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization bills introduced, but this is just the start of this Congress.

Instead, the Council's attention is on the impacts of previously passed legislation that have fishery implications. The National Defense Authorization Act, which became public law late last year, included provisions that reauthorize the Coral Reef Conservation Act as well as establish regional ocean partnerships. In the reauthorization of the Coral Reef Conservation Act, the fishery management councils with coral reef jurisdictions were given seats on the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force as non-voting members. This is a request that the councils made in years past and will help to provide a fishery perspective on the Task Force. Other acts that were passed last session, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, provide funds that could give relief to territorial agencies addressing issues at harbors and marinas.

In March 2023, President Biden released his FY2024 budget that allocates funding for fisheries through the Department of Commerce and funding to the territories through the Department of the Interior. The proposed budget increases NOAA's funding directed toward national marine sanctuaries and building a climate-ready nation. However, funding for impacts from the Compact of Free Association with Micronesian states has been eliminated. This funding is used to reimburse the costs associated with providing services to persons from these areas. As the negotiations for a continued agreement continue, this is likely to be identified as an issue. 🐟

To follow along with the legislation in the other island areas, visit:

American Samoa - www.americansamoa.gov/fono

CNMI - <https://cnmileg.net>

Guam - <https://guamlegislature.com/index/bills>

Hawai'i - www.capitol.hawaii.gov



Council Family Updates

At the 194th Council meeting, the Council supported the following advisory body changes:

- * Appointed **Sean Hanser** and **Irene Kelly** to the Archipelagic Plan Team
- * Appointed **Jason Philibotte** and **Melissa Snover** to the Pelagic Plan Team.
- * Appointed **Kelsey McClellan**, **Christina Tudela** and **Sylvia Calvo** to the Education Committee.



Felix Penalosa joined the Council staff in March 2023 as its American Samoa island coordinator. Penalosa brings his experience as a former grant analyst for the American Samoa Department of Treasury. His primary duties are maintaining operations of the AS Council satellite office and providing logistical support and coordination for Council staff. Penalosa holds an associate of science degree in accounting from the AS Community College.

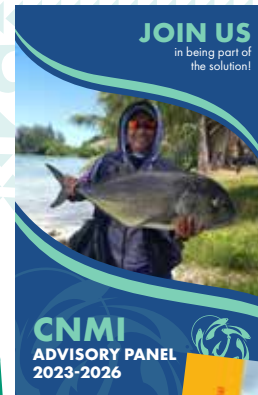
Molly Lutcavage and **Clayward Tam**, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, recently completed a Kaua'i Small Boat Fishery Diversification Project sponsored by the National Marine Fisheries Service. The objective of the project was to identify and evaluate a range of possible approaches to diversify or increase market share and business opportunities for the Kaua'i small boat fleet, which mainly consisting of part-time anglers, and faced new distribution challenges during the pandemic. The authors used web-based workshops and expert panels to gather community insights and successful diversification strategies, resulting in the creation of www.AhiHubKauai.org and www.FishToday.org as resources for future diversification efforts and to support Kaua'i's local food and culinary resources. To see the full report, visit: www.wpcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/KauaiDiversificationFinalReport.pdf. 🐟



New Outreach Resources

The Council elected new members for its Advisory Panel (AP) with subgroups in Hawai'i, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and Guam. The members serve four-year terms and provide advice and recommendations to the Council. The new 2023–2026 AP brochures highlight regional focus topics and provide information about the members, whose experience spans multiple fishing-related sectors.

You can find the AP brochures on our website at: www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/brochures. While you're, make sure to check out our new Marine Spatial Management web page for information on fishery management regulations in Monuments in the Western Pacific, current National Marine Sanctuary proposals and more: www.wpcouncil.org/marine-spatial-management. 🐟



Ono in a Creamy Tahini Sauce

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

Recipe courtesy Kapi'olani Community College Culinary Arts Department. Right photo: David Itano.



INGREDIENTS

- 1 tsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 tsp cumin
- 1 tsp sumac
- 1¼ tsp seasalt
- 2 cups water
- 2 tsp tahini (sesame butter)
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- 1 lb ono fillet, cut bite-sized

DIRECTIONS

1. In a heavy-bottomed skillet sauté onion in oil over medium-low heat. Cook until the onions are a deep brown, stirring occasionally (about 15 minutes).
2. Add cumin and cook for 2 minutes. Add sumac, salt and water. Stir in tahini and lemon juice.
3. Add fish and cook for 5 minutes, or until fish is opaque and firm. Add more water if sauce gets too thick.



RECIPE

Summary of Action Items at the June 2023 Council Meeting

The Council will consider and may take action on the issues summarized below.

1. American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan BMUS Revision Amendment

The proposed action item aims to refine the bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) complex in American Samoa to accurately reflect the current state of the bottomfish fishery. The BMUS complex, originally recommended in 1996 and revised in 2009 and 2018, has been used for management purposes in the region. However, in response to the 2019 benchmark stock assessment and new assessment models in 2022, there is a need to reassess the BMUS complex and potentially manage the shallow and deep-water species separately.

The purpose of this proposed action is to determine if the current species composition of the BMUS complex in American Samoa aligns with the fisheries and if conservation and management measures are necessary for sustainable bottomfish fisheries. **The Council will discuss and may select a preliminary preferred alternative at its 195th meeting regarding the American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) BMUS Revision Amendment.**

2. Specifying Annual Catch Limits for Kona Crab (Final Action)

The Council will consider the establishment of multi-year harvest limits for the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Kona crab for fishing years 2024-2026. The decision will be based on the 2019 benchmark stock assessment and catch projections up to 2026. The assessment indicated a maximum sustainable yield of 73,609 pounds and an overfishing limit of 33,989 pounds. **At its 195th meeting, the Council will review several options and make a final decision regarding the harvest limits and associated accountability measures to prevent overfishing.**

3. MHI Kona Crab Status Determination Criteria (Final Action)

The recent benchmark stock assessment for Kona crab in the MHI showed that the stock is not overfished and not experiencing overfishing. However, the FEP for the Hawai'i Archipelago does not have specific criteria to determine the status of the Kona crab MUS. As a result, the stock status of MHI Kona crab is labeled as "unknown" in the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Species Information System, which is the national database for stock assessment and status determination.

To address this issue, the Council took initial action at its March 2023 meeting and recommended establishing status determination criteria (SDC) for Kona crab fisheries, aligned with the previous stock assessment. The Council recognized the importance of developing SDC specific to this fishery, as criteria from other regions or fisheries may not be suitable.

At its 195th meeting, the Council will consider taking final action to amend the Hawai'i Archipelagic FEP and establish SDC for Kona crab.

This action is necessary to comply with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and its regulations, ensuring the specification of SDC for the Kona crab stock in the MHI under the Hawai'i Archipelago FEP. By establishing SDC, the Council aims to enable the determination and reporting of stock status, consistent with the requirements of section 304(e) of the MSA. This action is also needed to further support the sustainable management of the Kona crab fishery in the MHI.

4. Options for Revising Uku Essential Fish Habitat

The Council is proposing an action to refine the Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designations and associated

provisions for MHI uku (gray snapper) in the Hawai'i FEP. The aim is to ensure compliance with NMFS regulatory guidelines and implementing regulations, as well as National Standard 2, which recommends periodic review and revision of EFH provisions based on the best scientific information available.

To achieve this, at its September 2022 meeting, the Scientific and Statistical Committee reviewed two uku EFH models developed by Franklin (2021) and Tanaka et al. (2022), recognizing them as significant improvements over the current approach. The models were then presented to the Council, which instructed staff to assess their use in revising uku EFH through an amendment to the Hawai'i FEP.

At its 195th meeting, the Council will discuss taking initial action to refine uku EFH by considering the options presented in an options paper developed by a working group. A preliminary preferred alternative may be selected based on Level 1 and 2 models developed by Franklin (2021) and Tanaka et al. (2022), respectively.

5. Options for the CNMI Bottomfish Annual Catch Limits (Final Action)

The NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center conducted a 2019 stock assessment update, which indicated a lower long-term maximum sustainable yield estimate of 93,600 pounds (with a 95% confidence interval of 48,800-205,300 pounds) compared to the previous estimate of 173,100 ± 32,190 pounds.

Based on stock projection results, assuming a complete harvest of the six-year bottomfish catch limit in previous years, it was found that setting the ACL at 95,000 pounds would result in a 50% probability of overfishing in 2024 and 2025, which is the maximum allowable risk according to federal guidelines. Therefore, 95,000 pounds is considered the proxy for the overfishing limit for

this two-year period. For reference, the average annual total catch between 2019 and 2021 was 43,792 pounds.

At its 195th meeting, the Council will discuss and will consider taking final action on the ACL specifications for the CNMI bottomfish fishery for 2024-2025.

6. Review of the Guam Marine Conservation Plan

The MCP for Guam will expire in 2023. ***At its 195th meeting, the Council will assess the MCP for agreement and approval.*** Once approved by the Council and the Secretary of Commerce, the MCP will be valid for three years. However, the plan can be adjusted at any time and resubmitted for approval.

The MSA authorizes the Secretary of State to negotiate and sign a Pacific

Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA), provided that the Secretary of Commerce and the Council concur. A PIAFA would allow foreign fishing within the 200-mile U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) around American Samoa, the CNMI, Guam or the PRIA with the concurrence of the appropriate governors. Before entering into a PIAFA, the appropriate governor must develop a three-year MCP providing details on the use of any funds collected by the Secretary under the PIAFA, with the concurrence of the Council.

In addition to PIAFA funds, fines and penalties resulting from violations by foreign vessels in the EEZ around the Pacific Insular Areas are to be deposited into the local government's treasury and used to implement the respective MCP. The Council is also authorized by

the MSA to use funds from the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund to implement MCP projects.

The MCP must be consistent with the Council's FEPs. The MSA mandates that the MCP comprise conservation and management objectives, such as Pacific Insular Area observer programs, marine and fisheries research, and conservation, education, and enforcement activities related to marine and coastal management. Education and training in sustainable marine resources development, scientific research, and conservation strategies are also required. The MCP must also include Western Pacific community-based demonstration projects to promote the management, conservation, and economic enhancement of the Pacific Insular Areas. 🐟

Upcoming Events

The 148th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held June 14 to 16, 2023, at the Council office, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI, 96813. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for SSC members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/148SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) amendment for bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) revision (action item); Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) BMUS annual biological catch (ABC) specification for 2024-2025 (action item); Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Kona crab ABC specification for 2024-2026 (action item); Uku essential fish habitat (EFH) revision options (action item); False killer whale issues review; and 2022 Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report and recommendations review.

The 195th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held June 27 to 29, 2023, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium, American Samoa Highway 001, Utulei, AS. The meeting will be in a hybrid format, with in-person participation available for Council members and the public, or remote participation via Webex: <https://tinyurl.com/195CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: American Samoa FEP amendment for BMUS revision (action item); MHI Kona crab annual catch limit (ACL) specification and status determination criteria establishment (action items); Uku EFH revision options (action item); CNMI Bottomfish ACL options (action item); Guam Marine Conservation Plan review (action item); Hawai'i deep-set and American Samoa longline fishery final biological opinions and implementation plan review; 2022 Annual SAFE Report and recommendations review; and Research priorities and international fishery issues review.

For more information on the Webex connections, and complete agendas and meeting documents, go to www.wpcouncil.org/meetings-calendars.

The Fishers Forum on “Rising Tides and Changing Times” will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. June 27, 2023, at the Governor H. Rex Lee Auditorium,



American Samoa Highway 001, Utulei, AS. This free, family friendly public event includes informational tables, presentations and more. Come learn about climate change in American Samoa—how it affects fisheries, what government agencies and community partners are doing to address it, and how you can get involved. 🐟

2023 Council Calendar

Check the Council website for in-person and remote public participation options for meetings hosted by the Council.

JUNE

3
Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP)-Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Advisory Panel (AP) meeting (ChST), Garapan, Saipan

6-7
19th Regular Session of the Northern Committee (Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Fukuoka, Japan*

6-8
Capitol Hill Ocean Week 2023: Ocean x Climate, Washington, DC*

8
Mariana Archipelago FEP-Guam AP meeting (ChST), Hagatña, Guam

8
Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee (FDCRC)-Technical Committee meeting

9
Hawai'i Archipelago FEP AP meeting, Honolulu

12
FDCRC meeting

13
Non-Commercial Fishery Advisory Committee meeting

14-16
148th Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting, Honolulu

22
American Samoa (AS) Standing Committee meeting, Pago Pago, AS

23
Executive & Budget Standing Committee meeting, Pago Pago, AS

23
AS Fishing Industry Advisory Committee meeting, Utulei, AS

23
AS Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee meeting, Pago Pago, AS

24
AS FEP AP meeting, Pava'ia'i, AS

27-29
195th Council meeting, Utulei, AS

27-29
Hawai'i Conservation Conference, Honolulu*

JULY

4-5
Joint Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission-WCPFC Northern Committee (NC) Working Group on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna, Fukuoka, Japan*

6-7
19th Regular Session of the NC (WCPFC), Fukuoka, Japan*

12-17
International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean Plenary, Kanazawa, Japan*

* Meetings not hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.



Congratulations to the New England Fishery Management Council Executive Director Tom Nies (second from left) who will retire this summer after 26 years with the Council. The eight EDs from the regional councils met in Key West, FL for the Council Coordination Committee meeting May 23-25, 2023.

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