



The Governor and other Samoan officials, WPRFMC members and family attended an 'ava ceremony at the Tufele Cultural Center in Utulei, AS prior to the opening of the Council meeting.

TROLL ON IN TO THIS ISSUE

- 1 Council and American Samoa Leaders Frustrated by Continued Fishery Management Through Sanctuaries and Monuments in the Pacific
- 4 Federal Government Seeks Public Comments on Proposed Green Sea Turtle Critical Habitat in Western Pacific Region
- 5 Fishers Forum Hawai'i: What's in the Gut?
- 6 2022 U.S. Pacific Island Fisheries Reports Highlight Data Trends and Renewed Focus on Fishers' Perspectives
- 10 Renegotiations on COFA Withholds Funds from Hawai'i and US Pacific Territories
- 11 Severe Storm Disrupts Guam's Small-Boat Fishery
- 12 Enhancing Coastal Safety and Empowering Local Fishermen with Wave Buoys and Technology
- 13 Rising Tides and Changing Times: Climate Change in American Samoa
- 14 New Outreach Resources
- 14 Science and Management 101 - Management Unit Species vs Ecosystem Component Species
- 15 Council Family Updates
- 16 In Memorium: Paul Bartram
- 17 Recipe: Crab Cakes
- 18 Summary of Action Items at the September 2023 Council Meeting
- 19 Upcoming Events
- 20 2023 Council Calendar

Council and American Samoa Leaders Frustrated by Continued Fishery Management Through Sanctuaries and Monuments in the Pacific



American Samoa Governor Stresses Importance of Fisheries and Respect to the U.S. Territory

“You must be mindful of the decisions you make...so that the interests of small fishing communities are not disregarded” was the main message heard in the remarks of the Honorable Gov. Lemanu Peleti Mauga, who opened the 195th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in Pago Pago, American Samoa.

“The ocean and its marine resources have sustained our Fa’asamoa for thousands of years. These abundant natural resources have provided food on our table and supported our people, especially during calamities,” noted the Governor. “Our community went back to farming and fishing when we closed our borders during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ocean is what has sustained us and will continue to do so for years to come.”

“Respect is a very important aspect to the Pacific people, and I call on our federal partners to show some respect – sit down with us, talk with us and not to us.”

However, he stressed the pressure that global climate change is putting on the islands, despite the territory’s small carbon footprint. “Our high vulnerability could lead to widespread food and water insecurity, increased health risks, lack of access to social services and even forced displacements in some cases,” said Governor Mauga. “Due to climate change, the ocean that has sustained us for millennia is now threatening our daily lives. We require

PACIFIC ISLANDS FISHERY NEWS

is published by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
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StarKist Samoa cannery representatives attended the WPRFMC meeting June 28, 2023, to express their opposition to the proposed sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Islands.

STORY ICON KEY

REGIONAL INTEREST



CONSERVATION



FISHERMEN



EDUCATORS



GOVERNMENT



Federal



Hawai'i



Guam/
CNMI



American
Samoa

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more support and coordination for increased access to climate adaptation strategies, mitigation data and knowledge.”

He also noted that, in addition to climate change, government actions threaten the tuna industry that sustains the local economy, referencing the proposed national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA) and the Effort Limit Areas for Purse Seine (ELAPS). He said a National Marine Fisheries Service report showed the percentage of retained catch for the local purse seiner fleet in the PRIA was as much as 25% historically, with fishing effort increasing over the past few years.

“Most, if not all, of the fish caught in these waters is landed in the territory,” said Governor Mauga. “The misinformation that has been circulated by the proponents of this sanctuary is insulting and misconstrues the reality of the importance of these waters to our territory.”

The purse seine fleet is critical for the continued viability of the tuna industry, as it provides approximately 75% of the tuna needed for the StarKist Samoa cannery production.

The Governor emphasized what saddened him the most about the federal actions is that they have been done without meaningful consultation and engagement of the American Samoa people. “There is no equity and justice served

when the people that these federal actions will impact have no say, and no voice,” he said. “Respect is a very important aspect to the Pacific people, and I call on our federal partners to show some respect – sit down with us, talk with us and not to us.”

“And the question is, will the Administration and NOAA seriously consider these comments in the context of its own priorities supporting Equity and Environmental Justice in underserved and underrepresented communities?” said Council Chair John Gourley.

“It’s going to be a long battle and we need to be ready,” added Council Vice Chair for American Samoa Will Sword. “This top-down approach is typical of Government overreach and flies in the face of democracy, government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Council Challenged by NOAA Prohibition on Commercial Fishing for Proposed Pacific Remote Islands Sanctuary

Congresswoman Amata Radewagen from American Samoa expressed her deep concern regarding the lack of consultation with the U.S. territories affected by the NOAA proposed sanctuary in the PRIA. In a video message during the Council meeting, Congresswoman

“The misinformation that has been circulated by the proponents of this sanctuary is insulting and misconstrues the reality of the importance of these waters to our territory.”

Radewagen stated her astonishment at the Administration’s failure to meaningfully consult and engage with the U.S. Pacific territories. She criticized the sudden announcement of this potentially drastic change via a tweet by the President.

Despite the authority granted by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Congresswoman highlighted the Council’s lack of involvement in the decision-making process. She emphasized that the Administration was pursuing the wrong policy and employing an inappropriate approach.

On June 23, the Council received the official sanctuary proposal, which requested the Council’s assistance in formulating fishing regulations. Currently, commercial fishing is permitted between 50-200 miles in parts of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM). However, NOAA’s first objective aims to extend the existing protections of the Monument to the entire U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ), thereby prohibiting commercial fishing by U.S. fishermen in U.S. waters.

Council members expressed their opposition to the proposed prohibition on commercial fishing. For more than 30 years, American Samoa-based purse seiners and Honolulu-based longliners operated in the waters of the Pacific Remote Islands Area until the establishment of the PRIMNM in 2006. This new action will force U.S. purse seiners to fish farther away from Pago Pago Harbor and transport their catch to Mexico and Ecuador instead of the StarKist Samoa cannery, which serves as the backbone of American Samoa’s economy.

Archie Soliai, Director of the American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, stated that this federal action, coupled with NOAA’s

rule requiring 558 purse seine days to be fished within the U.S. EEZ, is “the nail in the coffin” to the tuna industry in American Samoa. The Governor of American Samoa has expressed objection to the proposed rule and has notified NOAA of its intention to file a lawsuit.

Dr. Judi Guthertz, Guam Council member, strongly criticized the federal government for proposing the sanctuary despite the opposition from the people of American Samoa, Guam, and the CNMI. “Shame on the federal government” admonished Guthertz as she urged the process to restart with consultation and consensus building, highlighting the vigilant attention being paid to the situation by the islands’ fishermen, senators and leaders.

Council Member Sword expressed concern for the livelihoods of those working in the canneries, who rely on fishing to support their families. “Those cannery workers are poor and you want to take food off of their tables,” said Sword. He questioned the decision-making process, pointing out that advice is being taken from individuals who do not reside in American Samoa and will not be adversely affected by the proposed action.

Guam Council Vice Chair Manny Dueñas suggested the allocation of percentages for commercial, noncommercial and

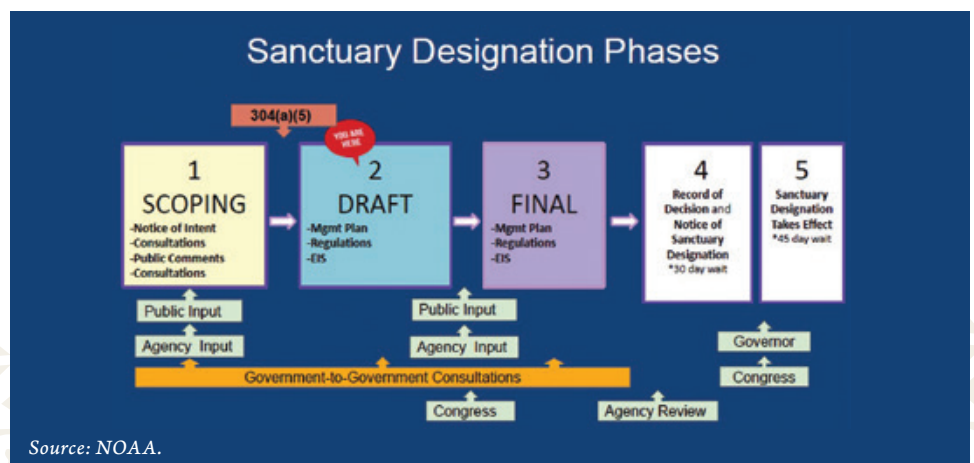
indigenous fishing, rather than a complete prohibition on fishing. Dueñas also raised questions about the true consideration of conserving resources asking, “Which generation is being prioritized, and is it for the people of the mainland or the Pacific?”

Kitty Simonds, Council Executive Director, criticized the contradiction between claiming to preserve cultural influences, while simultaneously abolishing fishing, which holds significant importance within the culture. “It’s obvious that the ocean belongs only to the federal government and not to its people, and we are merely spectators,” said Simonds.

The Council has until December 23 to respond to NOAA’s proposal. The NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is expected to complete the process, including the Environmental Impact Statement, by August 2024, with implementation scheduled to occur before the upcoming elections.

The Council sent a comment letter to ONMS June 2, 2023, describing its objections to the proposed sanctuary: <https://tinyurl.com/ONMSCommentLetter>.

The meeting agenda and summary of action items are available at www.wpcouncil.org/event/195th-council-meeting. 🐟



Federal Government Seeks Public Comments on Proposed Green Sea Turtle Critical Habitat in Western Pacific Region



Public hearing on green sea turtle critical habitat at the Rex Lee Auditorium in American Samoa. Photo: Felix Penalosa.

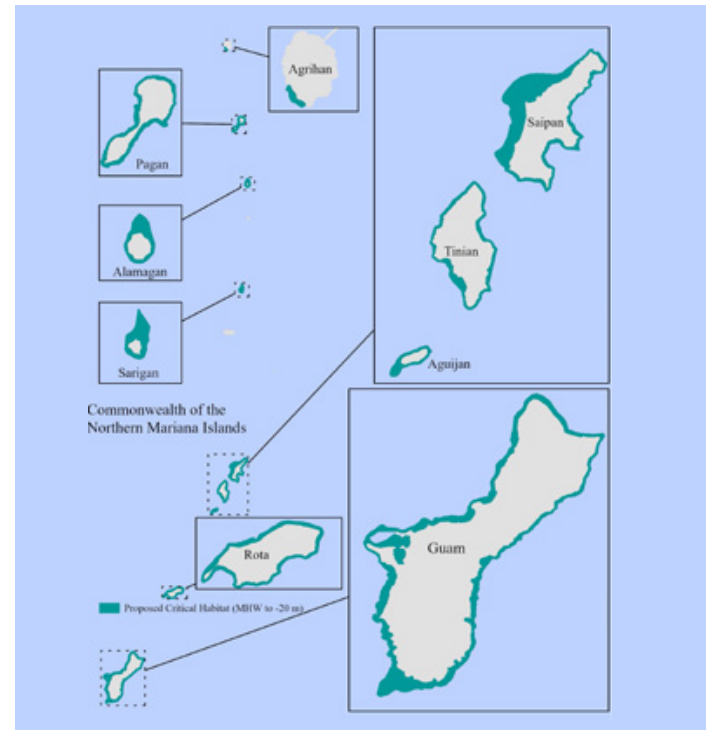
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published proposed rules on July 18, 2023, to designate critical habitat for populations of green sea turtles listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Proposed areas include terrestrial (land) and marine habitats in Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI).

From Aug. 10 to 30, 2023, USFWS and NMFS conducted joint public hearings on the proposed rules. At the American Samoa public hearing, Taotasi Archie Soliai, Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources director and Council member, expressed concern regarding the accuracy of the data which is crucial to supporting the designation. Despite a few supportive voices, there was a shared concern about adding a layer of bureaucracy and potential impacts on current and future projects that support economic development in the territory. Similar sentiments were shared at the public hearings held in Guam and Saipan. Guam Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources staff members expressed frustration that they have been inundated with multiple designations, including the overlap between the current proposal and the previously proposed coral critical habitat. Attendees of the CNMI hearing questioned the decision not to hold public hearings on Rota and Tinian, and raised concerns about the limited amount of community outreach on the complex rule in advance of the hearings. NMFS and USFWS representatives at the hearings acknowledged the issues raised and emphasized ongoing collaboration and the importance of accurate data and science in decision-making.

USFWS and NMFS share jurisdiction for sea turtles listed under the ESA, with USFWS covering terrestrial areas and NMFS responsible for marine areas. Critical habitat is defined as an area that contains habitat features that are essential for the conservation of a species. USFWS is proposing to designate critical habitat on land where green sea turtles bask, nest, incubate, hatch and travel to the sea, which includes beaches, sandy shoals and coastal vegetation between the mean high water line and the beginning of dense vegetation, cliff or coastal structures. NMFS is proposing to designate

marine critical habitat from the mean high water line to 20 meters depth to protect access to nesting beaches, migratory corridors and important feeding and resting areas.

Critical habitat is a way to make sure that activities funded or allowed by the federal government do not harm a species' habitat through the ESA consultation process. It does not create a protected area or limit access on its own, and it does not stop



Map of NMFS' proposed green sea turtle critical habitat designation in marine habitat for Guam and the CNMI. Credit: NMFS.

development or affect actions that do not have federal funding or permits. Most projects move forward without modifications after consultation with UFWFS or NMFS. If USFWS or NMFS determines that an activity will likely impact critical habitat, then it must work with the responsible federal agency or other entity to modify the activity or take precautions to protect the habitat.

The public comment period will close Oct. 17, 2023. For more information about the proposed rules, maps of all proposed areas, supporting documents and instructions on how to provide written comments, visit the websites below. 🐢

Additional resources on the proposed rule:

Overview of the USFWS proposed rule to designate critical habitat in terrestrial habitats in the Pacific Islands: www.fws.gov/project/green-sea-turtle-critical-habitat-pacific-islands.

NMFS proposed rule and supplemental materials for critical habitat in marine habitats: www.fisheries.noaa.gov/action/proposed-rule-designate-critical-habitat-green-sea-turtles.

WHAT'S IN THE GUT?



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2022 U.S. Pacific Island Fisheries Reports Highlight Data Trends and Renewed Focus on Fishers' Perspectives



A Hawai'i-based commercial longline vessel heads out to sea. The Port of Honolulu consistently ranks nationally in the top 10 in terms of annual value of seafood landed. Photo: Hawaiian Fresh Seafood.

Earlier this summer, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council released the 2022 Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports for the Hawai'i, American Samoa and Mariana Archipelagos, and Pacific Remote Island Areas and Pacific Pelagic fisheries. The reports represent collaboration the Council, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources, American Samoa Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, Guam Department of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Division of Fish and Wildlife, who oversee the update and assembly of the reports each year. The reports are a complete collection of information relevant to U.S. Pacific Island fisheries for the previous year, including summaries of fishery performance (i.e., catch, effort, and participation), annual catch limit (ACL) monitoring, the results of new and current stock assessments and administrative and regulatory actions. The reports also provide information on a wide range of ecosystem considerations, such as changes in climate and oceanic variables, socioeconomic trends and protected species interactions and management. The Council uses the information to inform management decisions, ensuring the region's fisheries remain sustainable and that a consistent supply of local fish is available to communities into the future.

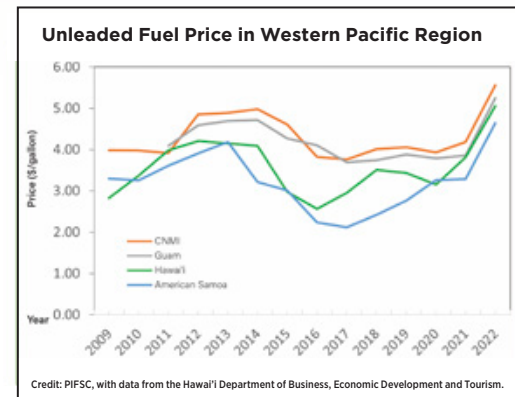
While regional fisheries have generally been viewed through the lens of impacts and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic over the past few years, there were indicators of a return to normalcy in 2022 despite some lingering effects and considerations across the various island areas. These influences on fishery operations, market demand and data collection are especially important for U.S. Pacific Island communities that rely on fishing not only for livelihoods and food security, but also for social and cultural purposes. Stemming from initial efforts to document the substantial and widespread impacts from the pandemic, the Council and its partners at the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) began collecting information to comprise a new "Fishers' Observations" section of the annual SAFE reports that highlighted fishers' perspectives with respect to how the pandemic impacted (and continues to impact) fishing and related industries. More recently, as effects of the pandemic have faded, the section focuses on empirical, "on-the-water" observations related to biological and environmental conditions, social and economic trends and other fishery-relevant factors.

Key Fisher Findings

Fisher observations are collected from two sources. First, the Council records information from local fishers actively participating as part of Advisory Panels during informal quarterly meetings.

These fishers not only share their own observations, but also convey insights from their communities and fishing networks. Second, the PIFSC Social-Ecological and Economic Systems Program hosts an annual summit in each island area, inviting local fishers to share their unique perspectives. Since this started in 2020, there have been additional efforts to supplement and standardize data collection to better characterize observations and relate them to scientific data.

In 2022, there were a number of similar observations made by fishers across the various jurisdictions of the Western Pacific Region. Perhaps the most notable of these was the high cost of fuel, especially early in the year. Gas prices were reportedly above \$6/gallon, with some prices reaching \$7-10/gallon for diesel fuel in some areas. These elevated costs made it more difficult for fishers to recoup fishing expenses through the sale of their catch, as fish prices did



not keep pace with rising gas prices despite an uptick in 2022. Kaua'i fishers said the increase in fuel cost impacted fishery operations, as they became more selective and would wait to hear about favorable fishing conditions from others before deciding to take a trip themselves. While elevated fuel prices were a 2022 phenomenon, shark depredation has been an issue in the Pacific for many years. Fishers continued to report sharks impacting their catch, especially for bottomfish and pelagics, with many fishers resorting to moving to a new area if sharks continuously took their

fish. Another common thread across the U.S. Pacific Islands was the need to address aging infrastructure related to fishing, including boat ramps, docks and fish aggregating devices (FADs), some of which were missing altogether. Crowding at fishing access points such as boat ramps, possibly a remaining effect of the pandemic, also limits fishing participation. As reported by Guam fishers, the crowding has led to an uptick in theft as well, further deterring fishing.

was an influx of swordfish in Hawai‘i markets is corroborated by the good year that the Hawai‘i shallow-set longline fishery had in 2022. Focusing nearshore, there was a greater abundance and availability of insular species, with the exception of West Hawai‘i Island where abnormal currents, possibly associated with La Niña conditions or increases in easterly wind days, impacted fish aggregations. Maui fishers observed more ehu being caught than onaga, while fishers on other Hawaiian islands

non-commercial fishers. Fishers also reported difficulties related to aging infrastructure like the marina and boat ramps, and fish spoilage because of the lack of available ice. Fishing increased later in 2022, especially in the Manu‘a Islands and by the American Samoa longline fleet. While bottomfish fishing has been decreasing in recent years and few bottomfish were seen in local markets, it was a good fishing year for nearshore reef species and there were strong roadside sales reported for these species. Consistent with logbook catch data, fishers observed increases in mahimahi and marlin over 2022 alongside a good season for albacore tuna, the primary target of the pelagic fishery.

Table 1. 2022 catch and revenue for Western Pacific pelagic fisheries

Island Area	Fishery	2022		% Change from 2021	
		Catch (lbs)	Revenue (\$)	Catch	Revenue
Hawai‘i	Deep-set longline	24,229,375	106,362,213	-9.6	-8.5
	Shallow-set longline	1,873,350	9,679,201	+48.2	+89.0
	Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) troll	1,762,027	7,040,286	-3.7	-0.2
	MHI handline	940,409	4,109,126	+37.3	+36.2
	Offshore handline	453,846	1,494,323	+76.6	+68.5
	Other gears	309,166	1,156,605	+71.9	+65.1
	Total	29,565,913	129,841,754	-4.7	-2.4
American Samoa	Longline	2,977,005	3,820,352	+13.2	+9.3
	Troll	4,543	n.d.	-75.3	-
	Total	2,981,560	-	+12.6	-
CNMI	Troll	237,440	721,579	-38.9	+7.1
Guam	Troll	629,837	n.d.	-26.6	-

Note: Data for 2022 landings and revenues are based on commercial reports and/or creel survey data expansions. Landings and revenues generated from creel survey data are estimates. Not all catch was sold. Revenue values are adjusted. "n.d." indicates that data were not disclosed due to rules regarding data confidentiality. Data obtained from fewer than three sources are considered confidential and are not able to be reported.

Hawai‘i

Hawai‘i fishers observed there was a strong mango and avocado bloom early in the year, which normally correlates with good fishing, especially for ‘ahi and otaru. Fishers also reported a strong ‘ahi bite for Hawai‘i small-boat fisheries early in the year despite low longline catches. Experienced fishers observed that, though they expected to be catching wahoo early in the year, they landed ‘ahi instead. However, according to commercial fishing report data, while there was a slight uptick in landings of yellowfin tuna by Hawai‘i pelagic fisheries relative to 2021, the catch for most tuna species decreased. Regardless, fishers’ reports of a strong mahimahi season were supported by available data, and this trend seemingly held across most U.S. Pacific Islands. Similarly, the observation that there

reported large schools of ‘oama and akule. Fishers noted the COVID-19 pandemic had lingering impacts early in 2022, sometimes making it hard to find crew and possibly contributing to crowding at local fishing access points. There were also reports of older fishers exiting the fisheries and being replaced by less experienced fishers.

American Samoa

Unlike the other island areas, American Samoa fishers were still dealing with pandemic-related lockdowns and mandates at the beginning of the year. Many people reported associated effects from the slow rollout of pandemic relief funding under the CARES Act. These issues were exacerbated later in the year by rough weather that led to reduced fishing effort from alia (traditional double-hulled catamarans) and

CNMI

In the CNMI, fishers reported there were abundant nearshore species. For example, there was a good run of atulai (akule, or bigeye scad, *Selar crumenophthalmus*), with some suggesting it was the best in the past decade. These observations support creel survey estimates indicating that atulai was the most caught non-management unit species (MUS) in the CNMI. Fishers also observed Saipan talaya (throw net) fishers catching ti‘ao (juvenile goatfish) and mañahak (juvenile rabbitfish). However, spearfishers had trouble catching parrotfish and needed to dive deeper to find them. Fishers reported rougher weather and wind patterns impacted fishing, though there were conflicting observations about water temperatures and the associated impacts to fishing behavior. Increased military activities also interfered with fishing activity and reduced fishing effort. While challenging market conditions in the territory persisted in 2022, fishers were able to recoup some of their elevated fishing costs by making sales door-to-door.

Guam

Observations made by Guam fishers in most cases aligned with those from the CNMI. Early in the year, fishers reported small runs of mañahak, ti‘ao and skipjack, but catches became rarer

Table 2. 2022 catch and revenue for Western Pacific bottomfish fisheries

Island Area	Fishery	2022		% Change from 2021	
		Catch (lbs)	Revenue (\$)	Catch	Revenue
Hawai'i	Deep-7 bottomfish stock complex	189,093	1,631,151	+15.2	+33.8
	Uku (gray jobfish)	52,966	341,529	-12.3	+9.7
American Samoa	Bottomfish	2,583	n.d.	+25.2	-
CNMI	Bottomfish	47,564	180,672	-36.2	-16.8
Guam	Bottomfish	45,071	n.d.	-11.4	-

Note: 2022 landings for Hawai'i fisheries are from commercial reports and do not include non-commercial catch estimates, whereas landings for the territories are from creel survey data expansions. Not all catch shown was sold. Revenue values are adjusted. "n.d." indicates that data were not disclosed due to rules regarding data confidentiality.

for these species as the year went on; this may help explain the large drop-off in catches of skipjack in the creel survey data. Other fishers corroborated the lack of skipjack, which some attributed to abnormal currents, strong winds, heavy rains and hot sun. Despite these difficulties, fishers observed large abundances of fish like atulai, mahimahi and wahoo, which is reflected in the annual SAFE report data. Fishers noted that the increase in mahimahi may be part of a typical five- to seven-year cycle and increases in atulai catch may be attributable to nighttime fishers harvesting the species under the full moon from August to September. While market conditions were challenging due to an excess of fish such as mahimahi that lowered fish prices in the face of rising fuel costs, customary exchange was still practiced throughout the community.

Fishery Performance

There are many instances in which the fisheries data support the observations made by fishers, and vice versa, such that the observations can provide important context and valuable insight for the scientific data the Council uses for management. The data tables provided below show the percent change in fish catch and revenue across the U.S. Pacific Islands from 2021 to 2022 to highlight the variable nature of local fisheries, especially in the context of post-pandemic recovery.

Pelagic

The pelagic fisheries of the Western Pacific Region are the largest managed by the Council in terms of catch and

revenue, and include the harvest of large species such as tunas and billfishes by longlining, trolling and handlining, among other gear types. **Table 1** shows the catch, revenue and percent change from 2021 to 2022 for each of the major pelagic fisheries. Most Hawai'i pelagic fisheries had increases in catch and revenue in 2022 relative to 2021, except for the deep-set longline and troll fisheries. Because the deep-set fishery, which targets tunas, comprises such a large proportion of the total catch, decreases in that sector resulted in a decrease in total catch across pelagic fisheries. The deep-set longline fishery decreases were driven by an ongoing decrease of bigeye tuna landings, consistent with fisher observations, though there has been an uptick in the amount of yellowfin tuna landed over the same period. A relative decrease in wahoo catches from 2021 to 2022 coincides with fisher observations that the species was absent from usual fishing areas at the beginning of the year. The shallow-set longline fishery had the highest percent increase in revenue for regional pelagic fisheries in 2022, along with substantial increases in catch for swordfish and striped marlin. But the revenue mostly benefited from an increase in average fish price from \$4.16 to \$4.75/pound from 2021 to 2022. The fishery also operated normally through its fishing season, whereas this had not been the case from 2018 through 2020 due to fishery closures associated with stipulated settlements, hard caps on sea turtle interactions and pandemic impacts.

Despite having one fewer vessel and less effort in 2022, the American Samoa

longline fishery experienced its second straight year of increased catch driven by good years for blue marlin, mahimahi and albacore. Catch rates for albacore increased above 14 fish per 1,000 hooks, known as the "break even" point, for the first time in the past decade. Despite the increase in trolling vessels, the American Samoa troll fishery had substantial decreases in catch (75%) and effort (50%) from 2021. The abrupt decline in the fishery prompted the Council to investigate whether the current design of the creel surveys is sufficient to generate catch estimates. Revenue data for the troll fishery are not able to be disclosed because there were fewer than three dealers reporting commercial sales data in 2022. Data from fewer than three sources are kept confidential to protect personal and business identifiable information.

The pelagic troll fisheries of the Mariana Archipelago had similar trends in catch and effort in 2022. Both Guam and the CNMI had slight decreases in trolling effort and participation with decreases in total estimated catch for the fisheries. The downticks in catch were driven by low landings of skipjack and yellowfin tuna, though both territories also had an influx of mahimahi and wahoo. Despite the nearly 40% decrease in pelagic catch in the CNMI, revenue increased primarily due to the larger proportion of catch sold and an increase in average fish price since 2021. Revenue data were not available for the Guam troll fishery because of data confidentiality rules, similar to the American Samoa troll fishery.

Bottomfish

Though island fisheries are not as substantial in terms of catch or revenue as pelagic fisheries, fishing for bottomfish continues to be important to local communities economically, culturally and socially. **Table 2** provides bottomfish catch, revenue and percent change from 2021 to 2022. While increases in catch were observed for Hawai'i Deep-7 and American Samoa bottomfish, these increases come during general decreasing trends for

each since 2014 and 2015, respectively. Factors contributing to the decline in the Deep-7 fishery are likely for multiple reasons as fishers shared, including challenging weather conditions, increasing shark depredation, declining fisher participation including skilled highliners, competing fisheries, and the negative impacts of the pandemic on Hawai'i's hotel and restaurant sectors.

Similar to the pattern seen in revenue for some of the pelagic fisheries in the region, revenues for Hawai'i uku and CNMI bottomfish did not decrease to the same extent as catch values due to higher average fish prices and higher proportions of the catch being sold. The same reasoning likely explains why revenue increased more for Hawai'i Deep-7 bottomfish than catch did when comparing 2022 values to those from 2021. Also, similar to the troll fisheries of American Samoa and Guam, revenue data for the bottomfish fisheries of these two territories are not disclosed due to confidentiality rules. This is consistent with fisher observations in American Samoa that local bottomfish were not frequently seen in fish markets.

Annual Catch Limits

To manage non-pelagic MUS fisheries like bottomfish, the Council uses ACLs (see **Table 3**) that set a level of permitted fish catch each year to ensure overfishing does not occur. To account for the high year-to-year variability in the fisheries data, average catches over the most recent three year period are usually tracked against the ACLs and presented in the annual SAFE reports. In Hawai'i, there are ACLs for bottomfish, crustaceans and precious corals, while the American Samoa and Mariana Archipelagos have ACLs for bottomfish only. In the past, ACLs were implemented for many more MUS, including a large number of coral reef fish species. However, many of these species were reclassified from MUS to ecosystem component species (ECS) in 2019 and are primarily monitored instead of actively managed. The initial estimate for the 2022 Guam bottomfish catch is still undergoing data validation. Annual

catch values are not disclosed for Hawai'i precious corals due to data confidentiality rules.

A 2019 NMFS stock assessment¹ indicated that American Samoa bottomfish were overfished and experiencing overfishing, while Guam bottomfish were overfished but not experiencing overfishing. The ACLs shown in **Table 3** for American Samoa and Guam bottomfish are limits meant to allow the stocks to rebuild within regulatory timeframes while permitting fishery operations to continue. A recent 2023 stock assessment for American Samoa bottomfish took a new approach in analyzing each MUS individually and indicated that the species are being harvested sustainably. The Council

situational awareness in the face of an ever changing climate. Changes such as El Niño can affect the productivity of marine ecosystems and catchability of managed fish stocks. Research is ongoing by NMFS and the Council on how climate change may impact regional fisheries.

In 2022, there were several notable improvements incorporated into the reports. For the Hawai'i report, the Council generated a new data module to track noncommercial catch estimates for bottomfish MUS and priority ECS through the Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey. In the Hawai'i and pelagic reports, new tables were added to show bycatch species data in Hawai'i small-boat fisheries by gear type. The Council plans to add a noncommercial

Table 3. ACLs for Western Pacific MUS compared to 2022 catch values

Island Area	Fishery	MUS	ACL (lbs)	2022 Catch (lbs)	Portion of ACL caught (%)
Hawai'i	Bottomfish	Deep-7 bottomfish	492,000	189,093	38.4
		Uku (gray jobfish)	295,419	282,241	95.5
	Crustacean	Deep-water shrimp	250,773	13,864	5.5
		Kona crab	30,802	2,533	8.2
American Samoa	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	5,000	2,583	51.7
CNMI	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	84,000	47,564	56.6
Guam	Bottomfish	Bottomfish	31,000	*Undergoing review	

Note: All Hawai'i catch values are from commercial data except for uku, which includes Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey data estimates that are known to have high uncertainty. The ACLs for American Samoa and Guam bottomfish are part of rebuilding plans for the fisheries after a recent stock assessment (Langseth et al. 2019) found both fisheries to be overfished, with the American Samoa bottomfish fishery also experiencing overfishing. The value for the Guam bottomfish fishery is preliminary and undergoing evaluation by NMFS.

anticipates specifying new ACLs for the fishery at the end of 2023. The next stock assessment for Guam bottomfish, which will reassess stock status and inform ACLs, is scheduled to be completed in 2024.

Report Updates and Improvements

Several other sections of the Council's annual SAFE reports provide annually updated information in addition to fishery performance that is used for monitoring and management. For example, the "Climate and Oceanic Indicators" section provides data on factors related to current climate and oceanic conditions in the Pacific, which provides fishing communities, resource managers and businesses with

data module in the 2023 reports for pelagic species as well as reconfigure the American Samoa archipelagic fishery performance section to monitor the bottomfish fishery by individual species, consistent with the new bottomfish stock assessment finalized in 2023. Full reports are available on the Council's website at www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports. Select content will soon be available through the Council's online portal (www.wpcouncildata.org), which allows readers to navigate the reports more easily and directly download the reported data. 🐟

¹Langseth B, Syslo J, Yau A, Carvalho F. 2019. Stock assessments of the bottomfish management unit species of Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa, 2019. NOAA Tech Memo. NMFS-PIFSC-86, 177 p. (+ supplement, 165 p.). doi:10.25923/bz8b-ng72.

Renegotiations on COFA Withholds Funds from Hawai'i and US Pacific Territories



Left photo: In Guam, DOI Secretary Haaland (center) met with Gov. Lourdes Leon Guerrero and Lt. Gov. Joshua Tenorio. Right photo: DOI Secretary Haaland (center) in the CNMI with Gov. Arnold Palacios and Lt. Gov. David Apatang. Photos: Guam Daily Post and KUAM News.

The Biden Administration seeks to invest more than \$6.5 billion over 20 years through international agreements between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and the Republic of Palau, collectively known as Freely Associated States (FAS). These Compacts of Free Association (COFAs) provide financial assistance and certain benefits to these nations in exchange for defense and other strategic arrangements, and are seen as key to protecting U.S. allies from the increasing influence of the Chinese government.

Current COFA provisions expire in 2024 for Palau, and Sept. 30, 2023, for the RMI and the FSM. Renegotiations between the U.S. Department of the Interior have been completed and signed by the respective governments of FSM and Palau. A renewed agreement with the RMI has yet to be signed due to a transition of power and change to their negotiator, but discussions continue.

What is not included in the proposed FY2024 budget is reimbursements provided to COFA hosts. This amounts to approximately \$30 million divided amongst the impacted territories.

Guam Council member Dr. Judi Guthertz commented, “The Compact agreements are important to our country and to the Western Pacific Region because of potential future geopolitical conflicts coming from Asia. However, the United States

abandoned the interests of Guam, the CNMI, Hawai'i, American Samoa and various U.S. mainland jurisdictions that have been hosting Compact citizens. Even in the new draft agreements, the U.S. government has scrapped any language providing for reimbursements to impacted communities. Let me be clear—we on Guam welcome our brothers and sisters from our neighboring Western Pacific islands. However, the cost to our local government has been very high. From the very beginning of the Compact agreements, the U.S. government has not treated Guam or other impacted areas fairly and equitably. And the United States has never honored provisions in the original agreements intended to ensure that host communities are not left with a financial burden. The newly drafted agreements do not provide any reimbursement language. This must be rectified by Congress before the Compacts are officially ratified. Fairness to impacted communities must guide this renewal process.”

A recent visit by DOI Secretary Deb Haaland to Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) included discussions with government officials on regional issues, such as COFA. She was accompanied by Assistant Secretary of Insular and International Affairs Carmen G. Cantor and Deputy Assistant to the President and Asian American and

Pacific Islander Senior Liaison Erika L. Moritsugu.

The Guam Governor's office, in a press release, said the visit “served as valuable opportunities for our federal partners to gain an understanding of our most pressing issues. From addressing national security to Compact of Free Association negotiations, housing and workforce development and invasive species, our administration is requesting greater support and advocacy in all these areas to increase the quality of life for the people of Guam.” Governor Leon Guerrero stressed the need for Guam to receive “adequate reimbursement for compact impact expenses” as well as support of the Compact Impact Fairness Act (CIFA). The Act allows non-U.S. COFA citizens the same benefits as those across the country. Leon Guerrero explained to Haaland the “CIFA should not replace the \$30 million in compact funds received by the COFA-impacted U.S. territories, as these funds are spent separate from the social benefits.” She also asked Haaland to support Guam Congressman James Moylan's amendment to extend \$16 million for 2024.

Congressman Moylan said, “It is unfortunate the Biden Administration continues to turn a blind eye towards COFA host communities.” The DOI continues to push for allowing COFA migrants who relocate to U.S. states and territories to qualify for social programs not currently permitted. But according to Moylan, “...this option does not address all the costs jurisdictions such as Guam have to endure with the increase of legal migration, especially in areas such as public safety and other social aspects.”

American Samoa Congresswoman Uifa'atali Amata, together with CNMI Congressman Gregorio Kilili Sablan, were recently appointed as co-chairs of the House Committee on Natural Resources' Indo-Pacific

Task Force to address Chinese government influence in the region, including discussion on COFA amendments. Amata noted the RMI negotiations on the \$7 billion Compact deal are stalled over nuclear testing compensation. “The deals are key to US and regional security in the Pacific. The administration is proposing the reauthorizing of the Compact agreements with economic assistance to the FAS in return for U.S. military basing rights.” But Amata said the Biden Administration’s proposal lacked spending offsets for COFA and increased costs for postal and other services. U.S. Special Envoy for Compact Negotiations Joseph Yun said the timeline to complete talks will be “very soon,” adding the U.S. Postal Service approval is the biggest hurdle. 🐟



Congresswoman Amata at the announcement of the bipartisan Indo-Pacific Task force in Washington D.C. Photo: Marianas Variety.

Severe Storm Disrupts Guam’s Small-Boat Fishery

Guam’s artisanal small-boat fishery was devastated by Typhoon Mawar when it passed over the northern tip of Guam May 24-25, 2023, as a Category 4 storm with sustained winds of up to 140 miles per hour.

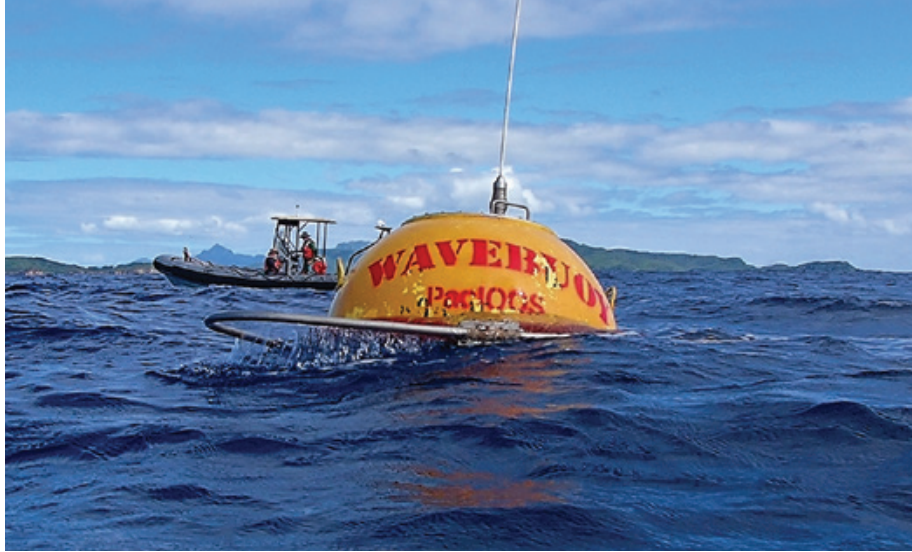
An institution for fishermen to sell fish and for the community to purchase freshly processed sashimi for more than 40 years, the Guam Fishermen’s Coop was severely damaged and unable to reopen until a temporary facility is completed, which is expected around the end of August 2023. A new facility is already in the planning stage and is expected to open in early 2025.

The storm also sunk or destroyed boats left in their slips at the Agaña and Agat Marinas. Many fishermen were unable to go fishing for weeks after the storm due to spilt oil and fuel from sunken boats, and boats damaged in their yards. This was exacerbated by fuel lines several miles long sparked by fear of a gas and diesel shortage.

Fortunately, there was little damage to the marinas themselves. Only the Malesso Pier suffered some damage due to storm waves.



Enhancing Coastal Safety and Empowering Local Fishermen with Wave Buoys and Technology



A wave buoy was recently deployed with the help of local fishermen approximately 3 miles off Aunu'u, American Samoa. Photo: Scott Burch/NPS.

Coastal communities across the Pacific are benefiting from an innovative partnership between NOAA, the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and various organizations to provide real-time wave height, wind direction and other critical ocean wave forecasting data to enhance ocean safety. Wave buoys, the heroes of this initiative, are playing a pivotal role in ensuring safer navigation and informed decision-making for those planning to go to sea or those already at sea, particularly benefiting local fishermen.

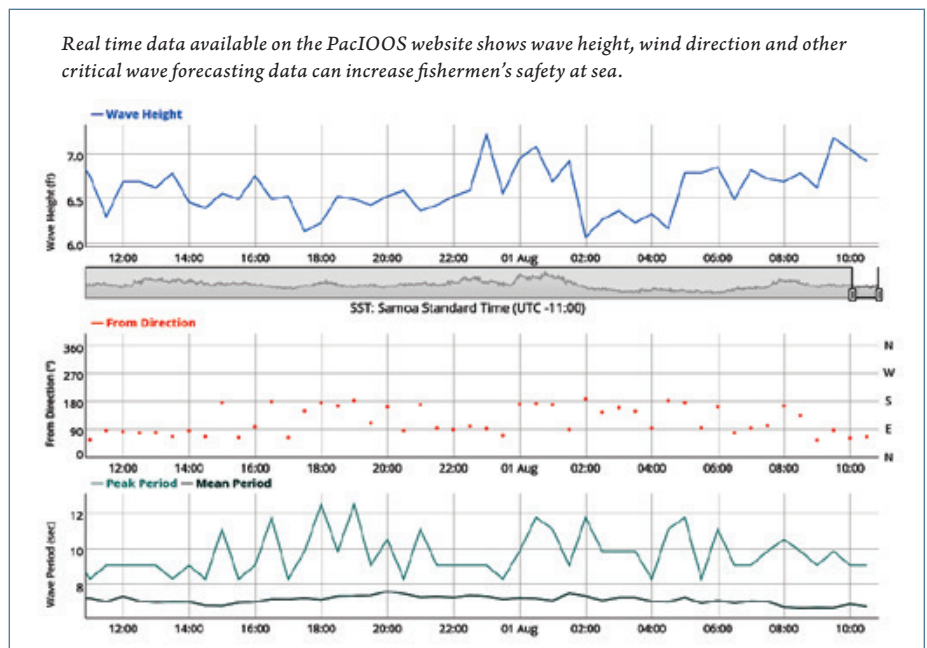
The Pacific Islands Ocean Observing System (PacIOOS) operates a network of wave buoys across the Pacific region, providing critical data on ocean wave conditions. In partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) of American Samoa, one such buoy, known as CDIP #189 or NDBC #51209, is located approximately 3 miles (5 km) off Aunu'u, a small island off the eastern coast of Tutuila. This state-of-the-art Datawell Directional Waverider Mark III buoy, moored in 55 meters of water, is equipped with accelerometers that measure north/south, east/west and vertical displacements, allowing it to accurately determine both wave direction and wave energy.

For local fishermen, these buoys are game changers. The real-time data provide invaluable insights into wave conditions and weather forecasts they can use as part of their float plan. Safety is a priority for all fishermen, especially with the increased number of fishing related incidents each year. Armed with this information, the local fishermen can plan their trips more effectively, while also applying traditional methods of forecasting weather and ocean conditions to help make better decisions when going out to sea. This not only ensures

the well-being of the fishermen but also protects their livelihoods and sustains their communities.

Community involvement is a key aspect of this initiative, and local fishermen play a vital role in its success. Engaging with fishermen and fishing communities allows them to take ownership of the buoys and understand the importance of their data. By partnering with fishermen Peter Taliva'a of Aunu'u Island and Keith Ahsoon from the Manu'a Islands in the deployment and maintenance of the buoys, the initiative fosters a sense of responsibility and pride in contributing to coastal safety, critical to a small island and fishing community like Aunu'u.

Education and outreach programs play a crucial role in familiarizing fishermen with the buoy system. By providing training on accessing and interpreting the scientific data, the NPS hopes to engage with the local agencies to enable fishermen to combine that with their traditional knowledge to make informed decisions at sea. A mobile phone app is being developed to accommodate the latest wave technology and make it more accessible to everyone. It is also available on the PacIOOS website at www.pacioos.hawaii.edu/waves/buoy-aunuu. 🐟





Rising Tides and Changing Times: Climate Change in American Samoa



As part of its 195th meeting held in Tutuila, American Samoa, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council hosted a public Fishers

Forum on June 27, 2023. The Forum focused on different effects of climate change on the territory. The Rex Lee Auditorium was bustling with nearly 80 attendees interacting with 12 exhibitors from various government agencies and organizations sharing information and initiatives in progress related to the theme. For example, the American Samoa Department of Commerce gave a status update its Super Alia Project, which focuses on providing training and education to the local fishermen on sustainable fishing practices and business management. In addition, the Council had a hands-on demonstration on ocean acidification due to increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and its disruption to food webs.

Council Vice Chair for American Samoa Taulapapa Will Sword opened and emceed the event, setting the stage for an evening filled with informative presentations and discussions. National Marine Fisheries Service Assistant Administrator Janet Coit described steps the agency is taking to address challenges to coastal communities. The Council presented on climate change impacts on tuna fisheries near American Samoa, showing predictions based on various greenhouse gas emission scenarios and physiological impacts on tuna growth and development due to ocean acidification. University of Hawai'i PhD student Carla Baizeau introduced a sea-level rise viewer¹ via web conference, providing participants with a visual representation of the potential consequences of rising sea levels on the local coastline.

Community outreach for this event included a banner, flier distribution, and radio and social media advertisements. Many of the participants were reached by word of mouth from our local sponsors and supporting departments and agencies. Local newspapers covered the event and it was also posted on the Council's website. Items generously donated by sponsors, along with items from the Council to acknowledge participation, were raffled off to attendees. 🐟

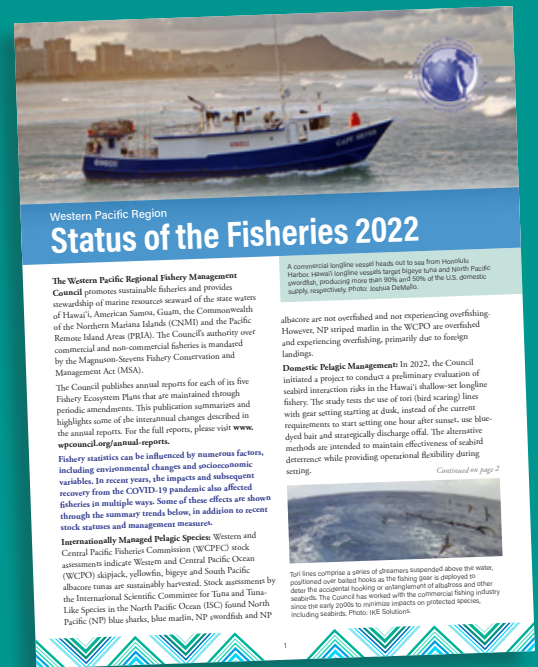
¹<https://pi-casc.soest.hawaii.edu/research/research-projects/slr-viewer-american-samoa>



New Outreach Resources

The Council's *Western Pacific Region Status of the Fisheries 2022* report is now available. The publication highlights some of the changes in the U.S. Pacific Island fisheries from 2020 to 2022. Fishery statistics can be affected by numerous variables, including environmental changes and socioeconomic variables. In recent years, the impacts and subsequent recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic also affected fisheries in multiple ways. Some of these effects are described, in addition to recent stock statuses and management measures.

Find the *Status of the Fisheries* and full reports at www.wpcouncil.org/annual-reports. To access the data used to generate the reports, go to www.wpcouncildata.org.



Science and Management 101 – Management Unit Species vs Ecosystem Component Species

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council manages thousands of species from culturally important coral reef fish to deep water corals and from economically significant bottom and pelagic fish to various crustaceans. These diverse species are managed through the Council's five place-based Fishery Ecosystem Plans, with the understanding that ecosystems are important to the sustainability of fisheries.

Management Unit Species (MUS) - Typically include species caught in federal waters in quantities sufficient to warrant federal conservation and management. For each one, the Council is required to specify maximum sustainable yield, optimum yield, annual catch limits (ACLs) and essential fish habitat. These stocks are managed collaboratively by the Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

Ecosystem Component Species (ECS) - Stocks included in a Fishery Ecosystem Plan that are monitored to achieve ecosystem management objectives, but do **not** require stock assessments, ACLs or essential fish habitat designations. In early 2019, NMFS issued a rule that reclassified many nearshore MUS as ECS. In the future, these species may be managed as part of local fishery management plans.

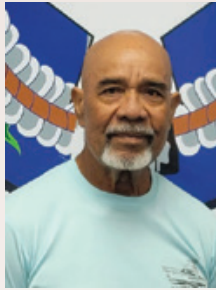
MUS and ECS lists for the Pacific Islands Region:
<https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2023-02/20230210-MUS-ECS-consolidated-lists-for-all-FEPs.pdf>.



Top: Kona crab is an example of a Hawai'i MUS with an ACL of 30,802 pounds. Photo: NMFS. Atulai (bigeye scad) is a commonly caught ECS in the Mariana Archipelago. Photo: JE Randall/iNaturalist.



Roger Dang



Pedro Itibus

The U.S. Department of Commerce has appointed two new members to the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.

Council members

are appointed to both obligatory (state-specific) and at-large (regional) seats. Council members serve a three-year term and can be reappointed to serve three consecutive terms. The current term is from Aug. 11, 2023, to Aug. 10, 2026. The Council members are:

At-Large Seats

- **Roger Dang** (Hawai'i)*
- **Pedro (Pete) Itibus** (Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands)

*reappointment

At its 195th Council meeting, the Council appointed the following members as its officers for the remainder of 2023:

- **William Sword**, chair
- **Archie Soliai**, vice chair, American Samoa

It also appointed **Charles Littnan**, NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center director, to the Scientific and Statistical Committee as an ex-officio member.

Doy Farwell will be retiring in September after providing professional transcription services to the Council for more than 23 years. The Council extends its recognition and sincerest appreciation to Doy for her years of service and contribution to the fishing communities of the Western Pacific Region and bids her a fond FAREWELL, tight lines, aloha a hui hou, olomwaay, un dangkulu na si Yu'us ma'ase and tofa soifua fa'afetai.



Doy (fourth from left) with Council members and staff in 2018.

Sean Macduff, recently hired as Superintendent for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, begins his position mid-September 2023. Sean was a contractor and part of the Council family between the years 2013-2015. While a staffer at CNMI Division of fish and Wildlife, Sean and Richard Farrell, Council Advisory Panel Vice Chair collaborated on collecting data in Tinian and Rota. Sean was instrumental in sourcing funding for electronic catch reports. While earning his PhD in zoology at the University of Hawai'i, Sean was a member of the Council's Fishery Data Collection Technical Committee from 2013 to 2015 and the Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan Team from 2014 to 2015. Congratulations, Sean!

Roy Morioka to Receive the 2023 Richard Shiroma Award



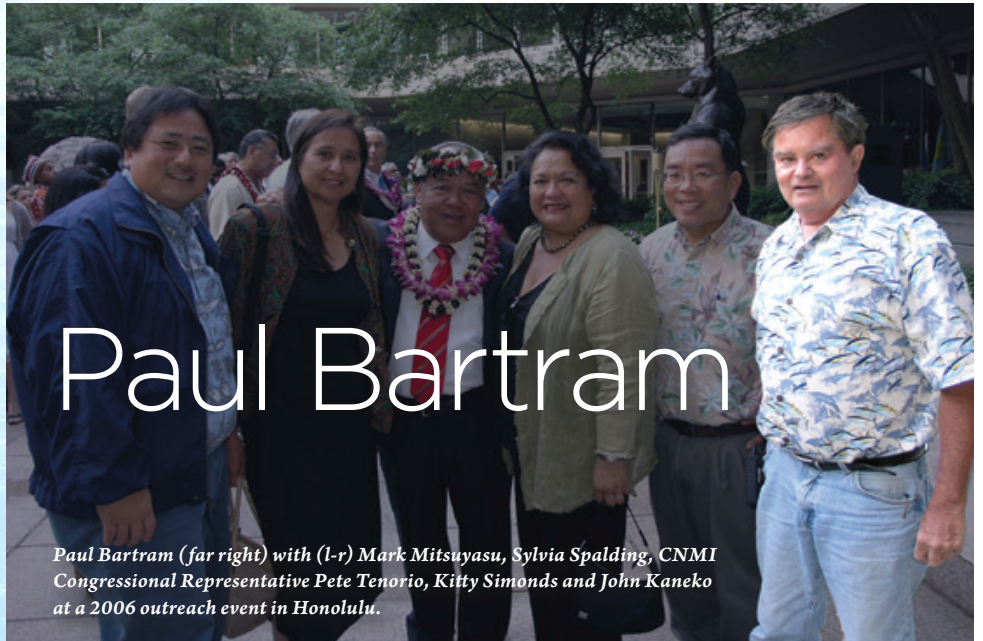
First given out in 2006, the **Richard Shiroma Award** is in recognition of exemplary dedication and performance of a Council member or advisor. The award honors the service the late Richard Shiroma dedicated to the Council as the chair of its Recreational Data Task Force and vice chair of its Advisory Panel.

Roy Morioka was chosen as the 2023 award winner because he is an advocate for all fishermen and ocean users, particularly the small-boat fishing fleet out of Hawai'i. As a member of the Council's Advisory Panel, a Council Member, and Council Chair over the past 25 years, Uncle Roy has helped guide the Council in its regional issues as well as those at national and international levels.



Roy founded the Hawai'i Fishermen's Alliance for Conservation and Tradition (HFACT) to promote the interests of fishermen and provide them with representation to the different management agencies. Through his participation in the Waialua Boat Club (WBC), he has also worked with club members on developing and improving a smartphone application that aims to bring the fishing community together through various features, including catch reporting and distress signaling. Through HFACT and the WBC, Roy organized annual Fishing for Hawaii's Hungry Tournaments that exemplified the fishing community's culture and tradition to "Share the Catch!" 🐟

IN MEMORIAM



Paul Bartram (far right) with (l-r) Mark Mitsuyasu, Sylvia Spalding, CNMI Congressional Representative Pete Tenorio, Kitty Simonds and John Kaneko at a 2006 outreach event in Honolulu.

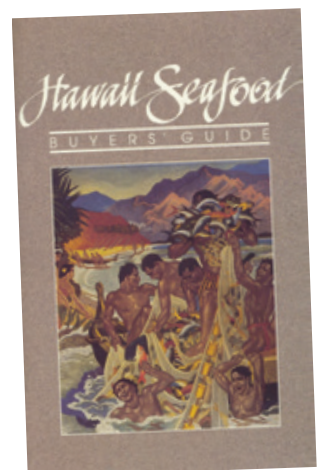


Paul Douglas Bartram passed away on June 14, 2023, in Honolulu, Hawai‘i. Born on Aug. 20, 1946, in New Hampshire, Paul leaves behind a remarkable footprint in the world of fisheries and marine conservation. A graduate of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, Bartram earned his bachelor of arts in biology in 1978. He was a fishery researcher known for his profound grasp of ecosystem-based thinking, adeptness in finding and dissecting fishery data, and proficiency in technical writing.

Paul dedicated his expertise to projects supporting the fisheries and seafood industries of the Western Pacific Region, focusing on Hawai‘i, American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. He worked for the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council in the 1980s, helping to develop its inaugural Strategic Program Plan and territorial fishery management plans.

During the late 1980s, Paul played a pivotal role in shaping the *Hawai‘i Seafood Buyer’s Guide*, a project funded by the NOAA Saltonstall-Kennedy Program. In the early 1990s, he championed the introduction of fresh tuna from Hawai‘i to European markets through his work with Hawai‘i Seafood Products Inc. As the emerging market for fresh tuna took shape, he was instrumental in the establishment of fresh tuna shipments from Guam to Europe.

Paul also worked with Hui Malama O Mo‘omomion Moloka‘i to secure funding to develop the group’s community-based management program and publish its lunar calendar, featuring traditional management approaches based on the life cycles of important marine resources. 🐟





Crab Cakes

SERVES 4 AS AN APPETIZER

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tbsp unsalted butter
- ½ tbsp minced garlic
- 3 tbsp minced onion
- 3 tbsp minced red bell pepper
- 3 tbsp minced green bell pepper
- 3 tbsp minced celery
- 3 tbsp minced carrots
- 2 tbsp minced fresh basil
- 6 tbsp heavy cream
- Salt and freshly ground white pepper, to taste
- 1 ½ lbs fresh lump crabmeat, preferably Kona crab, picked over for shell
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups panko (*Japanese bread crumbs*)
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup peanut oil
- ½ each red and green bell pepper, seeded, deribbed, and finely diced
- 4 strips lemon zest
- 4 small basil sprigs

DIRECTIONS

1. Melt the butter in a large sauté pan or skillet over medium-high heat. Add the garlic and onion and sauté for about 1 minute, or until golden brown. Add the red and green bell pepper, celery, carrot and basil and sauté 1 minute longer. Add the cream and continue cooking until the liquid is reduced by half. Season with salt and pepper and transfer to a non-reactive bowl. Let cool. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.
2. Add the crabmeat to the chilled mixture and stir thoroughly. Form into 8 balls and squeeze gently to remove any excess liquid; then form the balls into patties.
3. Place the flour and Panko on separate plates and beat the eggs in a shallow bowl. Lightly coat the crab cakes in the flour, then in the egg, and finally, in the Panko.
4. Heat the peanut oil in a heavy sauté pan or skillet over medium heat until it reaches 350°F. Add the crab cakes and sauté for about 1 ½ minutes on each side, or until evenly browned.
5. Serve 2 crab cakes per person. Garnish with the red and green bell pepper and lemon zest. Top with a basil sprig.



Recipe Courtesy
greateatshawaii.blogspot.com
Recipe Bottom Photo: Keoki Stender

Summary of Action Items at the September 2023 Council Meeting

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

1. Options for Fishing Regulations in Proposed PRIA Sanctuary

In 2009, President Bush used the Antiquities Act to designate the Pacific Remote Islands (Baker, Howland, Jarvis, Wake Islands, Johnston and Palmyra Atolls, and Kingman Reef) as the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument, covering 490,343 square miles with prohibitions on commercial fishing but allowances for non-commercial and charter fishing. In 2014, President Obama expanded the Monument using the same authority to include Wake, Johnston, and Jarvis Islands out to the 200 nm U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ) limit while keeping the 50 nm limit for other islands. In March 2023, President Biden instructed the Commerce Secretary to consider making the monument and additional U.S. EEZ areas a national marine sanctuary.

The National Marine Sanctuaries Act requires involving the appropriate fishery management council for fishing regulations within the EEZ. NOAA has identified that proposed fishing management actions are necessary, and provided the Council a package of materials intended to help it determine what would best fulfill the sanctuary goals and objectives. The Council can decide to create draft fishing regulations, determine there is no need for regulations, or defer a decision.

At its 196th meeting, the Council will consider taking initial action on the need for draft fishing regulations. If needed, the Council will formulate these regulations by Dec. 20, 2023, considering aspects like necessity, the types of fishing regulations, and implications for commercial and noncommercial fishing within the proposed sanctuary.

2. American Samoa Bottomfish: Discontinuing the Rebuilding Plan and Annual Catch Limit Specifications

At its 195th meeting, the Council reviewed the 2023 American Samoa bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) stock assessment and confirmed the fishery was not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The Council directed staff to draft a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) amendment to end the current rebuilding plan and assemble P* (risk of overfishing) and SEEM (Social, Economic, Ecological and Management Uncertainty) working groups. In August 2023, these groups along with the Scientific and Statistical Committee evaluated multiple factors and advised a risk level to the Council. *At the 196th meeting, the Council will decide whether to discontinue the rebuilding plan and set annual catch limits and accountability measures for the American Samoa bottomfish fishery from 2024 to 2027.*

3. 2024 US Territorial Bigeye Tuna Catch Limit and Allocation Specification (Final Action)

Bigeye tuna is managed as separate stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) and Eastern Pacific Ocean by international commissions. The 2023 stock assessment for WCPO's bigeye tuna reveals it is not overfished or experiencing overfishing. The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) establishes conservation measures for species like bigeye tuna caught by various fisheries and flag states, including the United States. Since 2018, conservation and management measures (CMMs) like 2018-01, 2020-01, and 2021-01 maintain catch limits, like the United States' 3,554-metric ton (mt) bigeye limit.

CMM 2021-01, expiring in 2023, doesn't set individual limits for Small Island Developing States and territories like American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. Potential new catch limits and extending current ones might emerge. The Council's Amendment 7 to the Pacific Pelagic FEP sets management rules for U.S. Participating Territories, granting them authority to manage species within WCPFC limits. The Council is considering single-year specifications for 2024 and awaits WCPFC's future limits.

Past years saw bigeye limits of 2,000 mt for each U.S. Participating Territory, and allocation limits with U.S.-flagged vessels to up to 1,000 mt. However, the fishery closed in 2019 before the season ended, during a time of high demand. The Council adjusted limits for 2020-2023, with allocations not exceeding 3,000 mt. U.S. vessels operated through these years. The final rule for the 2023 specification was issued in June 2023. *At its 196th meeting, the Council will consider taking final action on the 2024 bigeye limits for U.S. territories and catch transfer limits under the Pacific Pelagic FEP.*

4. Review of the Guam and CNMI Marine Conservation Plans

The MCP for Guam expired in August 2023 and the CNMI government is requesting an amendment to its MCP. *At its 196th meeting, the Council will assess the MCPs for agreement and approval.* Once approved by the Council and the Secretary of Commerce, the MCPs will be valid for three years. However, the plans can be adjusted at any time and resubmitted for approval.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act (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. 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. 🐟

2023 Council Calendar

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

SEPTEMBER

11-15

1st Pacific Islands Conference on Ocean Science and Ocean Management, the Pacific Community, Nadi, Fiji*

11-16

11th Scientific Committee Meeting of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization, Panama City, Panama*

12-14

149th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting, Honolulu

15

Pelagic & International Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

15

Program Planning Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

15

Fishing Rights of Indigenous Peoples Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

15

Executive & Budget Standing Committee meeting, Honolulu

18-20

196th Council meeting, Honolulu

20-26

19th Technical and Compliance Committee Meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC), Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)*

29-30

Development of a Revised WCPFC Tropical Tuna Measure Workshop 4, Pohnpei, FSM*

OCTOBER

2-3

Permanent Advisory Committee to advise the U.S. Commissioners to the WCPFC, Honolulu*

2-5

6th Regional Conference of Heads of Planning and Statistics, Noumea, New Caledonia*

11-13

Council Coordination Committee meeting, Washington, DC

21-28

U.S. Coral Reef Task Force Meeting, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands*

NOVEMBER

14-16

6th Climate Workshop, TBD*

30-Dec 12

2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference, Dubai, United Arab Emirates*

DECEMBER

4-8

20th Regular Session of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, Rarotonga, Cook Islands*

5-7

150th SSC meeting, Honolulu

11-14

197th Council meeting (virtual)

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



Upcoming Events

The 149th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held Sept. 12 to 14, 2023, at the Council office, 1164 Bishop Street, Suite 1400, Honolulu, HI. 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/149SSCMtg>.

Major agenda items include: American Samoa bottomfish rebuilding plan discontinuation and setting acceptable biological catch for 2024-2027 (action item); 2024 U.S. Territorial bigeye tuna catch limit and allocation specifications (action item); Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Deep 7 bottomfish stock assessment review; Electronic monitoring scenarios in Western Pacific longline fisheries; Proposed national marine sanctuary in the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA) update; Proposed green sea turtle critical habitat designation update; and Addressing climate change in fishery management priorities discussion.

The 196th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held Sept. 18 to 20, 2023, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Hibiscus Ballroom, 410 Atkinson Drive, Honolulu, HI. 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/196WPCouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: 2024 U.S. Territorial bigeye tuna catch limit and allocation specifications (final action item); Fishing regulation options in proposed PRIA national marine sanctuary (action item); Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam Marine Conservation Plans review (action item); American Samoa bottomfish rebuilding plan discontinuation and annual catch limit specification for 2024-2027 (action item); MHI Deep 7 bottomfish stock assessment discussion; Proposed green sea turtle critical habitat designation update; Addressing equity and environmental justice in fisheries

management discussion; Council program planning and multi-year priorities; and electronic monitoring options in Western Pacific longline fisheries.

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



The Fishers Forum on "What's in the Gut?" will take place from 6 to 9 p.m. Sept. 18, 2023, at the Ala Moana Hotel, Hibiscus Ballroom, 410 Atkinson Drive, Honolulu, HI.

You like to eat 'ahi, mahi and other offshore fish? Ever think about what they eat, and how that helps fishermen to catch more fish? Learn about this and how fishing apps improve record keeping, communication among fishermen and management efforts at this free, family friendly event. 🐟

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