



Final Report of the Mariana Archipelago - Guam FEP Advisory Panel Meeting
Tuesday, June 4, 2024
6:20 p.m. – 8 p.m. (ChST)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Dominick San Gil, Guam Advisory Panel (AP) Vice-Chair, opened the meeting at 6:20 p.m., ChST. Members in attendance included Michael Gawel, Jason Miller, Dale Alvarez, Dominick San Gil, and Carl Dela Cruz. Michael Duenas, Jesse Rosario, and James Borja were excused.

Others in attendance include Zach Yamada, Felix Reyes, Asuka Ishizaki (Council Staff), Mia Iwane, Jenny Suter, Eric Cruz, Marlowe Sabater (PIFSC), and Audrey Toves (Charter Fisher).

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendations and Meeting

Felix Reyes, Council staff, provided a review of the last Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meeting held on May 19, 2024, held in Honolulu, Hawai'i.

3. Feedback from the Fleet

AP members provided their fisher observations from January to June 2024.

A member reported that during the first quarter, there were large swells and heavy currents from the north. Fishing was great with wahoo, which arrived earlier with many 'rats' between 5 and 10 pounds in size caught. Some boats caught 40 to 60 lb wahoo. Between January and April, mahimahi was caught in larger quantities than in 2023, which may be due to cooler waters. The seasonal mañahak came in last week with many net fishers along the shores. The seasonal run was large. An AP member said there were a lot of fish to be caught and that they were close to shore. Large mahimahi are still caught. Another AP said during the last two weeks, the seasons experienced a significant change, with seas getting warmer and a greater abundance of flying fish.

4. Council Fisheries Issues

A. 2024 Annual Stock Assessment and Fisher Evaluation Report

Zach Yamada, Council staff, presented the 2023 Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Report - Guam Overview and Highlights.

In the bottomfish fishery, there was a decrease in total catch to 25,713 lbs and effort (-56-68%) but an increase in catch per unit effort. Creel surveys for Ecosystem Component Species showed assorted reef fish at 16,925 lbs and atulai (bigeye scad) at 14,143 lbs. The most harvested priority species was tataga (unicorn fish) at 4,093 lbs. For Guam's pelagic fishery, there was a 14% increase in total estimated catch to 718,342 lbs, mainly from skipjack and yellowfin tuna, but a decrease for mahimahi and wahoo. Military activities (47 Notices to Mariners and 144 warning

days) and adverse weather (119 high surf warning days and 108 small craft advisories) restricted fishing access. Typhoon Mawar in May 2023 damaged the Guam Fishermen's Coop and caused survey disruptions. Fisher observations noted fewer trips due to high fuel costs and shark depredation. National Coral Reef Monitoring Program surveys in the Marianas showed increased bottom coral coverage and slightly higher fish biomass. Significant progress was made in BMUS sample collection, with ongoing efforts for several species. Socioeconomic data indicated stable fuel prices, and protected species reviews showed no recent interactions with oceanic whitetip sharks or significant impacts on protected species. Oceanic and climate indicators showed slight changes, with a shift from La Niña to El Niño and increased sea surface temperatures, suggesting potential coral bleaching in 2023.

A member said that sea surface temperatures were an important environmental factor that fishers were concerned with. Members also discussed the close gap between catches of mahimahi and wahoo, which reflected the poundage caught for atulai (bigeye scad) at 14,143 was very close to 'assorted reef fish' at 16,925 lb in 2023. The AP noted Guam's fishing seasons have been year-round, and may be the reason for this narrow gap. Members noted that ~4000lbs of tataga (unicorn fish) was a lot.

B. Updates on the Guam BF Rebuilding Plan

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided an update on the Guam bottomfish rebuilding plan. At its 198th meeting, the Council received a presentation on the 2024 Guam bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) stock assessment update that found that the fishery was not overfished but not rebuilt. The Council endorsed the scientific and statistical committees' recommendation that 2024 was the best scientific information available and requested that the National Marine Fisheries Service provide a status review of the rebuilding plan and catch projections that would rebuild the Guam BMUS stock by 2031. In its letter to the Council on April 12 and 14, 2024, the Pacific Island Regional Office and the Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) said they would provide a review of the rebuilding plan and catch projections by June 2024, respectively.

There was no discussion.

5. NMFS 2024-2025 Marianas Small Boat Survey

Mia Iwane, PIFSC, provided an overview of the effort and outreach materials for the socioeconomic Marianas boat fishing survey that will be conducted in 2024 or early 2025. She provided an overview of previous surveys that were completed in 2011 and 2018.

6. Updates on the Regional Data Collection Improvement Efforts

Jenny Suter, West PacFIN/PIFSC, provided an update on the regional data collection improvement efforts in response to the joint advisory committee's request for NMFS PIFSC to provide updates on Catch-It Log-It (CILI). Data from PacFIN was used, and the CILI application is still being developed. Future work will see the process migrate to self-reporting and image recognition, which hopes to leverage the use of AI.

A member asked if there had been any developments with image recognition. Younger fishers are more adept at using technology and asked if this technology has been implemented yet. Suter said The Pacific Community (SPC) went through this AI application, but PIFSC did not have the

opportunity to discuss the progress of their Ikasavea app. They said they could leverage some of the successes for use later.

Sabater said there are areas in the continental US, such as the Southeast, that may be using AI. PIFSC is looking at ways to get videos of catch and train the software to ID the fish and also connect the size of the fish. Funding for this program is being sought.

7. Other Business

A member reported that the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative (CoOp) will reopen on Monday, June 10. An AP member said that in light of the CoOp reopening, the community developed a preference for imported fish at lower quality and lower prices than fresher local-caught fish. This activity should be restricted to allow the purchase of local fish first.

Another member said DAWR was issued the permit to deploy echosounders on each fish aggregating device. There are currently nine FADs online out of 14 permitted.

An AP member said the University of Guam Sea Grant was using social media to survey fishermen to determine whether size and bag limits should be established in relation to the Guam Fishery Management Plan.

An AP member said at the last informal meeting; the AP discussed inviting the Joint Region Marianas Environmental Liaison Mark Cruz to host the AP on a site visit to Camp Blaz shooting range to see what is being built. The member said he circulated a brochure on the range with the AP members received from Dan Guerrero, Regional Community Planning Liaison Officer for Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command.

Eric Cruz, PIFSC, reported military training exercise Valiant Shield will be held in Guam and along the Mariana Archipelago during June 7-18, and another exercise called Pacific Vanguard will be held during August 24-September 1.

8. Public Comment

Audrey Toves, Guam charter fisher, said there are many new boats being brought into Guam that take up slip or ramp space. They park at other fisher's slips making the marinas full. There had been several attempts to rent a mooring slip at the Agaña marina but had been unsuccessful. Between 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., the water temperature gets warmer and then drops down to 84F during the early morning hours or later in the evening.

Mia Iwane, PIFSC, announced that the Pacific Island Ocean Observation System has updated bathymetric maps for the Marianas.

Eric Cruz, PIFSC, announced they are hosting the second bottomfish constituent meeting tomorrow, Wednesday, June 5, 2024, at the Sinajaña Mayor's office. In addition, feedback will be shared on how information will be used on the upcoming stock assessment. Comments from breakout groups from the last constituents' meeting will also be shared. Bottomfish feedback meeting: 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. The second constituents meeting will be from 7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

There were no discussion and no recommendations

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m., ChST