



PACIFIC ISLANDS FISHERY NEWS

Newsletter of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council / Winter 2025

A New Era, A Bold Future:

Welcoming the White House Administration and Embracing America's Next Chapter



Fisherman at sunrise in Pago Pago Harbor, American Samoa. Photo: Ed Watamura.

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“The Golden Age of America begins right now,” proclaimed President Donald J. Trump at his inauguration back in January. As the United States embarks on this new chapter with a new, but familiar, White House administration, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council looks ahead with a sense of renewal, unity and purpose. The coming years will be marked by historic milestones that define who we are as a nation—not just in the halls of government, but in our economic resilience, global leadership and commitment to sustainable resource management.

During this next administration, Americans will celebrate the 250th anniversary of American independence, the 50th anniversary of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) and observe the 25th anniversary of the September 11 attacks. On the global stage, the 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2028 Summer Olympics will mark additional celebrations and responsibilities. These historic milestones come at a time when the Trump administration has emphasized reducing regulatory burdens, prioritizing American industries, fostering economic growth and ensuring the sustainability of our natural resources.

The Council hopes that this term also celebrates the fisheries that make America great, and the fishers and fishing communities that make the country proud and prosperous. Tuna fisheries are the greatest natural resource in the Pacific and economic commonality with Pacific Islands. The Pacific Islands are crucial for maintaining U.S. influence and countering competition with China. For the U.S. fishing industry—an industry integral to the economic and cultural fabric of the Western Pacific—this presents an opportunity to enhance fisheries management and strengthen our role in domestic and international markets.

The Council recognizes the potential of this administration to make significant strides in fisheries policy. Our region has unique opportunities that align with the administration's

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A New Era, A Bold Future:

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Longline vessels at Pier 38 in Honolulu. The Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery brought in close to \$100M in tuna revenue in 2023.

STORY ICON KEY

REGIONAL INTEREST



CONSERVATION



FISHERMEN



EDUCATORS



GOVERNMENT



Federal



Hawai'i



Guam/
CNMI



American
Samoa

*Dedicated to ecosystem-based
fisheries management in the
U.S. Pacific Islands.*



stated goals, and we stand ready to collaborate in ways that benefit both our fishermen and the nation's economy. Below, we highlight key areas where our expertise and leadership can help advance the administration's promises and priorities.

Expanding Economic Opportunities in Fisheries

One of the administration's strongest campaign themes was removing excessive regulations that hinder economic growth. In the fisheries sector, the Council sees this as an opportunity to reevaluate regulations affecting access to marine resources while ensuring sustainable practices. By streamlining regulatory processes, we can enhance the efficiency of fisheries management and improve economic opportunities for American fishermen. President Trump should resurrect the Seafood Trade Task Force from Executive Order 13921, *Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth*. This could serve as a mechanism to pull together experts to develop and modify policies to level the playing field for U.S. fisheries, including our Pacific Island fisheries.

Addressing National Marine Sanctuaries and Marine Monuments

The expansion of marine national monuments and sanctuaries in recent years has restricted access to historically important fishing grounds. While conservation is critical, these closures have had unintended consequences

for local fisheries, seafood supply chains and U.S. relevance in the Pacific tuna market—all of which are tantamount to any perceived conservation benefit. We encourage a review of these designations to ensure they balance conservation with the economic and food security needs of the nation. Adaptive management strategies, guided by the principles of the MSA, that allow for sustainable fishing within designated areas could provide a solution that meets both conservation and economic objectives. Based on past actions of the Trump administration, fishermen can now expect to have a seat at the table before decisions on monuments and sanctuaries get made. Previously, Trump met with fishermen and heard their concerns about losing fishing rights in the Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument. U.S. Pacific fishermen are anxious to get the same opportunity.

Strengthening International Agreements and Enforcement

The administration has emphasized strengthening American interests in international trade and agreements. Fisheries play a significant role in this arena, particularly in the Pacific, where international agreements regulate access to highly migratory species such as tuna. The U.S. fishing industry faces competition from foreign fleets that often operate under weaker regulatory frameworks. The Council has long advocated for American Samoa to be recognized as a Small Island Developing State



(SIDS) within international fisheries organizations, which would provide preferential fishing rights and financial assistance to support its tuna industry. We also support stronger enforcement of fair trade practices and ensuring that U.S. fishermen are not at a competitive disadvantage due to inconsistent international regulations. Agency decisions and negotiations need to fall in line with

current law under the Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act, which was intended to protect U.S. fishermen from any disadvantages. This also follows the new administration’s mantra of putting “America First.”

Supporting Immigration Reform for the Fishing Workforce

A critical challenge for the Western Pacific fishing industry is the availability of a skilled workforce. Many U.S.-flagged fishing vessels in our region rely on foreign crew members due to the lack of domestic labor willing to take on these demanding jobs. The administration could help by backing common-sense immigration reforms that ensure a stable and legal workforce while maintaining the integrity of U.S. labor laws. This also includes agencies allowing foreign crew members to transit freely from the port and airport in Honolulu, much like foreign laborers can transit to and from the United States on the continental U.S.

Enhancing Fisheries Data Collection

Reliable data is the cornerstone of effective fisheries management. The

administration’s focus on efficiency and innovation presents an opportunity to modernize fisheries data collection. Investments in electronic monitoring, real-time data reporting and advanced stock assessment technologies can lead to better-informed management decisions, reduced regulatory burdens and increased transparency in fisheries operations.

A New Path Forward for Fisheries

The new administration presents a pivotal moment for U.S. fisheries. The path forward can lead to a thriving industry supported by science-based management, economic opportunity and strategic regulatory reform. The Council is eager to work with the administration to ensure that its vision for economic growth, deregulation and resource sustainability is realized in a way that benefits fishermen, coastal communities and the nation as a whole. This new administration really does present a fork in the road for fisheries. 🐟



Fiji hosted the 21st Annual Meeting of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) November-December 2024. WCPFC is an international body responsible for the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks, such as tuna and billfish, ensuring sustainable fisheries through science-based regulations and international cooperation. Source: www.oceanequityresearch.org.

201st Council Meeting Highlights

December 16-17, 2024



The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council ended its 201st meeting on a hopeful note, inspired by the upcoming change in the Federal administration. The Council found that the incoming administration provides a chance to make U.S. fisheries in the Pacific great again.

After finally achieving an increase in longline bigeye tuna quotas last year, in 2024, U.S. fisheries in the Pacific were once again ignored and suffered a loss in striped marlin quota at the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). The decision by the WCPFC requires the United States to set a catch limit of 228.4 metric tons annually from 2025 to 2027, a decrease of 50% from the previous limit.

Kitty Simonds, executive director of the Council, said that she was “disappointed at the uneven playing field,” noting that the United States is the only fleet or country taking a reduction. She suggested that the impact of the rule will decrease the value of marlin and increase waste in the fishery.

The Ensuring Access to Pacific Fisheries Act (Public Law 14-327), states that “The Secretary, in consultation with the Secretary of State, in the course of negotiations, shall seek— (1) to minimize any disadvantage to United States fishermen in relation to other members of the Commission.” Archie Soliai, Council vice chair, said that the U.S. government can and must do better to advocate for the best interests of its territories. “Our future, our livelihoods and the economic stability of our communities depend on it.”

Nate Ilaoa, American Samoa businessman, reminded the Council that “American Samoa has a signed contract with the U.S. in the form of the Deeds of Cession,” referencing



(l-r) Council Chair Will Sword and Vice Chair Archie Soliai, both from American Samoa, and CNMI Council member Sylvan Igisomar at a recent meeting.

the document from April 17, 1900, that the United States signed with the *Matai* (chiefs) agreeing to protect and look after the interest of American Samoa.

Training for the Longline Fleet

To improve U.S. fisheries, at this meeting, the Council also deliberated on implementation approaches for establishing protected species handling training requirements for Hawai‘i and American Samoa longline fisheries. The main goals are to reduce post-release mortality by addressing protected species handling and release through specific training to crew members that can assist during hauling operations. The recommendation specified a one- to two-year certification period for crew, maintaining the annual workshop certification for vessel owners and operators, and allowing flexibility for crew certifications to be met through owner/operator workshops.

“Considering high turnover, specifically for American Samoa, it is an ongoing challenge,” remarked American Samoa Council member Archie Soliai. He suggested that “it makes [more] sense to have training for everyone together.”

Also, the Council advanced plans to transition electronic monitoring (EM) from a research initiative to an operational management tool. Recognizing the challenges posed by declining human observer coverage (due to overbudget costs), the Council outlined a phased approach to EM implementation. This approach includes authorizing EM systems to monitor protected species interactions over three years as an optional program and establishing regional standards and a robust

data review process.

“While the U.S. fisheries have suffered setbacks in recent years,” said Council Chairman Will Sword, “we hope that these measures will continue the Council’s track record of encouraging sustainable fishing and perpetuating Pacific Island traditions and culture.”

Additional Council Actions

Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan: The Council recommended increasing the annual catch limit to 34,500 pounds, with a post-season accountability measure to rebuild stocks by 2031. This measure means if the average catch over the most recent three years exceeds the limit, the following year’s limit will be reduced by the overage to prevent overfishing.



Council members from Guam, (l-r) Chelsea Muña, Frank Perez and Vice Chair Judith Guthertz, participate virtually in the December meeting from the Guam Council office.

American Samoa Bottomfish Management: The Council recommended removing the Tier 6 acceptable biological catch control rule from the current revision of the American Samoa bottomfish management unit species action. Instead, the Council will develop amendments to all its Fishery Ecosystem Plans to incorporate the Tier 6 approach, ensuring this flexible, data-limited management tool can be applied consistently across all fisheries under its jurisdiction.

North Pacific Striped Marlin: Initial steps were taken to set a catch limit of 228.4 metric tons annually from 2025 to 2027, aligning with international conservation measures. The new measure cuts in half a guaranteed U.S. catch from the previous measure of 457 mt. 🐟

Integrating Traditional Fishermen's Knowledge into Annual Fishery Reports



For generations, fishing has played a central role in shaping Pacific Island communities' social, cultural and economic fabric. However, Western science and management have not always captured or considered fishermen's traditional knowledge. In 2021, two Hawai'i fishermen, Roy Morioka and Clay Tam, led the charge to capture fishers' knowledge to record and track notable observations and factors that could explain changes in the fisheries. With Uncle Roy's departure from Hawai'i in 2024, the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group (PIFG) took the initiative to continue and perpetuate this tradition.

In January 2025, PIFG hosted three meetings for fishers throughout the Western Pacific Region to capture their 2024 on-the-water observations for species managed in the Council's jurisdiction. The goal was to incorporate empirical and traditional knowledge from active fishermen into the Council's Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) Reports. Observations included changes to the physical environment (e.g., weather, sea conditions, water temperature), markets, fishery stocks (e.g., species abundance, sizes, predation), unusual events and species cycles (i.e., juvenile recruitment). Fishermen observations also captured the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions on the fishing market, such as fishers adjusting to the decline of tourism by peddling fish on the roadside.

Main Takeaways

American Samoa fishers reported 2024 was a relatively warm year, with tunas moving deeper and an increase in seaweed that was not commonly observed in the past. Fishers observed King Tides, which can lead to increased coral bleaching and negatively impact the shoreline. Fishers also reported that *palolo* (coral reproductive cells), a main staple and delicacy in Samoa, had a slow run last year.

Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) fishers observed that there were slow and spotty runs of *tiao* and *mañahak* (baitfish) in 2024. Although the recruitment was low, fishers said there were signals that 2025 may be a good year for these species. With the lasting impacts of Typhoon Mawar in 2023, the market structure in Guam shifted, leading fishers to sell their fish directly on social media. Although the traditional market pathway exists, fishers worry about oversupplying the market, as there are no fishmongers to help sell their catch. For CNMI, fishers reported that increased earthquakes in the northern islands have impacted fish aggregations. There has been an increased military presence across the Mariana Islands, which has led to increased traffic congestion at the harbors. Local fishers have had to compete for limited space and time to launch their boats and reach their spots in a timely manner.

Key findings from Hawai'i fishermen highlighted fish recruitment, infrastructure challenges and the presence of larger

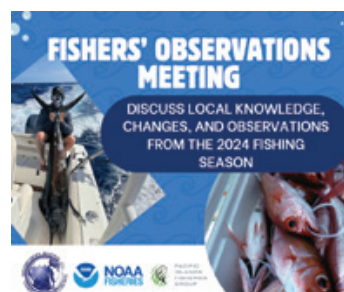
bottomfish. Small-boat fishers reported a strong recruitment of larger *tombo* (albacore tuna) and noted positive effects on the Kona crab fishery following the lift on the ban of harvesting female crabs.

Offshore fishing remained productive, with strong marlin and 'ahi (yellowfin tuna) runs, particularly around Kaua'i and Kona. As expected during the holiday season, an influx of bottomfish entered the market. Still, fishers reported catching larger 'ōpakapaka and *onaga*, a trend that aligns with observations from 2021 and 2022. On the neighboring islands, commercial fishers continue to struggle due to market conditions, as many restaurants opt to serve imported fish over fresh, locally caught seafood.

Common observations across all areas included a high catch of small marlin, increased shark depredation, shifting spawning seasons and higher water temperatures. Fishers noted that the expected runs of different species occurred outside their usual seasons, emphasizing environmental changes.

The 2024 findings are being compiled for the Archipelagic and Pelagic Plan Teams, which convene each spring to review the Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs) through the development of the Annual SAFE Reports. The Council produces Annual SAFE Reports for each FEP, including four archipelagic reports—covering Hawai'i, American Samoa, the Mariana Islands and the Pacific Remote Island Areas—and one pelagic report for fisheries operating in the Western Pacific Region. These reports summarize the best available scientific information on the past, present and future conditions of fish stocks, marine ecosystems and federally managed fisheries.

Effective ecosystem-based fisheries management depends on a comprehensive understanding of social and scientific factors, biological and trophic relationships, ecosystem indicators and models, and the ecological impacts of non-fishing activities on the marine environment. Integrating fishermen's observations into management helps ensure sustainable fisheries and preserve traditional knowledge. As conditions change, collaboration among fishers, scientists and policymakers will be key to keeping Pacific Island fisheries thriving for future generations. 🐟



Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, with support from the Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service, conducted the 4th Annual Fishers' Observations Meetings across American Samoa, the Mariana Islands and Hawai'i. Led by fishermen, the meetings spoke to the seasonal changes, trends and observations witnessed on the water. Photos: (l) George Mayette with a 120-pound striped marlin, West O'ahu; (r) PIFG bottomfish samples.

Fishing Community, Federal and State Partnerships Essential to Improve Hawai'i Uku Catch Estimate



Ed Watamura of the Waialua Boat Club proudly displays two uku he caught while bottomfishing from his boat. Photo: Ed Watamura.

estimates based on the State of Hawai'i's Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS) and the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). The high year-to-year variability and sampling of all residents with a Hawai'i zip code raise doubts among fishers about the accuracy of these estimates.

To address these concerns, the Science Center developed a pilot project in partnership with the Hawai'i Fishermen's Alliance for Conservation and Tradition, Pacific Islands Fisheries Group, State of Hawai'i, NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office and the Council. The project aims to refine data collection by utilizing the State's Division of Boating and Ocean Recreation's (DOBOR) vessel registry and Division of Aquatic Resource's bottomfish registry.

This approach increases the likelihood of collecting catch and effort data from fishers who caught uku from their boats, rather than relying on broad residential surveys. Randomly selected vessel owners and fishers from these registries will receive a questionnaire asking about the number of trips taken in the previous month, total uku caught (by number and weight), and shark depredation—an issue affecting catch per unit effort. The prepaid return cards make participation easy.

Fishers have played a key role in this effort—helping design the survey, offering insights to boost participation and testing the questionnaire for clarity. Their continued engagement and help to spread the word are critical to the project's success.

We urge the fishing community to support this important initiative. Enhancing uku fishery data will strengthen federal, state and fishing community partnerships in line with the Council's motto to "Fish Forever." 🐟

For a poster depicting the uku lifecycle and habitat essential for its developmental stages, visit <https://tinyurl.com/UkuLifeCycle>.

From the shoreline to deep waters, uku (*Aprion virescens*, grey snapper or green jobfish) is a unique fishery in the main Hawaiian Islands, harvested by shorecasters, spearfishers, and bottomfishers and trollers from boats, jet skis or kayaks. The 2024 NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center stock assessment (<https://tinyurl.com/2024UkuAssessment>) found the fishery is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. At its March 2025 meeting, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will consider annual catch limits and accountability measures, factoring in the current data collection system for both commercial and noncommercial catches.

While commercial fishers are required to report their catch per trip, the fishing community and managers have questioned the reliability of noncommercial catch



Newly Elected American Samoa Governor Pula Prioritizes Economic Growth



Pula'ali'i Nikolao "Nik" Iuli Tuiteleleapaga Pula was elected governor of American Samoa Nov. 19, 2024. A central aspect of Pula's "HOPE to Prosperity" economic plan (www.hope2024.com/platform) is strengthening American Samoa's fisheries sector, recognizing its vital role in driving economic growth. The plan focuses on supporting both small-scale and commercial fishing operations, enhancing food security and promoting local seafood products. It also includes assessing the viability of traditional industries like tuna canning, while exploring new opportunities in marine-based industries and seabed resource extraction.

Pula's economic vision also emphasizes investments in infrastructure to modernize air and seaport facilities and improve logistical support for seafood exports. His plan includes



Governor Pula

streamlining regulations to attract private-sector investment in entrepreneurship, small businesses, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing and natural resources. Pula also seeks to position American Samoa as a duty-free trade center and a unique cultural and ecotourism destination, leveraging the territory's natural resources while ensuring environmental sustainability.

The Pula administration is committed to "Honest Governance" and prioritizing key fisheries-related issues such as exceptional

education, expanding economic growth, environmental stewardship, and cultural and community stewardship. By strengthening American Samoa's position in the global seafood market, supporting local fishers and integrating the territory more closely with regional trade networks, Pula's leadership is expected to play a key role in shaping the future of the island's fisheries sector.

Pula brings extensive experience to his new role, having served as director of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs (DOI), where he was a strong advocate for economic development and regional partnerships in the Pacific. Known for his bipartisan approach, Pula has earned credibility among both Republicans and Democrats and was the first Pacific Islander of Samoan ancestry to serve as the DOI's director of Insular Affairs.

Locally, Pula's government experience includes working at the American Samoa Fono Legislature's Reference Bureau. His running mate, Pulu Ae Ae Jr., served as the *pulenu'u* (mayor) of Pago Pago for five years and as a *faipule* (House of Representatives member) representing Pago Pago for 10 years.

Pula is the youngest of twelve children and comes from the villages of Leone, Utulei, Fagatogo and Pago Pago. His father was a pioneer in the public school system in American Samoa, while his mother was a woman of faith who valued hard work and honesty. Pula is married to Dr. Lois Phillips-Pula, a retired professor from Georgetown University School of Nursing. 🐟

Photo: Gubernatorial Candidacy Committee for Pula and Pulu 2024.

CNMI Fishing Clubs Reel in New Opportunities with Sustainable Fisheries Funds

In an effort to revitalize local fishing communities, CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) Secretary Sylvan Igisomar has invited fishing clubs and associations to submit proposals for grant funding to support transformative projects. This initiative provides an opportunity for these organizations to secure funding that could significantly enhance local waterways, fisheries, and recreational fishing activities.

On Jan. 27, 2025, Secretary Igisomar met with DLNR staff, members of the Talaya Club, Tasi to Table, the I Sanhalom Laguna Anglers Association and Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council staff to discuss the initiative. He provided background information on how the funds were obtained, outlined the parameters for accessing them and encouraged discussions on potential project proposals.

"This is a chance for DLNR to work directly with our fishing communities," said Secretary Igisomar. "It's been quite some time since the Sustainable Fisheries Fund has offered this type of support." He looks forward to receiving innovative proposals that can be showcased to CNMI Governor Arnold Palacios.

This initiative is more than just a funding opportunity, it is an investment in CNMI's fishing communities and the future of its shared marine resources. 🐟

Background photo: Monies from the SFF were used to pave the boat trailer parking lot in 2017 at the Garapan Fishing Base in Saipan, CNMI.



Making Waves:

A Great Start to the Year for Capacity Building in CNMI



Workshops for High School Students

As the year casts its line into 2025, Tasi to Table (TTT, www.tasitotable.com) has been reeling in workshops of success! Founded in 2020 in part by the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) Council member Gene Weaver, the nonprofit engages youth through teaching fishing methodologies, boating safety, environmental stewardship and mental health awareness. Recently, TTT hosted two hands-on workshops for high school students, equipping them with valuable skills and insights that strengthen the next generation of CNMI leaders.



Jesse Chong from the Talaya Club shows workshop participants techniques to best throw a talaya. Photo: TTT.

Jan. 11, 2025, Kili Beach in Saipan: 25 students participated in a workshop focused on *talaya* (cast net) fishing and spearfishing. *Talaya*, a traditional fishing method passed down for generations in the Mariana Islands, remains an integral part of the indigenous cultural heritage. Jesse Chong from the Talaya Club demonstrated how to prepare and cast the net for maximum coverage, guiding students through spotting fish, reading tidal patterns and understanding seasonal variations. Participants then practiced both on land and in the water.

Morito Asai, owner of a local spearfishing hub, led the spearfishing segment, emphasizing safety and proper techniques. He highlighted the importance of using a buoy with a dive flag for visibility, staying close to a partner using the “one up, one down” system, and avoiding the misconception that you always “know your body” when diving. Understanding personal limits, factoring in sea conditions and allowing sufficient surface recovery time—at least twice the duration spent underwater—are critical for safety. Asai also demonstrated proper speargun use, stressing key factors to consider.

Jan. 18, 2025, Smiling Cove Marina in Saipan: TTT members toured the CNMI Department of Public Safety (DPS) Marine Patrol unit’s warehouse and vessels, learning about their functions and key safety protocols. Officers emphasized pre-departure checks, including weather conditions, vessel readiness, and essential safety equipment, as well as emergency preparedness and communication plans. While on the water, students learned to use lifejackets, stay alert, respect marine laws and navigate safely.

In addition to practical training, officers shared their career paths, detailing how they advanced through the ranks, their roles and what to expect on duty. They provided insights into different avenues for joining the Marine Patrol unit, inspiring several students to consider it as a future career.

TTT provides opportunities for the leaders of tomorrow to learn from the leaders of today.



TTT high school students learn about different parts of DPS’s Marine Patrol unit vessels. Photo: TTT.



All-Women’s Bottomfish Workshop

Lino and Marcy Tenorio of Lino S. Tenorio & Associates hosted an all-women’s bottomfishing workshop Jan. 25, 2025, providing the 18 participants with in-depth knowledge and hands-on training. Attendees learned the fundamentals of bottomfishing, essential safety practices, and techniques for preparing hooks and sinkers. The workshop also encouraged women to sell their catch, offering an opportunity to earn extra income while supporting local island fisheries. 🐟

Photo: Lino Tenorio.



Audrey Toves, One Love GUD Vibes Fishing Charters, shares her on-the-water experience with 8th grade students at Piti's Jose Rios Middle School.



Council's Speakers Bureau Connects Students to Fishing Knowledge

"If you give a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day, but if you teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime."

This timeless proverb reflects the goal of the Council's Speakers Bureau—connecting students, educators and community groups with experts who share knowledge on sustainable fishing, marine ecosystems and cultural traditions that support Pacific fisheries for generations to come. The region-wide program brings together Council staff, Advisory Panel members, fishing industry experts, and local and federal government representatives from Hawai'i, Guam, the CNMI and American Samoa. These experts are available to engage with classrooms and community groups, both in-person and virtually, to share their knowledge.

Jose Rios Middle School teacher Allison Jensen embraced this opportunity, inviting members of the Guam Speakers Bureau to discuss the role of moon phases and tide charts in local fishing practices. On Jan. 9, 2025, more than 150 eighth-grade students, teachers, aides and Vice Principal John Castro attended presentations by Audrey Toves, a Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee member and the region's only female boat captain, along with her son Izzik Cabrera; Department of

Agriculture and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) Biologist Brent Tibbatts; and the Council's Guam Island Coordinator Felix Reyes.

Toves captivated students by showcasing the fishing gear she uses on her charter trips. Toves shared how, as a charter captain, she faces pressure to ensure her customers have a successful outing. She explained how she uses lunar cycles, tide charts and ocean currents to determine the best fishing times. When trolling slows down, she adapts by switching to deep-bottom fishing, shallow-water techniques, or jigging closer to shore. Her interactive session highlighted the science behind successful fishing, leaving students with a deeper appreciation of the connection between nature and fishing techniques.

Tibbatts outlined the academic requirements for careers at DAWR and highlighted the University of Guam's Marine Lab as a strong pathway for aspiring marine scientists. He explained how DAWR collects and shares fisheries data with local, regional and national entities. He pointed out Masso Reservoir—just across from the school—as a valuable fishing and recreation spot for students and their families. He also described how fishermen use environmental cues



(l-r) Izzik Cabrera, Allison Jensen, Audrey Toves, Brent Tibbatts, Felix Reyes and Vice Principal John Castro at Jose Rios Middle School on Jan. 9, 2025.

to determine the proper gear to catch seasonal fish like *ti'ao* (juvenile goatfish), *i'e* (juvenile jack) and *mañahak* (juvenile rabbitfish), as well as the best times for wahoo, tuna and mahimahi runs.

Each attendee received the Council's 2025 lunar calendar for the Mariana Islands, which provides moon cycles and tide charts to aid in fishing. This event, part of the Council's collaboration with the Department of Education's Sylvia Calvo, aims to integrate fisheries education into classrooms and deepen students' understanding of Guam's marine resources.

For more information on the Speakers Bureau or to schedule a talk, visit www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/speakers-bureau. 🐟

Council Family Updates

At the 201st Council meeting, the Council:

Appointed the following members to the Scientific and Statistical Committee:

- **Courtney Carothers**, University of Alaska Fairbanks
- **Cathy Dichmont**, Cathy Dichmont Consulting
- **Alister Hunt**, Finology
- **Jim Roberts**, Anemone Consulting
- **Justin Suca**, University of Hawai'i
- **Robin Waples**, University of Washington

Appointed the following members to the Archipelagic Plan Team:

- **Eric Cruz**, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC)
- **Bradley Gough**, NMFS PIFSC
- **Rhane Malae**, NMFS PIFSC
- **Francisco Villagomez**, NMFS PIFSC

Appointed **Ashley Tomita**, NMFS PIFSC, and **Jenny Stahl**, NMFS PIFSC, to the Pelagic Plan Team

Appointed **Edwin Ebisui III** to the Hawai'i Advisory Panel

NMFS is seeking nominations for the Permanent Advisory Committee (PAC) that advises U.S. Commissioners on fisheries management decisions under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission. Nominations are due by March 24, 2025. For more info, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/NominationsPAC>.

New Publication

NMFS published the final U.S. Pacific Marine Mammal Stock Assessments report in December 2024. Reports for the Pacific, Alaska and Atlantic/Gulf of Mexico are prepared annually, as directed by the Marine Mammal Protection Act. www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-stock-assessment-reports

Recognitions



The University of Guam (UOG) honored **Judith Guthertz** (front row, second from right) for her many years of dedicated service by naming her vice president emerita in the Society of Emeritus Professors & Retired Scholars. At a special ceremony on Jan. 28, 2025, UOG President Anita Borja Enriquez (front row, second from left) presented Council member Judi with a certificate of recognition, honoring her lifelong commitment to supporting student success. Source: UOG.

CNMI Advisory Panel member **Cecilio Raiukiulipiy** (front row with certificate) received a resolution from the Rota Legislative Delegation Dec. 6, 2024, to acknowledge his steadfast efforts for the betterment of the local community. Cecilio, along with Lorraine Manglona, have provided critical cargo transportation services to the Rota community since 2006.



CNMI Advisory Panel member **Lino Tenorio** (front row with certificate) received a House of Representatives resolution from the Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature Nov. 22, 2024. The resolution recognized and commended Lino for his lifelong dedication to sharing his knowledge and experiences in bottomfishing with the CNMI and Guam communities. 🐟



Photos (middle and left): Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

Congressional Corner



The 119th U.S. Congress started Jan. 3, 2025, with nine new senators and 63 new representatives, plus two new territorial representatives, including Kimberlyn King-Hinds from the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. While Congress has had many other pressing issues to address, the world of fisheries is eager to join the full plate of urgent matters facing the House and Senate.

The Supporting the Health of the Aquatic systems through Research Knowledge and Enhanced Dialogue (SHARKED) Act of 2025 (H.R. 207) was reintroduced by Rep. Wittman (R-VA) on the first day, which subsequently passed the House 18 days later and is now with the Senate. This bill directs the Department of Commerce to establish a task force to assess and address shark depredation, a growing challenge in the Western Pacific. The task force will develop a comprehensive report outlining research priorities, funding opportunities, and recommended management strategies to mitigate the impact of shark depredation on fisheries and marine ecosystems.

It also appears that the Endangered Species Act (ESA) will be a focus in this Congress. H.R. 180 was introduced by Rep. McClintock (R-CA) that would require the government to publish the basis for ESA determinations for the sake of transparency. Rep. Biggs (R-AZ) has introduced several proposed amendments to the ESA, including:

- H.R. 106: Aims to enhance precision in the listing, delisting, and downlisting of endangered species.
- H.R. 65: Seeks to exempt defense-related operations from ESA regulations.
- H.R. 102: Proposes to prohibit the listing of species that are

not native to the United States as endangered or threatened.

A subcommittee of the House Natural Resources Committee held its first oversight hearing on ESA and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) Feb. 26, 2025. The hearing highlighted the impacts of permitting and consultation processes under these statutes on economic activities including fishing, and the challenges of delisting species even after recovery goals have been reached. These laws have influenced fisheries in the Western Pacific, as their implementation has led to regulatory changes for fisheries managed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA). Aligning regulatory development through the existing MSA Section 302 process would ensure greater consistency and transparency in fisheries management while considering potential impacts on fishing communities.

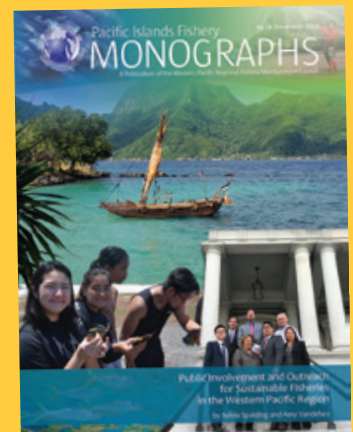
The Senate is considering S. 283, the Illegal Red Snapper and Tuna Enforcement Act, a bipartisan bill introduced by Senators Schatz (D-HI) and Cruz (R-TX). This legislation aims to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing by establishing standards for determining the country of origin of seafood. The bill would help level the playing area for U.S. tuna fishing in the Western Pacific by ensuring that frozen (and/or chemically treated) fish from foreign sources are not mistaken for, disguised as, commingled or confused with fresh, high-quality local tuna intended for sale to consumers.

This is just the beginning of the 119th Congress, and more bills are expected to be introduced and passed in the coming years. With so much on the agenda, it is essential to keep fisheries a priority and ensure that U.S. fisheries remain at the forefront. For more on what bills are of interest to fisheries in the Western Pacific, visit www.wpcouncil.org/legislative-congressional. 🐟

New Outreach Resources

The Council released the latest installment in its *Pacific Islands Fishery Monographs* series in December 2024—*Public Involvement and Outreach for Sustainable Fisheries in the Western Pacific Region*. Co-authored by former Communications Director **Sylvia Spalding** and current Education and Outreach Coordinator **Amy Vandehey**, this monograph provides an overview of the Council's implementation of its *Public Involvement and Outreach Plan* over the past quarter-century, with representative examples. It examines the political, technological and environmental factors that shaped outreach efforts, summarizes findings from surveys and focus groups assessing their effectiveness, and offers insights for future engagement.

Find it online in our Education Library: www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/education-library.



2025 Council Calendar

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

MARCH

11-13

155th Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting

13

Hawai'i Advisory Panel (AP) meeting

18

American Samoa AP meeting

19

Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee (NCFAC) meeting

24

Program Planning Standing Committee (SC) meeting

24

Pelagic & Intern'l SC meeting

24

Executive & Budget SC meeting

25-27

202nd Council meeting, Honolulu

APRIL

4-10

Marine Resources Education Program workshop, Honolulu*

14-17

2025 International Pacific Marine Educator Network meeting, Kaoshiung, Taiwan*

24-May 2

Pacific Community (SPC) 17th Heads of Fisheries meeting, Tasmania, Australia*

MAY

5-9

Joint Plan Team meeting (tent)

13-15

Council Coordination Committee meeting, New Bedford, NE*

19-22

75th Tuna Conference, Los Angeles, CA*

26-27

Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) 3rd Meeting of the Permanent Working Group on Ecosystem and Bycatch*

29

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands AP meeting (tent)

29

NCFAC meeting (tent)

30

Hawai'i AP meeting (tent)

30

Guam AP meeting (tent)

30-31

IATTC 5th Workshop on Management Strategy Evaluation for Tropical Tunas*

JUNE

2-6

IATTC 16th Meeting of the Science Advisory Committee, La Jolla, CA*

2-6

Capitol Hill Ocean Week*

4-6

156th SSC meeting (tent)

12

Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee meeting (tent)

13

American Samoa Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee meeting (tent)

14

American Samoa AP meeting (tent)

17-19

203rd Council meeting (tent)

Upcoming Events

The 155th Scientific & Statistical Committee (SSC) meeting will be held March 11-13, 2025, at the Courtyard King Kamehameha's Kona Beach Hotel, 75-5660 Palani Rd, Kailua-Kona, 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/155SSCMtg>.


Major agenda items include: Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) uku 2026-2029 acceptable biological catch (ABC) setting (action item); MHI deepwater shrimp and precious corals 2025-2028 ABC review (action item); Longline electronic monitoring (EM) status update; SSC special projects discussion; and 2023 false killer whale Stock Assessment Report update.


The 202nd meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council will be held March 25-27, 2025, at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, Coral Ballroom, 2005 Kalia Rd, 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/202CouncilMtg>.

Major agenda items include: U.S. catch limits for North Pacific striped marlin (final action); American Samoa bottomfish management unit species revision (final action); MHI uku 2026-2029 annual catch limit (ACL) specification (initial action); MHI deepwater shrimp and precious corals 2025-2028 ACL specification (final action); Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries crew training status report; EM program updates for Western Pacific fisheries; Inclusion of a Tier 6 ABC control rule in the Fishery Ecosystem Plans (final action); and Longline and small-boat scenario planning, regulatory review and community consultation project reports.

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

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 youtube.com/wpcouncil

Summary of Action Items at the March 2025 Council Meeting

The Council will consider and may take action on the issues summarized below. A more detailed summary can be found at: <https://tinyurl.com/202CouncilMtgActions>.

1. ACL Specifications for MHI Uku (2026-2029) – Initial Action

The Council will consider options for setting annual catch limits (ACLs) and accountability measures (AMs) for uku in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI). Given challenges in monitoring in-season catches, alternatives to revising ACLs based on the latest stock assessment include maintaining the status quo AMs or shifting to a post-season AM to prevent overfishing.

2. ACL Specifications for MHI Deep-water Shrimp & Precious Corals (2025-2028) – Final Action

With low participation in these fisheries and no new stock assessments, the Council will decide whether to maintain the current ACLs or discontinue setting ACLs altogether. The decision will impact federal permit requirements and sustainable management strategies.

3. American Samoa BMUS Revision – Final Action

The Council will finalize changes to the bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) list to better reflect the fishery. Options include maintaining the current list, reclassifying some species as ecosystem components or reducing the list to focus on species with sufficient stock assessment data.

4. Tier 6 Acceptable Biological Catch Control Rule – Final Action

To improve management of data-limited fisheries, the Council will decide whether to implement a rate-based approach for setting ACLs. This approach, which relies on fish size rather than total catch, could provide an alternative for fisheries where biomass estimates are unavailable.

5. US Catch Limits for North Pacific Striped Marlin – Final Action

The Council will set new catch limits for North Pacific striped marlin and consider alignment with international conservation measures. Options range from maintaining no limits, setting limits consistent with past and present international measures or prohibiting retention altogether.

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