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COUNCIL

Report of the Marianas Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan CNMI Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee Meeting

Monday, January 24, 2011

World Resort Hotel

9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Benigno Sablan called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

2. Status of 2010 REAC Recommendations

Ogumoro presented the status of the 2010 REAC recommendations.

3. Coastal Marine Spatial Planning Initiative

A. Regional Ocean Partnership

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, reported on the Coastal Marine Spatial Planning initiative and Regional Ocean Partnerships. He gave a brief history of the initiative and an example of a successful spatial planning exercise.

B. Monument Activities and Status

Marianne Teregeyo reported on the activities and status of the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. She noted that the advisory committee selections were made and that funding was received through their Federal representative to Congress for the development of a visitor's center. Currently, the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources is contracting someone to do the architectural and engineering background work to determine the viability of using the old Japanese lighthouse as a visitor's center. There is currently no timeline on the establishment of the center, as it is dependent upon the background work and no funding has been committed for the actual construction of the center.

C. Military build-up in the Marianas and fishing community issues

The Joint Guam Program Office was invited to participate but they declined.

D. Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion regarding CMSP

Dr. Dela Cruz asked if funding sources were available for this program? He also asked if the program was voluntary or mandatory? DeMello replied that there was an opportunity for funding to help create these regional ocean partnerships, but no direct funding as of right now. He said that if funding does become available, the information will be passed on to the REAC members. DeMello also said that the development of marine spatial plans are up to the agencies involved.

Lino Olopai commented that there are existing initiatives in CNMI that have been in place for parasailing and jetskis. He commented that MSP is an old issue and that we should be looking at impacts of recreational activities on traditional fishing.

Cecilio Raiukiulipiy commented that traditional canoes cannot change their route, therefore some of the activities in CMSP that are accounted for will be greatly impacted.

Mayor Donald Flores of Saipan commented that he would like to see the revegetation of reefs after it is damaged as part of CMSP.

The members had a full discussion on the composition of the National Ocean Council and the CNMI's involvement in this body. The REAC wanted additional information and made a **recommendation to invite Laura Hamilton, NOAA Regional Coordinator, to provide a presentation to the CNMI on Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning.**

Discussion regarding Military Buildup

With no formal presentation on the military buildup, Richard Seman suggested the CNMI continue to plan for the military's use of Farallon De Mendinilla and the REAC **recommended a more formal discussion with the military on future plans for FDM.**

Discussion regarding monument activities and status

Olopai asked if the Governor's appointees were involved with the visitor's center? Teregeyo said no, but they would welcome their input.

Representative Palacios commented that they will try to involve as many people in the community in the monument process.

John Gourley asked if the Japanese Lighthouse was a temporary visitor center? Teregeyo responded that the lighthouse is the selected site.

Representative Tebuteb commented that the public market originally proposed for construction at Fishing Base in Garapan is a good place for the visitor's center and other places should be considered, not just the lighthouse.

After much discussion on the merits of the lighthouse as the visitor's center, the REAC discussed the need for funding of the center. The REAC **recommended the Council inquire with the Federal government on the status of the visitor's center and that it assist CNMI with finding funding for the center.**

4. Ecosystem Monitoring and Community Issues

A. CNMI Bio-Sampling Program

Gourley presented the REAC with his project to collect life history information from fish in the CNMI. He noted that this is a 14 month project contracted by NMFS PIFSC to collect length and weight information as well as to collect biological samples for analysis on age and growth.

B. Saipan Lagoon Net Fishing Data Analysis

Michael Tenorio, CNMI DFW, presented an analysis of data on fish populations collected before and after the prohibitions on nets in the CNMI. He said that the net regulations were put in place to help reef fish species in Saipan lagoon recover from low numbers. At the initiation of the net ban, the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife did a survey of the lagoon using belt-transect and

stationary counts to assess the numbers of fishes in the area. Three years later, they repeated these surveys and found that the numbers of fish have increased, supporting the need for the net ban. However, the increase in the numbers of fish seen, did not warrant the removal of the net ban and that the DFW recommended to continue the net ban and to continue the surveys as funding allows.

C. Annual Catch Limit Scoping Meetings

Richard Seamn presented the results of multiple scoping meetings held in the CNMI and Guam on Annual Catch Limits and Catch Shares. He reviewed the purpose of ACLs and noted that he was contracted to bring it to the attention of the community. He did this by conducting a total of 17 meetings (including 7 on Saipan, 2 on Rota and 2 on Tinian) that included over 140 participants. In the CNMI he received many comments and recommendations on these issues which all basically agreed that the people are not ready for ACLs or catch shares and that these should be community-based management decisions.

D. Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion regarding the CNMI bio-sampling project

Arnold Palacios commented that the vendors participating in the project use resources from night fishing activities.

Gourley explained that they are testing out the sampling methods with the biggest fish vendors in Saipan and that fish do come from the other islands as well. He said the plan is to expand these tested methods to the other vendors as sampling resources are trained and available.

The REAC discussed the merits of this program and the need to continue the bio-sampling effort and **recommended the Council expand biosampling project to include fish from all of CNMI and provide the resources to do so.**

Discussion regarding the Net Fishing Analysis

Ike Demapan asked what is the purpose of project? What will be the impact of this study? Is this to produce more regulations? Tenorio responded that the project was looking at the effectiveness of the regulations put into place back in 2003. The study showed that restricting net fishing did help increase fish populations, and with further study, could someday allow some type of net fishing again in Saipan lagoon.

Sablan asked Tenorio if there was overfishing in the lagoon or if the species were overfished? Tenorio said there is no overfishing occurring and that it is not overfished.

Mayor Flores asked what the effects of pollution are in the lagoon and if that could have an affect? Tenorio said they haven't studied that in this analysis, but there have been studies done by the University of Guam looking at heavy metals in Saipan lagoon that show the fish are safe to eat.

Stan Taisacan said that a six foot scoop net for Achuman is illegal under these restrictions and is asking for an exemption. He asked why the traditional nets are illegal? Tenorio said it was in the wording of the restrictions put into the legislative bill.

Discussion regarding the ACL scoping meetings:

The REAC discussed the recommendations and comments from the scoping meetings and adopted the following:

- **Recommends any catch share allocation be administered through the community;**
- **Recommends a community-based management, or co-management, plan for ACLs and catch shares, if it is necessary, with a preferred no limit since the number of fishermen fishing around the Marianas at present is not enough to even put a dent into the stocks.** With the Military buildup and the impact it may bring, it is preferred that the community manages the fishery and not the Federal Government;
- **Since the CNMI has not closely reached its peak with its fishery industry, especially in its economic benefit, it recommends that the ACL be set at a level where it can allow the CNMI to attain such benefit while still allowing the ACL to meet its required purpose of “No Overfishing”;**

5. Community Development

A. Status of Mariana Longline Fishery

David Lewis, longline fisherman, provided an update on the longline industry in CNMI. He noted that they had 4 boats fishing but added that docking space and fuel costs are a problem. They are developing markets in places such as Korea, but there are also problems with timing and customs. He was also concerned with local shark regulations because he thinks that a shark fishery could be developed in CNMI. Lewis was also concerned that the process for his boats to transit between Guam and CNMI was very expensive and may be a limiting factor in expanding the fishery.

B. Marine Conservation Plan

Teregeyo reported on the Marine Conservation Plan for CNMI and its status. She reported that funding was made available last year to the CNMI through violations of foreign fishing. She noted that the CNMI DLNR is working on a process to spend the funds. She also noted that the MCP was up for re-approval soon.

C. Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion regarding longline industry

The REAC was generally supportive of the emerging longline fishery in CNMI and sees it as a viable economic opportunity. The REAC **recommended the Council support the development of a longline fishery and fishery economic development in CNMI through feasibility, marketing and shipping studies. These studies would also look at the process to enter and dock fishing boats in Guam and find a way to reduce costs and streamline the process.**

Some REAC members were supportive of the local shark regulations being proposed while others said that the problems with sharks in the CNMI are the opposite, and that there are too many sharks. The REAC came to a consensus and **recommended the Council work with the CNMI to investigate the feasibility of development of a shark fishing industry.**

Discussion on the CNMI Marine Conservation Plan

The REAC was excited to see that funding was available for the MCP, but would like to provide additional ideas on projects to be included in the MCP for future funding availability. The REAC **recommended the Council assist the CNMI in holding wider meetings to update the CNMI MCP before it is approved by the Council.**

6. Upcoming Meeting/Conferences/Workshops

A. Mariana Archipelago Lunar Calendar Workshop

Council staff presented on the upcoming lunar calendar workshop scheduled for January 27-28, 2011 at the Saipan World Resort. He noted that the workshop was to identify the commonalities in the lunar calendars of the region and to support its use and cultivation of information.

B. Offshore Aquaculture Workshop

Council staff presented on the January 26-27 open ocean cage culture symposium being co-hosted by the Council and NMC CREES. He invited everyone to participate and explained that this was an opportunity to learn more about this industry in hopes of developing a new economic engine in the CNMI.

C. Mariana Islands Green Sea Turtle Workshop

Council staff presented on the Green Sea Turtle Workshop being hosted by the Council on January 25-27. She noted that the members were invited to participate as observers and that researchers from Japan and the Philippines, as well as local fishermen with traditional knowledge of turtles were invited participants. She explained that this workshop is the beginning of gathering data and determining the direction for the Marianas to achieve a cultural take of green sea turtles in the future.

7. Other Business

There was no other business.

8. Public Comments

There was no public comment.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

- 1. Regarding Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council keep the REAC abreast about CMSP and invite Laura Hamilton, NOAA Regional Coordinator, to provide a presentation to the CNMI on CMSP and other NOAA regional efforts.**
- 2. Regarding the U.S. Military presence in CNMI, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council assist CNMI with developing a formal discussion with the military on future plans for FDM.**
- 3. Regarding the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council inquire with the Federal government on the status of the visitor's center and available funding for the center.**

- 4. Regarding the NMFS Bio-sampling Project in the CNMI, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council request NMFS to expand the bio-sampling project to include fish from all of CNMI and provide the resources to do so.**
- 5. Regarding ACLs, the REAC noted that fishing in the CNMI is occurring well below maximum sustainable yield and therefore recommends that any ACL developed by the Council for CNMI be set at a level that allows CNMI to attain the maximum benefit from the resources.**
- 6. Regarding Catch Shares, the REAC recommended a community-based co-management plan be developed to assign catch shares if the Council chooses to uses this management tool.**
- 7. Regarding Fishery Development in the CNMI, the CNMI REAC**
 - a. Recommended the Council support the development of a longline fishery and fishery economic development in CNMI through feasibility, marketing and shipping studies.** These studies would also look at the process to enter and dock fishing boats in Guam and find a way to reduce costs and streamline the process.
 - b. Recommended the Council work with the CNMI to investigate the feasibility of development of a shark fishing industry.**
- 8. Regarding MCPs, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council assist the CNMI in holding scoping meetings to update the CNMI MCP before it is approved by the Council.**

The REAC adjourned 2:00 PM