

Workshop Kicks Off Marine Education and Training Initiative for US Pacific Islands

HONOLULU (17 April 2008) Two dozen educators from the US Pacific islands concluded a two-day workshop yesterday in Honolulu to establish a pilot program for regionally-based marine education and training programs in the region. The aim of the programs would be to foster understanding, practical use of knowledge (including native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander-based knowledge) and technical expertise relevant to stewardship of living marine resources. The programs or projects would improve communication, education, and training on marine resource issues throughout the region and increase scientific education for marine-related professions among coastal community residents, including indigenous Pacific islanders, Native Hawaiians and other underrepresented groups in the region. The workshop was coordinated by Charles Kaaiai, indigenous coordinator for the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, which is mandated under section 305(j) of the 2006 reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (MSA) to assist the Secretary of Commerce in the development of the pilot program.

The MSA also specifies that the programs should address the following components:

- Prepares community residents for employment in marine related professions, including marine resource conservation and management, marine science, marine technology, and maritime operations;
- Provides fisheries and seafood-related training, including programs for fishery observers, seafood safety and seafood marketing, focused on increasing the involvement of coastal community residents in fishing, fishery management, and seafood related operations;
- Educates and informs consumers about the quality and sustainability of wild fish or fish products farmed through responsible aquaculture, particularly in Hawaii and the Central and Western Pacific;
- Identifies, with the fishing industry, methods and technologies that will improve the data collection, quality, and reporting and increase the sustainability of fishing practices, and to transfer such methods and technologies among fisheries sectors and to other nations in the Western, Northern and Central Pacific;
- Develops means by which local and traditional knowledge (including Pacific islander and Native Hawaiian knowledge) can enhance science-based management of fishery resources of the region; and
- Develops partnerships with other Western Pacific Island agencies, academic institutions and other entities.

Workshop participants noted that all of the above components currently exist in the region; however, they are distributed unfairly across the region. They also expressed concern about whether enhanced training would result in increased employment opportunities in the region. They noted the existing “brain drain” syndrome, whereby educated US Pacific islanders frequently move to the US mainland in order to be gainfully employed in the field for which they’ve been educated.

Agencies and organizations represented at the workshop included the co-hosts Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and the National Marine Fisheries Service Pacific Islands Regional Office, American Samoa Community College, University of Guam-College of Natural and Applied Sciences, University of Hawaii Marine Operations Program, Hawaii Pacific University, Honolulu Community College, Northern Marianas College, The Nature Conservancy, Alu Like, PacMar Inc, Guam Fishermen’s Cooperative Association, Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources Tagging Program, Guam 4H, University of Hawaii Sea Grant, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands Division of Historic Preservation, Guam Department of Chamorro Affairs, Hawaii Community College Lawaia Program, Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Office Samoan Affairs. The workshop was facilitated by Kuumealoha Gomes.

Recommendations and findings from the workshop are undergoing analysis, and a report to the Council should be available in June. For more information, contact Charles Kaaiai, indigenous coordinator, at 808 522-8220 or at charles.kaaiiai@noaa.gov.

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