



**Report of the Marianas Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan  
Advisory Panel Meeting  
CNMI Sub-Panel  
Friday, June 7, 2013  
DLNR Conference Room  
1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Council Chairman Arnold Palacios called the meeting to order about fifteen minutes after the hour. Since the AP Chairman was absent, Chairman Palacios also appointed temporarily AP member Frank Aldan to preside over the meeting.

AP members present were Mike Fleming, Pete Itibus, Ambrosio Ogumoro, Lawrence Concepcion, George Moses, John Gourley, Lino Olopai, Stan Taisacan, Frank Aldan and Gary Sword.

There were no public in attendance.

**2. Update on Previous AP Recommendations**

Council Coordinator Jack Ogumoro reported that previous recommendations from the June 25-26, 2012 and March 3, 2012 meetings are included in their package. He then explained the process whereby the recommendations would go to the Council for action. He then used as an example one of the previous recommendations which was about reducing the current closure area for the bottomfish from 50 nautical miles down to 30 nautical miles. He said the AP recommendation made it to the Council for action. The Council staff was directed to look into it and on January 9, 2013, the Council wrote to the DLNR Secretary, who replied that the request to reduce the closure area was not warranted.

The members ended up discussing the recommendations again and came to a conclusion that there should not have been any restriction made in the first place. Since reducing the closure area does not include new fishing grounds, it does not make sense to change it. Thus, they agreed to eliminate the restriction because it does not make sense and it only restricts and penalizes individuals who are interested in pursuing economic opportunities in fishery developments.

**3. Update on Roles and Responsibilities of the Advisory Panel**

Council Chairman Palacios informed the members that he wants them to be effective in their roles in advising the Council on fisheries management and other issues. He also encouraged the members to take time to review the numerous fishery documents and to attend not just their meetings but other fisheries meetings as well.

The Coordinator also mentioned about the members serving as the eyes and ears of the Council and bringing community concerns to the Council and the Council's activities to the community.

The members agreed to do more and mentioned that in order for them to be effective that they also need to learn more about current and new fisheries issues coming down the pipe. They also agreed to meet on a quarterly basis or as often as possible to know each other and learn more about fishery issues.

#### **4. Council Issues and Action Items**

##### **A. Annual Catch Limits**

Sean Macduff from DFW Data Section provided an overview of the ACL and explained the different data collection efforts such as creel surveys, commercial receipt books, boat-based and shore-based creel surveys. He said these surveys are what define the ACL for the CNMI. He also indicated that Atulai, grouper and rabbitfish exceeded their ACL estimates for 2013. He said they're continuously trying to improve their data collection program, including potentially incorporating the non creel survey data such as bio-sampling and underwater surveys. Furthermore, he mentioned that they will be implementing a creel survey on Rota and another one on the island of Tinian.

##### **B. Endangered Species Act Updates**

Sean Macduff from DFW reminded AP members of the way the ESA protects species and updated them on the status of the coral, napoleon wrasse, scalloped hammerhead shark and the 8 species of reef fish. The coral and the scalloped hammerhead have been proposed to be listed and are currently awaiting their respective final rule. The napoleon wrasse is currently in the status review stage, while the reef fish species are still in the initial 90 day finding stage.

#### **5. CNMI Advisory Panel Issues**

##### **A. DOD Training Proposal**

Council coordinator reported on the recent scoping meetings conducted by the military for new training needs on the islands of Tinian and Pagan. The military is seeking to have live firing ranges on these two islands and even bombing practices on Pagan. The military has a deficiency in the Pacific and the new firing range on both islands will address this problematic area.

On both islands the military is seeking to have closure areas during practices. On Tinian the area to be closed will be the waters immediately west of the airport and going north and around the island towards the east of the airport. On Pagan the closure area will be twelve nautical miles around the entire island.

The members were concerned that the closure area on Tinian would force the people traveling to and from the island to first go further away from the island several miles out west or east before reaching the island, which would definitely be more difficult and expensive. As for Pagan, the members were concerned about the twelve miles closure area which would take away more fishing grounds in addition to the destruction from bombing activities to the island.

##### **B. Proposed Fisheries Legislation**

Council coordinator discussed three fishery legislations introduced within the last three months in the House of Representatives. The three were House Bill 18-53, introduced by Representative Roman C. Benavente on April 15, 2013. The bill would amend an existing statute to allow the use of certain nets such as trap net (chenchulun managam) and surround net (chenchulun umesugon) for

non-commercial purposes in the waters surrounding the municipality of Saipan. The fishing nets authorized will be made of nylon and other fabric materials only.

House Bill 18-68 was also introduced by Speaker Joseph Deleon Guerrero on April 30, 2013, which would prohibit the taking and selling of certain sizes of marine resources for commercial purposes. The bill targets reef fishes and the size limits were based upon the best available estimates of reproductive maturity of reef fish that are commonly found in the local markets.

Representative Roman C. Benavente introduced another bill, House Bill 18-72, which would require a \$25 fee for every scuba diver to pay with forty percent of the proceeds going towards the purchase of a decompression chamber, 35 percent to the Division of Environmental Quality for the coral program, and the rest towards the general fund. The bill was introduced on May 21, 2013.

#### **C. Update on CNMI Fishery Scientific Review Committee**

Sean Macduff updated members on the newly formed Fisheries Assessment Committee (FAC). The FAC is a body comprised of the DLNR Secretary, DFW Director and the DFW fisheries scientific staff. Outside participation by other government agencies, the public, key stakeholders and the private sector are welcomed. The FAC is a forum where fisheries related issues, concerns, research and management ideas could be discussed, reviewed and improved upon. This FAC could make comments and recommendations on current and future research projects.

#### **D. Update on CNMI Bio-sampling Program**

John Gourley from Micronesian Environmental Services presented the status of the CNMI Bio-sampling program, which is funded by the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council. The local working partner for this program is DFW.

Data collection for commercial reef fish started in January 2011 and continues today. To date, over 90,000 reef fish have been measured comprising 1,359 individual night spearfishing events. Currently, there have been 144 species identified from the Saipan markets. Data collected includes: length and weight of market fish, location fished, number fishers, hours fished, and whether the catch was from a boat or shore.

Bio-sampling data is being incorporated into the following DFW programs; commercial purchase receipts program, DFW creel survey, CNMI master species check list, and the DFW life history program. Bio-sampling data may also be assisting several federal fishery programs, such as the bottomfish logbook, annual catch limits, and barcode of life.

#### **E. Marine Conservation Plan Updates**

Council coordinator indicated that members of the Marine Conservation Plan Advisory Committee met on April 19 and April 24 to review and made recommendations on several proposals to be approved by the DLNR Secretary. Of the ten proposals received, the six recommended for approval were:

- Farm Made Aqua Feed Project – Submitted by NMC CREES requesting \$32,900 to develop feed production for aquaculture farmers in the hope of reducing production cost and increasing profit.
- Rabbit Fish Farming Project – Submitted also by NMC CREES to seek \$69,812 to raise rabbit fish in the CNMI.
- Fishing Derbies Project – Submitted by Saipan Fishermen Association requesting \$8,000 to help them collect fishery data and perform education and outreach during events.
- DFW Enforcement Project– Seeking \$50,000 to recruit additional enforcement officers.
- BIO-Sampling Project – Submitted by Micronesian Environmental Services to continue bio-sampling activities in the CNMI and to help supplement DFW creel survey activities.
- Pagan Fishing Community Project – Submitted by Northern Islands Mayor’s Office requesting \$76,000 to help establish a fishing community on the island of Pagan.

**F. Update on Fisheries Development Projects**

**1. Longline Dock Study**

Council coordinator discussed the ongoing longline dock study and the opening of the new fish market. The dock study is to determine the docking space needs to support a locally-based fleet of up to ten small to medium longline vessels. To that end, the Council, in concert with the Department of Lands and Natural Resources, selected GHD Inc. to provide this service. The company will now be looking at four existing waterfront facilities within Tanapag Harbor to be evaluated such as the Outer Cove Marina at the American Memorial Park, Puerto Rico Dump (PRD) - Puerto Rico, Echo Dock (ED) - Falig/Seman’s Restaurant, and Sea Plane Ramp (SPR) in Lower Base.

**2. Fish Market**

Council coordinator mentioned that on May 19, 2013, NMFMA opened its doors for business unannounced to allow the staff to undergo extensive training on the daily operation of the market involving processing, customer service, temperature control and monitoring, scheduling and overall interaction and direct assistance to fishermen members. On June 1, 2013, NMFMA officially opened for business offering an assortment of Bottomfish, Reefish and White Tuna and Yellowfin Tuna. The store is open everyday from 10am to 7pm, Monday through Sunday. The first day of business pulled in over \$500 of revenue and over \$600 the very next day on Sunday from walk-in customers alone.

NMFMA will be expanding its sales and marketing to local hotels and restaurants and some government agencies such as the Office of Aging, Department of Corrections and the Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation. It is also preparing to include the acceptance of credit and debit cards transaction.

**G. Other Advisory Panel Issues**

Gary Sword discussed U.S. House Resolution 573, which was introduced by U.S. Delegate Gregorio C. Sablan on February 6, 2013 to amend U.S. Public Law 93-435 with respect to the Northern Mariana Islands, providing parity with Guam, the Virgin Islands, and American Samoa,

which was passed by the House of Representatives on May 15, 2013. The legislation is about conveying ownership of the lands and water surrounding each of the fourteen islands in the Northern Marianas to the people of the Commonwealth.

**H. Other Business** – None

**I. Public Comment** – None

**J. Discussion and AP Recommendations to Council**

After discussing every item on the agenda, the AP members agreed on the following recommendations:

*With respect to bottomfish, the AP:*

1. Recommended the Council look into the possibility of removing the current closure area restrictions on commercial bottomfishing in the CNMI.

*With respect to AP roles and responsibilities, the AP:*

2. Recommended to meet every quarter, about two weeks before the Council meeting, including half way between Council meetings to learn what transpired at the Council meetings and to take actions on what needs to be done before the next Council meeting.

*With respect to DOD training proposals, the AP:*

3. Recommended to bitterly, unilaterally and in no way shape or form, support the military plans for the islands of Tinian and Pagan. Furthermore, the AP recommended that in the event the military plans prevail on Tinian, that the west side of the island be opened for passages to and from Tinian, for fishing, as well as commerce and other activities.

*With respect to U.S. HR 573 (providing CNMI with rights to territorial waters), the AP*

4. Recommended that the Council supports the legislation in the form of a resolution.

*With respect to Pelagics and Fishery Training, the AP:*

5. Recommended the Council help train the local fishermen in preparing, handling, and exporting tuna anywhere outside the CNMI.

*With respect to the AP Chairman, the AP:*

6. Recommended the Council appoint Mr. Frank Aldan to replace Mr. Cecilio Raiukiulipiy as the chairman of the CNMI Advisory Panel, seeing that Mr. Raiukiulipiy no longer resides in CNMI.