



NOAA Fisheries Service

Pacific Islands Regional Office

REPORT TO THE 164TH WESTERN PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) is responsible for assisting the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in the development of fishery management plans and amendments, initiating Federal fishing regulations, issuing Federal fishing permits, and monitoring fisheries through the observer program. Other major responsibilities include the conservation and recovery of protected species, conservation and restoration of marine habitats, including the Pacific marine national monuments, and coordination with international organizations to implement fishery agreements and treaties. The following information is provided to update the Council on NMFS and PIRO activities since the 163rd Council meeting.

RULEMAKING

On July 17, NMFS announced receipt of, and requested public comment on, a petition for rulemaking (80 FR 42464) from TriMarine Management Company, LLC regarding the 2015 purse seine fishing effort limit in the Effort Limit Area for Purse Seine (ELAPS). The public comment period on the petition closed on August 17, 2015.

On July 23, 2015, NMFS issued a final rule (80 FR 43634) to implement a decision of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) establishing a catch limit of 3,502 metric tons of bigeye tuna for U.S. longline vessels fishing in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) in 2015.

On July 28, 2015, PIRO published a final rule to close the U.S. pelagic longline fishery for bigeye tuna in the western and central Pacific Ocean because the fishery reached the 2015 catch limit (80 FR 43634). This action was necessary to prevent additional fishing pressure on this fish stock.

On August 10, 2015, PIRO published the proposed rule to allow large federally-permitted U.S. longline vessels to fish in certain areas of the Large Vessel Prohibited Area (LVPA) around Swains Island, Tutuila, and the Manua Islands (80 FR 51527). NMFS would continue to prohibit fishing in the LVPA by large purse seine vessels. The fishing requirements for the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument would remain unchanged. The intent of the proposed rule is to improve the viability of the American Samoa longline fishery and achieve optimum yield from the fishery while preventing overfishing, in accordance with National Standard 1. The comment period ended September 24, 2015.

On August 24, 2015, PIRO published the proposed rule to specify a catch limit of 2,000 metric tons (mt) of longline-caught bigeye tuna for each of the pelagic longline fisheries of American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands in 2015 (80 FR 51193). NMFS also proposed to authorize each U.S. territory to allocate and transfer up to 1,000 mt of its 2,000 mt bigeye tuna limit to a U.S. longline fishing vessel or vessels based in another U.S. territory or Hawaii, and identified in a specified fishing agreement applicable to the territory. NMFS would monitor catches of longline-caught bigeye tuna by the longline fisheries of each U.S. territory, including catches made by U.S. longline vessels operating under specified fishing agreements. When NMFS projects a territorial catch or allocation limit would be reached, NMFS would apply accountability measures that prohibit the catch and retention of longline-caught bigeye tuna by vessels in the U.S. territory (if the territorial catch limit is projected to be reached), or by vessels operating under specified fishing agreements (if the allocation limit is projected to be reached). The comment period closed on September 8, 2014.

On August 25, NMFS responded to comments and made final (80 FR 51476) an interim rule that implemented a decision of the WCPFC limiting the number of fishing days for U.S. purse seine vessels in the ELAPS in 2015. NMFS on the same day also issued an interim rule (80 FR 51478) that removed restrictions on purse seine bunkering operations in the ELAPS during the closure period. The ELAPS was closed to purse seine fishing on June 15, 2015. The comment period on the interim rule closed on September 24, 2015.

On August 31, 2015, PIRO published a final rule to implement annual catch limits for 2015 Pacific Island bottomfish, crustacean, precious coral, and coral reef ecosystem fisheries, and accountability measures to correct or mitigate any overages of catch limits (80 FR 52415). The catch limits and accountability measures support the long-term sustainability of fishery resources of the U.S. Pacific Islands.

On October 1st, 2015, NMFS issued a final rule and final specifications. The final rule establishes a framework under which NMFS will specify limits on fishing effort and catches, as well as spatial and temporal restrictions on particular fishing activities and other requirements, in U.S. fisheries for highly migratory fish species in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). NMFS will issue the specifications as may be necessary to implement conservation and management measures adopted by the WCPFC. The final rule also includes changes to regulations regarding tuna catch retention requirements for purse seine vessels, requirements to install and carry vessel monitoring system (VMS) units, daily reporting requirements, and other changes that are administrative in nature. Using the regulatory framework described above, NMFS also issued final specifications for 2015 that restrict the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) by purse seine vessels.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Sustainable Fisheries

PIRO hired Scot Yamashita as our new front desk customer service staff at Pier 38. Scot will provide public liaison and informational outreach activities with fishery participants.

PIRO continues to provide protected species workshop (PSW) training to the longline fishing communities. Since January 1, 2015, PIRO provided PSW training for approximately 253 Hawaii-based longline vessel owners and captains, and other interested individuals. Another 76 vessel owners, captains, and crewmembers completed PSW training in American Samoa with assistance from the PIRO Observer Program. We updated the PSW training to include the recent fishing restrictions in the WCPFC convention area for oceanic whitetip, silky, and whale sharks; and current best-practice techniques for safe handling and release of protected species. These practices include the use of fighting lines to straighten weak circle hooks. Updates of the workshop material ensure owners and operators of Hawaii- and West Coast-based longline fishing vessels understand current fishing regulations and are prepared to safely handle and release protected species during fishing operations.

PIRO also conducted PSW orientation and sea turtle dehooking classes for 33 newly hired observer contractors in Hawaii. The objective of these classes is to provide observers with an understanding of the training Hawaii longline fishing vessel owners and operators receive to mitigate protected species interactions.

PIRO coordinated the collection of PIRO and PIFSC updates on shark conservation, management, research, and data collection for the 2014 Shark Finning Report and Appendix. The Shark Finning Prohibition Act of 2000 requires NMFS to provide annual reports to Congress that describe efforts to carry out provisions of this act. The report should be available to the public in summer 2016 at http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/laws_policies/sca/shark_finning_reports.html.

PIRO continues to update Information on fish catch limits in Pacific Island fisheries at www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_regs_3.html.

PIRO continues management of the fisheries in consideration of status changes and incidental take events of protected species. Up-to-date information about interactions between the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery and sea turtles is at www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_turtleint.html. In February 2015, a NMFS observer on board a Hawaii shallow-set longline vessel documented an interaction with a fin whale. In August 2015, NMFS published a final rule designating critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal in the main Hawaiian Islands and expanding monk seal critical habitat in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. These events triggered the need to consult under Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 on the continuing operation of fisheries in the region. The following updates highlight the progress of consultations, in which Council staff have been integral and very helpful:

- On May 8, 2015, NMFS reinitiated consultation for the continued operation of the American Samoa pelagic longline fishery. The biological opinion (BiOp) for this consultation analyzes the potential effects on ESA-listed species of the opening of the American Samoa LVPA to longline vessels. This BiOp is currently under NMFS internal review.
- On September 16, 2015, NMFS determined that the continued authorization of the Hawaii-based shallow-set and deep-set longline fisheries is not likely to adversely affect Hawaiian monk seal critical habitat and fin whales.

PIRO attended the NOAA Regional Recreational Fisheries Coordinators meeting in La Jolla in August 2015. The focus of the meeting was on the development of a recreational fisheries implementation plan for each NMFS Region. An important component of this effort is that NMFS develop the plan in coordination with the recreational fishing community so that it reflects their interests and ideas. Preparation for the meeting included coordinating with Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) partners and with the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee Recreational Fishing Working Group to produce a PIRO summary of recreational/non-commercial activity. These activities relate to the 2014-2015 National and Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda. PIRO staff reported on the progress of the 21 regional projects that meet the objectives and goals of PIRO's Regional Recreational Fisheries Action Agenda.

PIRO visited the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) and Guam field offices in July 2015. In response to a recommendation made at the June 2015 Council meeting, the CNMI field office visit included outreach to address confusion regarding permitting and reporting requirements for commercial bottomfishing in federal waters surrounding the CNMI. Federal, territorial and private sector representatives in Guam discussed current fisheries-related issues.

PIRO renewed or revised all of our data collections, as required by the Paperwork Reduction Act, this fiscal year. These collections must be approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and include all of our permit application forms, logbook forms, VMS collection, vessel and gear identification and marking, observer notification, and the short-tailed albatross injury/mortality report. We consolidated all logbooks forms from various collections into one collection, and will do the same for permit applications after OMB approves the pending renewals. We appreciate the input from fishermen and other agencies on the data collections required for OMB approval.

PIRO published a notice in the *Federal Register* soliciting applications for available permits in the American Samoa longline limited access fishery on August 5, 2015 (80 FR 46565). PIRO mailed the notice to Pacific Islands permit holders. At least 10 Class A permits, 1 Class B permit, and 1 Class D permit are available. More permits may become available before the application period ends. Interested applicants may obtain the application form from PIRO offices or from the PIRO permits webpage at http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_permits_index.html. Complete applications must include payment of the application fee and evidence of documented participation. PIRO must receive these applications by December 3, 2015.

Pacific Islands Fishing Permits

(As of September 25, 2015. Current permit status, applications, and other information are available at www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_permits_index.html.)

<i>Permit</i>	<i>Number</i>
<i>Pelagic</i>	
Hawaii longline (limited entry)	144 (of 164 available)
American Samoa longline (limited entry)	41 (of 60 available)
Western Pacific general longline	0
Receiving vessel	21
Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA) troll & handline	4
Pelagic squid jig	0
<i>Hawaii</i>	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	2
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious coral	1
Crustaceans	1 lobster, 4 shrimp
<i>American Samoa</i>	
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious coral	0
Crustaceans	0 lobster, 0 shrimp
<i>Mariana Islands</i>	
Guam large vessel bottomfish	1
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	3
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious coral	0
Crustaceans	0 lobster, 0 shrimp
<i>Pacific Remote Island Areas</i>	
Bottomfish	1
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious corals	0
Crustaceans	0 lobster, 0 shrimp
<i>Monuments</i>	
Non-commercial and recreational charter	0

Protected Resources

Hawaiian Monk Seal Critical Habitat Proposed Revision (ESA)

NMFS published a final rule revising Hawaiian monk seal critical habitat on August 21, 2015 (80 FR 50925). The revised designation expands the previous designation in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands and includes new areas throughout the main Hawaiian Islands. We initiated this rulemaking in 2008 in response to a petition from Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), Kahea, and the Ocean Conservancy to revise critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal. On June 12, 2009, NMFS published a 12-month finding announcing that a revision was warranted (74 FR 27988), and on June 2, 2011, published a proposed rule to revise critical habitat for the Hawaiian monk seal by adding critical habitat in the main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) and extending critical habitat in the

Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (76 FR 32026). Public comment periods were open for 150 days, and we held six public hearings.

Eight Reef Fish Species Petition to List (ESA)

NMFS published a not warranted 12-month finding for the orange clownfish (*Amphiprion percula*) on August 24, 2015 (80 FR 51235). On September 14, 2012, NMFS received a petition from CBD to list eight species of pomacentrid reef fish, including one orange clownfish and seven damselfish, as threatened or endangered under the ESA and that critical habitat be designated concurrently with any listing (one species is in the Caribbean and seven in the Pacific). On September 3, 2014, NMFS announced a 90-day finding (79 FR 52276) that the petition provided substantial information indicating the petitioned action may be warranted for one species, the orange clownfish (*Amphiprion percula*). NMFS found substantial information was not provided for the other six Indo-Pacific species (on February 18, NMFS announced a negative 90-day finding for the Caribbean yellowtail damselfish). We completed a status review for the orange clownfish in August 2015, which formed the basis for our not warranted 12-month finding.

Corals (ESA)

Of the 15 Indo-Pacific coral species listed under the ESA as threatened in September 2014, six are confirmed in American Samoa, three each in Guam and PRIA, and two in CNMI. For more information, please see the PIRO ESA Corals webpage and linked species descriptions at http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_coral.html. NMFS is engaged in the next steps associated with the listing of these species, including issuing protective regulations pursuant to ESA Section 4(d), critical habitat, recovery planning, and Section 7 consultations. As described in an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) in early 2015 (80 FR 1616), NMFS will determine whether protective regulations pursuant to ESA Section 4(d) are necessary and advisable for the conservation of these species. Until such time, take of these listed coral species is not prohibited under the federal ESA. With regard to critical habitat, NMFS is considering areas within the waters of American Samoa, Guam, CNMI, and PRIA for proposed coral critical habitat, and has initiated analyses needed to support a proposed critical habitat rule in 2016.

Green Turtle Petition Finding and Proposed Rule (ESA)

The Services extended the comment period for the proposed rule until July 27, 2015, then until August 26, 2015, and then again until September 25, 2015. The comment period is now closed. This follows the March 23, 2015, proposed rule (80 FR 15272), which found that the green sea turtle consists of 11 distinct population segments (DPS): 8 are proposed as threatened and 3 are proposed as endangered. In the Pacific Islands Region, the Hawaiian green turtle population (i.e., the Central North Pacific population) is proposed as threatened, the green turtle population in the Marianas (i.e., the Central West Pacific population) is proposed as endangered, and the green turtle population in American Samoa (i.e., the Central South Pacific population) is proposed as endangered. This rulemaking was in response to a petition received from the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs on February 16, 2012, to classify the green sea turtle in Hawaii as a DPS and delist the DPS. A global status review of the species was conducted and underwent peer review. Public hearings were held in Honolulu on April 8, 2015, and in Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa, July 6 to 15, 2015 (80 FR 34594).

Green Turtle Critical Habitat (ESA)

At the same time that NMFS and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released their proposed rule in March 2015 to list 11 green sea turtle DPSs under the ESA (see above), they announced their intent to consider (or revise) green turtle critical habitat. NMFS and USFWS solicited relevant information to identify areas with physical and biological features essential to the conservation of green turtle DPSs occurring within U.S. jurisdiction. Additionally, NMFS and USFWS hosted public hearings in Hawaii, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and American Samoa to solicit this information. For more information about critical habitat generally, see <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/criticalhabitat.htm>.

Humpback Whale Status Review and Proposed Rule (ESA)

On April 21, 2015, NMFS issued a proposed rule to divide the globally ESA-listed humpback whale into 14 DPSs, remove the current species-level listing, and in its place list two DPSs as endangered and two DPSs as threatened. The Hawaii population and Oceania population (which includes American Samoa) would not remain listed if the rule is finalized as proposed, but the Western North Pacific population, which includes Guam and CNMI, would be listed as threatened. The proposed rule was informed by a comprehensive status review, which NMFS initiated in 2009 (74 FR 40568), and two petitions to designate and delist the DPS. The status review was released concurrently with the proposed rule. NMFS held a public hearing on the proposed rule in Honolulu on May 6, 2015, and the public comment period on the proposed rule closed on July 20, 2015.

Scalloped Hammerhead Shark Next Steps (ESA)

NMFS is currently determining if designating critical habitat is prudent and determinable for 3 DPSs of the scalloped hammerhead shark (Indo-West Pacific DPS, Eastern Pacific DPS, and Central & Southwest Atlantic DPS; NMFS is not evaluating the Eastern Atlantic DPS as its range is outside of U.S. jurisdiction). This action follows the July 3, 2014, final rule to list 4 DPSs of the scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*) under the ESA, in response to a 2011 petition received from WildEarth Guardians and Friends of Animals. The Indo-West Pacific DPS (which includes the U.S. Pacific territories & all Pacific Remote Island Areas except Johnston Atoll) and the Central & Southwest Atlantic DPS are listed as threatened; and the Eastern Pacific DPS and the Eastern Atlantic DPS are listed as endangered. The Central Pacific DPS (which includes the Hawaiian archipelago and Johnston Atoll) and the Northwest Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico DPS were not warranted for listing. Additionally, the NMFS Office of Protected Resources is in the early stages of recovery planning for these three DPSs.

Common Thresher Shark Petition to List (ESA)

On May 4, 2015, we announced an extension of the public comment period (80 FR 25272) to the July 6, 2015, positive 90-day finding to list the common thresher shark (*Alopias vulpinus*) under the ESA. This follows the March 3, 2015, positive 90-day finding (80 FR 11379) for the species. The species is now a candidate species and a status review is being conducted to inform the 12-month finding, which is statutorily due on April 27, 2016. These actions are in response to an April 27, 2015, petition from Defenders of Wildlife to list the species range-wide, or in the alternative, as one or more distinct population segments as threatened or endangered under the ESA. The petitioners also requested

that critical habitat be designated concurrent with a final listing. The species occurs worldwide in temperate and tropical waters. The species is bycaught in the Hawaii-based longline fisheries and in the American Samoa longline fishery.

Bigeye Thresher Shark Petition to List (ESA)

On August 11, 2015, we announced a positive 90-day finding (80 FR 48061) on a petition to list the bigeye thresher shark (*Alopias superciliosus*) under the ESA. Public comments are accepted until October 13, 2015. The species is a candidate species and a status review will be conducted to inform the 12-month finding, which is statutorily due on April 27, 2016. This follows a petition received from the Defenders of Wildlife on April 27, 2015, to list the bigeye thresher shark range-wide, or in the alternative, as one or more distinct population segments as threatened or endangered under the ESA. The petitioners also requested that critical habitat be designated concurrent with a final listing. The species occurs worldwide in temperate and tropical waters. The species is bycaught in the Hawaii-based deep and shallow set longline fisheries and in the American Samoa longline fishery.

Smooth Hammerhead Shark Petition to List (ESA)

On August 11, 2015, we announced a positive 90-day finding (80 FR 48053) on a petition to list the smooth hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna zygaena*) under the ESA. Public comments are accepted until October 13, 2015. The species is a candidate species and a status review will be conducted to inform the 12-month finding, which is statutorily due on April 27, 2016. This follows a petition received from the Defenders of Wildlife on April 27, 2015, to list the smooth hammerhead shark as threatened or endangered under the ESA throughout its range, or, as an alternative, to list any identified distinct population segments (DPSs). If the species does not warrant listing on its own merit, the petitioners request that the species be listed based on its similarity of appearance (pursuant to section 4(e) of the ESA) to the listed DPSs of the scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*). The petitioners also requested that critical habitat be designated concurrent with a final listing. The species occurs worldwide in temperate waters. The species is bycaught in the Hawaii-based deep longline fisheries and American Samoa longline fishery.

Main Hawaiian Islands Hawaiian Monk Seal Management Plan (ESA)

PIRO released a draft version of the Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan for a 30-day public review period from August 11 - September 9, 2015. While the comment period was not a legal requirement, PIRO solicited public comment to continue the participatory planning process used throughout the plan's development. Comments regarding the draft plan were received from the Council's Executive Director among others. All comments will be considered during the preparation of a final version of the plan, which we anticipate completing prior to the next Council meeting. The final version of the plan will serve as a non-regulatory guiding document for NMFS and partners. Since 2012, NMFS has held a variety of agency and stakeholder workshops, focus groups, and individual meetings with community members and stakeholders to develop and refine issues and strategies for Hawaiian monk seal management in the MHI. NMFS will continue to engage important groups, such as fishermen, ocean safety, law enforcement, partner agency staff, and the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team in plan implementation and periodic revision as needed.

Sea Turtle Recovery Program (ESA)

The Sea Turtle Management and Conservation Program continues to provide oversight and support to multiple projects which implement priority activities of the U.S. Sea Turtle Recovery Plans. Sea turtle recovery-based projects are ongoing in Hawaii, the territories, and other parts of the Pacific with population that have linkages to the Pacific Island Region. In general, funded projects include internationally-based fishery bycatch mitigation, sea turtle monitoring and conservation, and community educational outreach and public management. PIRO also continues to implement the "Fishing around Sea Turtles" program. This is a multi-agency program that includes NOAA, the State of Hawaii (including the Division of Conservation and Resource Enforcement), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Council. The program provides mitigation options to Hawaii recreational hook-and-line fishers through practical fishing tips, increased awareness, and best practice suggestions to reduce injury to sea turtles following an accidental interaction. For additional information, visit:

http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_fishing_around_sea_turtles.html

Hawaii False Killer Whale Take Reduction (MMPA)

NMFS convened an in-person meeting of the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team April 29-May 1, 2015 in Honolulu to consider initial monitoring efforts for the Hawaii False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan. The Team discussed a number of issues, but reached consensus on recommendations related to: a) encouraging voluntary efforts by fishermen to use stronger branch lines; b) seeking Team member access to observers' videos of false killer whale and other odontocete interactions (subject to confidentiality restrictions) to assist in learning more about the nature of hookings and to improve release techniques; and c) developing a unified and simplified message to captains and crew regarding false killer whale handling and release.

The False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan final rule published in the Federal Register on November 29, 2012 (77 FR 71260). All regulations became effective December 31, 2012 except for gear requirements for the deep-set fishery, which went into effect February 27, 2013. In December 2014, PIRO, in consultation with the Take Reduction Team, completed a Monitoring Strategy for the Take Reduction Plan. The document will guide our evaluation of compliance with and effectiveness of the Plan. PIRO is currently developing an annual report of compliance and effectiveness, as described in the Monitoring Strategy.

The Plan's "Southern Exclusion Zone" (SEZ) will be closed to deep-set longline fishing *if* there are two observed false killer whale serious injuries or mortalities in the fishery inside the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone around Hawaii in a single year. Closure of the SEZ was *not* triggered in 2013, 2014, or 2015 to-date, but PIRO convened full-Team teleconferences in March 2013 and April 2014 in response to observed false killer whale serious injuries in the deep-set fishery that counted toward the SEZ trigger. Summaries of these teleconferences and all past Team meetings, as well as information about the Take Reduction Team and Plan, are available at

http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_FKW_take_reduction_team.html

List of Fisheries (MMPA)

The 2016 List of Fisheries proposed rule published on September 29, 2015 (80 FR 58427). Proposed changes to Pacific Islands fisheries are based on the draft 2014 marine mammal stock assessment reports, and include revisions to the list of species injured or killed in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery and updates to the number of participants in numerous fisheries. In addition, NMFS has begun posting online “fact sheets” for Category III fisheries, and requests public comment on their content. The public comment period is open through October 29, 2015. The proposed rule and draft fishery fact sheets are available at:

<http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/interactions/fisheries/lof.html>

Habitat Conservation Division

Coral Reef Mitigation

PIRO continues to lead and participate in a variety of national and regional initiatives to better define federal management protocol for coral reefs with regard to avoidance best management practices, minimization, offset, compensatory mitigation as they relate to Essential Fish Habitat and the Clean Water Act.

Hawaii Conservation Alliance

PIRO continues to chair the Hawaii Conservation Alliance as well as Co-Chair the Effective Conservation Program (ECP). During this quarter PIRO participated in focus member meeting to improve ArcGIS web portal development and usage and presented at the Hawaii Conservation Conference present efforts and next steps for the Community Snapshot and expected next steps for ECP. These products are intended to provide tools for managers and support community engagement.

Essential Fish Habitat Program

PIRO continued to conduct Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) consultations for Hawaii, Guam, CNMI and American Samoa. Consultations occurred with the Department of Defense, Army Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Coast Guard, USFWS, U.S. Department of Transportation, and NOAA on a range of actions and impacts to EFH either undertaken, funded, or permitted by the entities. Several consultations, such as the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the military build-up activities in the Mariana Islands and the CNMI Joint Military Training (CJMT) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and EFH pre-review were completed during this quarter. Federal Action agencies (as listed above) also increasingly contact NMFS early and often regarding consulting on actions that may adversely affect EFH resources, which is beneficial to both agencies in building partnerships, streamlining the consultations, and improving conservation of EFH. EFH coordinators from all NMFS Regions teleconference monthly to follow up on action items and discuss ongoing projects and EFH related matters.

PIRO continued its participation as a member of the Council Coordinating Committee Habitat Working Group, to coordinate NMFS Region, Council, and Headquarters staff on important habitat issues, initiatives, strategies, and requirements (e.g., planning for an EFH

Summit, integration of habitat information with Ecosystem-Based Fishery Management (EBFM), refining and improving utilization of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC), formal/informal EFH consultations, EFH source documentation).

PIRO also participated in updating the Council on the status of the West Hawaii and Guam Manell-Geus Habitat Focus areas as well as meeting with staff to discuss collaboration opportunities at both sites.

Coral Reef Conservation Program

PIRO continued to implement local projects and efforts, through Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) supported field staff, to promote conservation of coral reefs/habitat in the Region:

The Fisheries Local Action Strategy Hawaii continues to support the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources (DAR) in reduce fishing related impacts to coral reefs through collaboratively implementing projects funded under NOAA CRCP's Cooperative Agreement with DAR.

The Pacific Islands Managed and Protected Area Community continues to implement capacity building activities in the US Flag Islands and Freely Associated States across Micronesia.

CNMI:

PIRO managed the final phases of data collection for the Rota creel project; completed publications and NOAA technical reports for the climate change reef resilience study for the islands of Saipan, Rota and Tinian; provided formal comments to the CJMT Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and EFH assessment documents, assisted with emergency permitting for the damage fiber optic cable on Saipan and continues to provide support for response and salvage actions associated with damage from typhoon Soudelor.

Guam:

Efforts are progressing with the Guam Habitat Blueprint Focus Area Site at the Manell-Geus Watershed in Merizo. HCD staff presented an update on the Habitat Blueprint to the Guam AP. Researchers from University of Guam continue to collect baseline ecological data for benthic communities on reef flats and physical and biological data on streams. A new contract was awarded to support watershed restoration projects in the Manell Watershed. Guam Department of Agriculture is supporting these efforts by conducting revegetation efforts in upland sites within the same watershed. NOAA, the Nature Conservancy, and Mariana Islands Nature Alliance conducted a training on Guam for Socioeconomic Monitoring for Habitat Blueprint partners.

A significant algal bloom continued in Cocos Lagoon (tentatively identified as a *Chaetomorpha* species). PIRO continues to work with local partners to monitor this bloom. There is interest in management intervention, but HCD and partners have not been able to secure funding to support removal efforts.

PIRO continued to expand the Guam Community Coral Reef Monitoring Program, including providing students with service learning opportunities and establishing a program for

communities to “Adopt-a-Reef”. The team has been working to adapt the Eyes of the Reef program from Hawaii to the Marianas and plan to launch it this fall to facilitate community reporting of coral bleaching, crown of thorns starfish, and marine debris.

HCD staff provided input to GovGuam on a potential stormwater diversion project into Tumon Bay that would affect EFH at a key seasonal fishing site in the bay.

American Samoa:

PIRO worked with local and federal resource partners in planning and coordinating activities for the Fisheries Local Action Strategy, Land-based Sources of Pollution Local Action Strategy, and Climate Change Local Action Strategy. These activities included: revision of the Faga’alu watershed management plan through meetings with the community and resource partners. PIRO also reviewed and provided EFH comments through consultations with federal partners and local applicants on development projects.

U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA)

PIRO continues to work under the USAKA Environmental standards, completing environmental reviews as well as coral consultations.

International Fisheries

PIRO attended the 89th annual meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) from June 29 – July 3, 2015, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. The IATTC adopted several resolutions including proposals to amend existing resolutions on illegal, unreported, and unregulated vessel listing procedures, FADs, data confidentiality and financing, as well as a proposal to prohibit fishing on mobulid rays.

PIRO chaired, the 4th meeting of the Intersessional Working Group on the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme (ROP), July 6-8, 2015, as well as attended the 1st meeting of the WCPFC electronic reporting and electronic monitoring working group, July 8-10, 2015, in Nadi, Fiji. The ROP working group agreed to language proposing some additions to the current transshipping measure as well as a recommendation on "pre-notification for flag states." The electronic reporting and electronic monitoring working group developed standards, specifications and protocols (SSPs) applicable to electronically reported information to the WCPFC.

PIRO participated in the 15th meeting of the International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) from July 15-20, 2015, in Kona, Hawaii. The ISC completed a stock assessment on North Pacific striped marlin. Recent fishing mortality for North Pacific striped marlin was above fishing mortality rates at maximum sustainable yield (MSY) and spawning biomass is below levels that would support MSY. The ISC also conducted an indicators analysis for North Pacific shortfin mako shark and was unable to come up with any conclusions on stock status due to conflicting indices and poor data.

PIRO participated in the 11th regular session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, August 5-13, 2015, in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. The Scientific Committee

reviewed the ISC stock assessments as well as a stock assessment for South Pacific albacore. The stock assessment for South Pacific albacore indicated that fishing mortality is less than fishing mortality at MSY, biomass is above biomass levels at MSY and biomass is above the Commission's limit reference point. The Scientific Committee also reviewed a Pacific-wide bigeye tuna sensitivity analysis, found results for the WCPO to be similar to results from the WCPO-only stock assessment conducted in 2014, and recommended that future stock assessments continue to use a WCPO-only model.

PIRO attended the 11th regular session of the WCPFC Northern Committee, August 31-September 3, 2015, in Sapporo, Japan. There was not a quorum so the Chair will convene the Northern Committee at WCPFC12 to formally adopt the outcomes of the meeting. The Northern Committee did not adopt the United States' proposed management framework or rebuilding target and strategy for bluefin tuna, but agreed to recommend amending the bluefin CMM to include a provision that the Northern Committee will develop an "emergency rule" that members will comply with when drastic drops in recruitment are detected. The Northern Committee did not agree upon the United States' proposed inputs to the upcoming management strategy evaluation for albacore, but agreed that Northern Committee members would submit proposed strategies for consideration when the Northern Committee meets at WCPFC12.

PIRO also attended the 11th regular session of the WCPFC Technical and Compliance Committee (TCC), September 23-29, 2015, in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia. PIRO also attended the WCPFC Intersessional Working Group on catch documentation systems (CDS) held in conjunction with TCC11.

PIRO will host a meeting of the Permanent Advisory Committee to advise the U.S. Commissioners to the WCPFC, October 14-15, 2015, in Honolulu, and attend the 12th regular session of the WCPFC, December 3-8, 2015, in Bali, Indonesia.

Observer Program

As of September 19, 2015, the coverage for the Hawaii longline deep set fishery was 20.2%. The coverage for the Hawaii longline shallow set fishery was 100%, with 57 departures observed and 28 observed deployments out of California. The coverage for the American Samoa longline fishery was 20.3%. There are currently five (5) observers in American Samoa. The observer training class was completed on September 15, 2015, with 18 observers receiving their certifications. Seven out of the 18 are Alu Like graduates. Bed Bug issues continue to be a problem in the fleet.

The program secured a five year contract with National Outdoor Leadership School-Wilderness Medicine Institute as the provider of first-aid training for the observer trainings.

The observer Erin Emanuel, on the F/V Lady of The Sea, out of Pago Pago assisted the U.S. Coast Guard administering a medical situation involving a crewman.

A two-day refresher training was administered for six observers, on Aug 10-11th.

eReporting

The eReporting initiative (Thorium Application) delivery date is scheduled for October 9, 2015 and will complete phase one of the initiative. CLSA and the Observer Program are currently validating end to end data generation and ingestion on the forms validated by the Pacific Islands Region Observer Program System (PIROPS). The Observer Programs eReporting development team will demo a beta version of the application to Observer Program staff. After Observer Program staff have tested and provided feed back to the development team that will conclude in house beta testing. A select number of observers will be provided tablets to beta test at sea which begins phase two of the initiative. We anticipate that phase two will begin in November and will end one year later. There are a total of 36 eForms on the tablet that mimic the workflow of the observer. Project team members have successfully transmitted data from the Thorium Application on the tablet to the CLSA servers.

Pilot Study/PIFSC – Sharks

The Observer Program will work with the Science Center to begin to identify the effects of handling on shark release conditions. In addition, we aim to identify the shark bycatch handling and release methods that maximize post-release survival. These efforts will also ensure that the Observer Program is in compliance with shark-specific conservation and management measures.

International

The Observer Program Manager, John Kelly attended an Intercessional Working Group on the WCPFC ROP in Nadi, Fiji.

IOTC Proposal Review

The Observer Program is currently reviewing a proposal for the development of an electronic reporting and data storage system to support the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission Regional Scheme (IOTC) and providing comments to Dr. Sarah Martins, Fisheries Officer, Science, and IOTC Secretariat.

Indonesia

The Observer Program Received a request for assistance from Indonesia as they are experiencing troubles implementing their national observer program. Earlier this year, Indonesia trained a corps of 400+ observers and the problems they are encountering include vessel compliance, new observer requirements, and identifying which agency will administer the observer program.

Republic of Korea

The Observer Program continues to interface with the Republic of Korea (ROK) under the Joint Project Agreement. The initial stages of developing an at-sea program for a domestic ROK demersal trawl fishery have begun.

Marine National Monuments Program

Okeanos Explorer Work

The NOAA research vessel Okeanos Explorer will be involved in a series of cruises in the Pacific from 2015 – 2017. The first year of research, entitled *Hohonu Moana: Exploring Deep Waters off Hawai'i*, will wrap up at the end of September 2015. Leg 1 of the 2015 expedition focused on mapping portions of the Johnston Atoll unit of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM). Legs 2 & 3 included remotely-operated vehicle (ROV) dives in Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM) and Hawaii Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary. The final 2015 leg enabled the first deep ROV dives in the Johnston Atoll area. Work in 2016 and 2017 is planned for the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa (including Rose Atoll Marine National Monument), Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, and additional areas of Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument. More information on the project, as well as videos and imagery from the dives, are available from:

<http://oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/okeanos/explorations/ex1504/welcome.html>.

Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

Progress on the conveyance of the 0-3 nm of submerged lands at Farallon de Parajos, Asuncion, and Maug to the CNMI, and the draft Marianas Trench Marine National Monument management plan were severely delayed by the loss of communication infrastructure and damages caused by typhoon Soudelor. The plan, which was drafted in collaboration with NOAA, the USFWS, and the CNMI Government, is awaiting final input from the CNMI regarding management of the 0-3 nm submerged lands in northern islands and internal NOAA and USFWS review. Managing Agencies hope to publish the draft plan in early 2016 and hold public meetings in CNMI and Guam to receive public comments.

Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

Members of the Rose Atoll Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) met in Pago Pago, American Samoa, on September 2nd and 4th. Primary topics of discussion included finalization of the IGC charter and development of coordinated approach to permitting.

On September 3rd, members of the IGC joined the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa at the launch of the Catlin Seaview & Google Streetview applications for American Samoa, including virtual visit capabilities to Rose Atoll Marine National Monument. See <http://catlinseaviewsurvey.zenfolio.com/p301873685> for sample images.

Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

In FY 2015, a total of 31 permit applications were submitted for access to the PMNM. A total of 21 permits were issued and 7 applications were withdrawn. Another 7 applications are in various stages of the reviewing process for FY 2016. The 2014 permitted activities report will be made available from: <http://www.papahanaumokuakea.gov/>.

There were an additional 6 permit applications submitted for the September 1, 2015 submittal deadline. These are the first permit applications for activities for FY 2016.