



Report of the Mariana Archipelago FEP- CNMI Advisory Panel Meeting

June 5, 2015

5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

DFW Conference Room, Saipan, CNMI

1. Welcome and Introductions

The CNMI AP Meeting started 5:20pm. In attendance were Chairman Richard Farrell, Diego Blanco, Lawrence Concepcion, Jack Villagomez, Floyd Masga, Manny Ramon and Ray Dela Cruz. Also in attendance were Council staff Becky Walker and Jack Ogumoro.

There was one member of the public present, Dr. Todd Miller, who is a DFW employee and member of the Council's SSC.

2. Review and Approval of the Agenda

Villagomez moved and Blanco seconded a motion to approve the agenda. The vote to approve the agenda was unanimous, and approved without any changes or additions.

3. Issues to be discussed at 163rd Council Meeting

Ogumoro explained that the Council will be acting on the Cooperative Research Priorities and the Five-Year Research Priorities during its upcoming meeting this month. The AP needs to either endorse these priorities or not. He then briefly described these priorities, indicating the priorities were addressed in detail during previous meetings, including the last AP meeting held at the Fiesta Resort Hotel last April.

Walker further explained that the members can endorse these items with additional recommendations.

Ogumoro also reported that at the last AP meeting Council staff Marlowe Sabator asked the members to identify an individual who will be the CNMI contact person regarding the research priorities.

Villagomez volunteered to be the CNMI contact person. Blanco then nominated Villagomez and was seconded by Lawrence Concepcion. The vote was unanimous and the members congratulated Villagomez in his new role.

Following the discussion of each of the four priorities, the members voted to support the priorities, with additional recommendations for the Stock and Human Communities priorities.

Under Stocks, the members recommended NMFS to perform a tagging project for skipjack.

Under Human Communities, the members recommended the inclusion of technical assistance for local fishery agency personnel.

4. Report on the Northern Islands CBMP Meeting

Ogumoro indicated that Council staff Mark Mitsuyasu and Charles Kaaiai visited the island and conducted a workshop for the residents of Northern Islands on April 22. The staff discussed the planning process, and engaged the participants in defining their goals and priorities in managing their marine resources.

The process will require several more visits to complete the Northern Islands plan, which would be developed by themselves, as opposed to an outside consultant.

5. CJMT and EIS Public Hearings

Ogumoro reported that DOD has extended the comment period on the CJMT Draft EIS from June 3 to August 3, a period of sixty days. The Council also had requested DOD to extend the comment period for six months consistent with the request submitted by the CNMI.

Walker asked for input on suggested mitigation from the AP with regard to the DEIS, in addition to the previously suggested ciguatera monitoring. The AP is still reading the DEIS and did not have any additional mitigation suggestions.

6. Submerged Lands MOU

Ogumoro indicated that the MOU has not been signed because there are still unanswered questions.

7. Update on Projects and Outreach Activities

Ogumoro updated the members on several projects funded by the Council, as well as on outreach activities he has performed or will be performing within the next two months. He also mentioned about the high school summer course program that would benefit fifteen or more students, which will commence on July 20 to 31.

8. Report of the Sub-panel

Under Island Fisheries, a concern was raised regarding the federal bottomfish reporting requirement. Many fishermen know that they have to report when fishing for bottomfish species for commercial purpose. However, during a recent visit by NOAA enforcement officials, the fishermen were told to report on all bottomfish catches, including subsistence and recreational harvest.

The members recommended NMFS should clarify this issue because it is causing confusion among the fishermen.

The members also recommended a study be performed to determine why ciguatera is common in certain groupers caught in northern islands but not in the same species caught around Saipan. This would also help the CNMI understand the possible impacts of military activities and dredging and/or bombing may have on the occurrence of ciguatera.

Under Pelagic Fisheries, the members recommended a study be done to determine the level of mercury in tuna being caught in the CNMI and the impacts of the radioactive fallout from Japan.

Under Ecosystem, the members recommended technical assistance be provided to DFW data staff and to biological staff in identification of corals and other fish habitat, so they would be able to collect quality data, as well as to process and disseminate collected information for public consumption.

The members also recommended a study be performed on the impacts of runoff on the ecosystem.

Under Indigenous Rights, the members recommended the federal government allow the indigenous people of the CNMI a limited cultural take on green sea turtle.

9. Public Comment

There was no public comment

10. Other Business

Ogumoro reported that NMFS and FWS will now be visiting the islands to conduct public hearings and solicit information on the proposal to delist green sea turtle in Hawaii. The green sea turtles were not delisted in Hawaii, and status of the green sea turtles in the Marianas was elevated from threatened to endangered.

The public hearing in the CNMI will most likely be in July.

10. Recommendations to the Council

The Marianas Archipelago Advisory Panel, CNMI Members, made the following recommendations:

Regarding Research Priorities, the CNMI AP:

- 1. Recommended the Council include a tagging project for skipjack.**
- 2. Recommended the Council include projects that provide technical assistance for local fishery agency personnel.**

Regarding Bottomfish Reporting, the CNMI AP:

- 3. Recommended the Council request NMFS clarify the issue of reporting all bottomfish versus only commercial bottomfish to avoid confusion amongst fishermen.**

Regarding Ecosystems and Habitat, the CNMI AP:

- 4. Recommended a study be performed to determine why ciguatera is common in certain groupers caught in northern islands but not in the same species caught around Saipan. This would also help the CNMI understand the possible impacts of military activities and dredging and/or bombing may have on the occurrence of ciguatera.**

- 5. Recommended the Council request NMFS to provide technical assistance to DFW data and biological staff in identification of corals and other fish habitat, so the agency is able to collect quality data, as well as to process and disseminate collected information for public consumption.**
- 6. Recommended the Council request NMFS conduct a study to look at the impacts of runoff on the fishery ecosystem.**

Regarding Pelagic Fisheries, the CNMI AP:

- 7. Recommended the Council request NMFS conduct a study to determine the level of mercury in tuna being caught in the CNMI and the impacts of the radioactive fallout from Japan.**

Regarding Indigenous Rights, the CNMI AP:

- 8. Recommended the Council request the federal government allow the indigenous people of the CNMI a limited cultural take on green sea turtle.**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.