
Federal Managers Present Gov. Torres with \$250K for Fisheries Training, Recommend Bottomfish Catch Limits and Other CNMI and Protected Species Measures

GARAPAN, COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (23 October 2018) The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council opened its 174th meeting yesterday in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) with the presentation of a check for \$250,000 to Gov. Ralph Torres and Department of Lands and Natural Resources Secretary Anthony Benavente.

The funds stem from the 2017 bigeye fishing agreement between the Commonwealth and Hawaii longline vessels.

In presenting the check, Council Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds said to Gov. Torres that “the funds will be used to implement a bottomfish training and fishing demonstration project, which would then lead hopefully to purchase of a vessel to help with your fishery development,” which Torres had mentioned earlier in his opening

remarks to the Council. “The Council has long recognized your huge fisheries development potential for both domestic and export markets,” Simonds continued. “Bottomfish resources in the CNMI are healthy and abundant, and we look forward to this project that will train the next generation of CNMI fishermen.”

“This \$250K will give us a not just a head start but an excellent opportunity to promote our fishermen and our resources so we can market not just our fish but the way we handle our fish,” Torres responded. “It’s about partnership.”

The Council today also recommended that an annual catch limit (ACL) of 228,000 pounds be set for the CNMI bottomfish species complex for fishing year 2019. The Council noted that the next stock assessment for the fishery is scheduled for review in February 2019 and will provide new information to set the ACLs for fishing year 2020 to 2022. In the period 2015-2017, the estimated average annual catch was 35,696 pounds, suggesting the fishery could harvest seven times its recent average catch before exceeding the overfishing limit of 250,000 pounds.



(from right) Council Executive Director Kitty M. Simonds presents \$250K check to Gov. Ralph Torres accompanied by CNMI Senate President Arnold Palacios, Council Acting Chair John Gourley of CNMI and CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources Secretary Anthony Benavente.

Among other CNMI fishery issues taken up by the Council were community concerns about the pre-positioning ships anchored off Saipan's shores. The Council will assist its Advisory Panel in the CNMI to facilitate a meeting with the military liaison and the CNMI government to communicate these concerns, which include damage to habitat and displacement of fishermen, among others. The Council will also assist the CNMI Advisory Panel to develop projects to improve harbors and the marina on Rota and Tinian and dredge Sugar Dock on Saipan. The Council will also request that the US Coast Guard work with Tinian to repair its harbor range/entrance lights. During the public comment period, CNMI Advisory Panel member Diego Blanco noted that fishermen have also not been compensated by the military for displacement from the fishing grounds around Farallon de Medinilla.

Regarding protected species, the Council recommended that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), in coordination with the Council and the Hawaii longline fishery participants, enhance outreach and training efforts to ensure proper application of existing seabird mitigation measure requirements on Hawaii longline vessels. The Council also recommended that NMFS support research and development of seabird mitigation methods to replace blue-dyed bait, with high priority placed on designing locally appropriate tori (streamer) lines.

The Council also expressed concern about Endangered Species Act listing petitions that use climate change or ocean acidification as the primary reason to justify the listing of threatened and endangered species. NMFS reported at the meeting that the review of petitions are ongoing for cauliflower coral and giant clams and that climate change is one of the primary reasons given to justify the coral petition.

The Council will continue its meeting today at the Fiesta Resort and Spa on Saipan in the CNMI and Oct. 26 and 27 at the Hilton at Tumon, Guam, pending typhoon Yutu, which is expected to hit Saipan on Thursday. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, the Council has authority over fisheries seaward of state waters of Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, the CNMI and the US Pacific Remote Islands. For complete agendas and background materials on the meeting, go to www.wpcouncil.org/category/upcoming-council-and-advisory-body-meetings or contact the Council at info.wpcouncil@noaa.gov or (808) 522-8220.

Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council: Secretary of Commerce appointees from nominees selected by American Samoa, CNMI, Guam and Hawaii governors: John Gourley, Micronesian Environmental Services (CNMI) (acting chair); Michael Duenas, Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Guam) (vice chair); Dean Sensui, film producer (Hawaii) (vice chair); Archie Soliai, StarKist (American Samoa) (vice chair); Michael Goto, United Fishing Agency (Hawaii); Christinna Lutu-Sanchez, commercial fisherman (American Samoa); Edwin Watamura (Hawaii). Designated state officials: Raymond Roberto, CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources; Suzanne Case, Hawaii Department of Land & Natural Resources; Matt Sablan, Guam Department of Agriculture; Henry Sesepasra, American Samoa Department of Marine & Wildlife Resources. Designated federal officials (voting): Michael Tosatto, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office. Designated federal officials (non-voting): RADM Kevin Lunday, USCG 14th District; Michael Brakke, US Department of State; Brian Peck, USFWS.

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