



**Mariana Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan
Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee Meeting Report**

Friday, March 2, 2012

Fiesta Resort

Garapan, Saipan

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Chairman Arnold Palacios opened the CNMI REAC meeting calling for introductions around the table.

2. Status of 2011 REAC Recommendations

Regarding Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning, the Council sponsored a CMSP workshop in Hawaii inviting members of the CNMI community to participate. The workshop was held in August in coordination with NMFS PIRO. Several individuals were selected from the CNMI, Guam, Hawaii and American Samoa to participate in the workshop so that the island communities will understand the process.

Regarding the U.S. Military presence in CNMI, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council assist CNMI with developing a more formal discussion with the military on future plans for FDM. The Council continues to engage with the military to discuss issues regarding live fire ranges and closures in and around the Marianas. The military has increased the closed area around FDM and continues to notify the community when live fire practice will be occurring. The Council is trying to improve coordination communication between the military, the Council, and the governments of Guam and CNMI.

Regarding the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council inquire with the Federal government on the status of the visitor's center and that it assist CNMI with finding funding for the center. The CNMI has written heads of federal agencies inquiring about this issue. Acting DLNR Secretary, Arnold Palacios, wrote a letter dated January 20, 2012 to Susan White, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services; Michael Tosatto, NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office; and Dr. Sam Pooley, Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, to provide information on the 2 million dollars appropriated for the monument activities. Mr. Palacios provided an overview on how the Council process can contribute to the marine monument through the Monument Advisory Committee. They had the first informal meeting in February and the formal meeting will be in June to determine the term of reference and determine the approach on how to deal with the monument issues. A question was raised regarding the visitor center for the marine national monument. DFW was assigned to be lead agency to deal with this project. Mr. Palacios provided the status where they are revising the scope of work and are trying to determine the possible location of the visitor center (tentatively the lighthouse). DFW requested for a no-cost extension. DFW is trying to streamline the project by placing the visitor center in a location where it would benefit the community and there is already an existing structure. If the structural survey of the lighthouse proves that the existing structure can't be used then the proposal will be changed because the cost of repair (survey,

construction, permitting) will increase. There is a long delay due to the austerity issue and also the long list of requirements (archaeological, zoning, and permitting).

Regarding the NMFS Bio-sampling Project in the CNMI, the CNMI REAC recommended the Council request NMFS to expand the bio-sampling project to include fish from all of CNMI and provide the resources to do so. The Council has contracted a local company to do a bio-sampling program in the CNMI. The company is working closely with DFW and the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) on this project since it started last year. The company representative and a representative from PIFSC will be discussing some of their findings later during this meeting.

Regarding ACLs and Catch Shares, the Council meeting specified annual catch limits (ACL) for federally managed species in the US Pacific Islands including the CNMI. The ACL applies to fish caught in waters 3-200 from shore. Because the ACLs are unrealistically low due to monitoring limitations that led to significant underestimates of catches and insufficient or non-existent biological assessments, the Council directed the SSC to revisit this issue and reiterated the urgent need to improve fishery data collection in all island areas.

Regarding Fishery Development in the CNMI, the Council provided information on the fishing techniques and equipment suitable for the troll fisheries in CNMI. The Longline fishery, marketing and shipping studies have not been conducted. Development of a directed shark fishery is hindered by legislation.

Regarding MCPs, the next Marine Conservation Plan will be due in 2014. The Council's coordinator will assist DLNR in conducting scoping meetings to develop a new plan for Council's approval. The meetings will take place throughout the CNMI.

Arnold Palacios provided an overview of the Marine Conservation Plan and how it provides funding for the CNMI. Mr. Palacios expounded on the importance of the Marine Conservation Plan and how the committee can provide input on the different proposals

3. Overview of REAC

Paul Dalzell provided a brief overview of the origin and function of the Regional Ecosystem Advisory Committee. This committee was borne out from the need to manage the coastal marine resources on an ecosystem based approach. Different agencies are encouraged to work together addressing issues within their jurisdiction that contribute in the conservation and management of the coastal marine resources.

4. Community Marine Management Forum

A. Military Activities

i. Military Closures Impacting CNMI Fishing Grounds

ii. Report on Military Activities to Engage the Local Agencies and Community

JGPO was not available to report to the REAC. Mr. Richard Seman provided an update on the military closures impacting CNMI fishing grounds. Surface closures are 0-10 mile and areal closures are 0-3. The military is planning to extend the closures to 0-12 for both the surface and area. A meeting was held at the Governor's office where oppositions to the closure extension.

The military stood their ground and would not compromise despite the opposition. Recent exercises have increase in frequency compounds the area closures. Mr. Seman suggested supporting the territory in developing infrastructures to support local fisheries. The military took note of the suggestion and would be calling a follow up meeting but did not materialize on the February 2, 2012. The committee members discussed the difficulty of accessing the areas around FDM and other northern islands because of the increase in the closure areas and frequency of the military use of the live fire ranges.

B. Update on the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

i. Report on Monument Advisory Committee

ii. Proposed Monument Fishing Regulations

Eric Kingma presented the options for the proposed Monument fishing regulations. A REAC member asked where does fine go when there are violations in the monument. If the violations occurred in the Marianas Monument the fines will go back to the Mariana Islands and fund the projects under the FEPs. Another comment was for the lack of public notice for the meetings related to the monuments particularly in other smaller islands. In addition, the format of the recent meeting by the management team of the Monument was not conducive for the local people. They were not allowed to bring forward verbal comments and the comments were supposed to be written down. It was hard for the older members of the communities to express themselves.

5. Information Needs to Manage Fisheries through Annual Catch Limits

Trianni asked about using different data sets to establish ACLs; Maloy said can if its complementary to the catch data; Dalzell said all the data available wasn't used and it good be done, but the PIFSC needs to see how these different programs can be meshed together.

Palacios asked what the REAC thinks about developing complementary regs for ACLs if they get their waters back? Trianni said that it would be wise to utilize all available data sets to come up with the best estimates.

A. Report on Bio-Sampling Program

Mr. John Gourley presented on the summary of the flow fish in the Marianas spear fishery. The fish flow ranges from direct sales to consumers or through retail via restaurants and market before reaching the end users. Mr. Gourley also presented the overview and initial results of the BioSampling Program. This program fills some of the data gaps in the Creel Survey Program by sufficiently documenting fishery information from the commercial night time spear fishery. The life history aspect of the Program may provide important information to the benefit of the L-50 Campaign.

B. Summary Report of Data Improvement Workshop Findings

Marlowe Sabater presented a summary of the Fishery Data Collection Improvement Workshop. A REAC participant suggested to compare landing between American Samoa, Guam, CNMI and Hawaii.

C. CNMI Data Program Review Initiative

Arnold Palacios summarized the steps that DFW is going to take in order to improve on the data collection.

D. CNMI Coral Reef Research Plan

Fran Castro provided an overview of the coral reef monitoring project in CNMI. DEQ is conducting reforestation, run-off abatement by drainage improvement, monitoring of watershed (water quality and coral reef), road pavement, L-50 Campaign, Size matter campaign. They are developing an interactive coral reef learning website to enhance learning of coral reef conservation.

The L-50 campaign is useful as a management tool if the Saipan fishery is experiencing recruitment overfishing. It is a good education and outreach initiative but caution has to be taken when it will be applied as a size limit regulation. L-50 based management should not interfere with the traditional fishing particularly harvest of juvenile rabbitfish.

E. Data Collection – Mandating Participation

Arnold Palacios reported that legislation has been forwarded for consideration to mandate all vendors and fish sellers to participate in the data collection program.

F. Discussion and Recommendations

The REAC discussed issues and made recommendations. The lack of stock assessment for most management unit species generated serious concern especially when establishing annual catch limits.

6. Communities and Traditional Fishing Practices

A. First Stewards Climate Change Symposium

Sylvia Spalding reported on the initiative for the first stewards climate change symposium.

B. Guihan Pacifiku-Offshore Aquaculture in CNMI

Gary Sword reported on the new Guihan Pacifiku Aquaculture Group.

C. Report on Tinan/Rota Community workshops

Richard Seman reported on the Rota community workshops. Arnold Palacios reported on the Tinian Community workshop.

D. Teachers Workshop

Sylvia Spalding reported on the Teachers' workshops in CNMI.

7. Upcoming Meetings/Workshops

A. Synopsis of Upcoming 153rd Council Meeting Actions

Eric Kingma gave a report on the issues at the 153rd Council meeting.

B Western & Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

Eric Kingma reported on proposed management measures for the WCPFC.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

Arnold Palacios called for recommendations and discussion from the REAC committee.

2012 REAC RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Recognizing the importance of local involvement in science and management, the REAC recommends that PIFSC and PIRO involve Northern Mariana College, to the extent possible, in the various research and community activities to build local capacity in CNMI.**
- 2. Regarding the military closures impacting CNMI fishing grounds, the REAC recommends the Department of Defense conduct a public forum and engage the local communities to determine amicable solution to fishing ground access particularly setting a fixed timeframe to which the area is open to fishing.**
- 3. The REAC further recommends that the Department of Defense provide compensation to local communities that are directly impacted by the closures either through direct compensation or through fishery infrastructure development to access areas beyond the potentially inaccessible traditional fishing grounds.**
- 4. Regarding the data issues related to ACL specification, the REAC recommends utilizing the BioSampling Program data to improve the future specification of ACLs particularly on species that have underestimated landings from the night time spear fishery.**
- 5. The REAC further recommends that DFW takes the lead to work with NOAA-PIRO and PIFSC to utilize information from the BioSampling Program and DFW Life History Projects to improve the L-50 estimates.**
- 6. Regarding improving future ACL specifications, the REAC recommends that the Pacific Island Fisheries Science Center prioritize improving the data collection programs in the Western Pacific and conduct stock assessments for species that are highly targeted in the CNMI fisheries.**
- 7. Regarding non-commercial fishing regulations in the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the REAC endorses the SSC's 109th meeting recommendations on limits of cash reimbursements, bag limits, and a timeframe on traditional indigenous fishing, and further, supports maintaining the Council's existing recommendations related to fishing in the Islands Unit.**