

**CNMI Island Report
159th Council Meeting
Saipan, CNMI
Fiesta Resort & Spa Hotel
March 17 – 18, 2014**

The purpose of this island report is to provide resource managers, scientist, constituencies and the general public the most recent fisheries progress information from the CNMI. This report will provide a broad look at the fishery related activities that have occurred over the past few months. The island report entails activities performed by the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) from the last Council meeting.

FISHERIES RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Checklist of CNMI Fishes (Funding source: Sport Fish Restoration):

- Additional information on new recorded species was obtained from collaborating organizations within the CNMI. Images of *Ostichthys archiepiscopus* (Deep bottom Soldierfish), *Naso thynnoides*, and an uncommon sample of *Naso unicornis* (Tataga) with three peduncular spines.
- Sampling effort for this project will be increased with the upcoming NOAA PIFSC “Insular Reef Fish & Bottomfish Bio-Sampling” crews in June.

Evaluation of Management Measures (Funding source: Sport Fish Restoration):

- Updated data for importation into central database.
- Submitted manuscript as Comments in Coral Reefs, entitled "Oversimplifying fisheries: A comment on Houk et al. (2012)", as a Comment in *Coral Reefs*. Our Comments address critical errors, oversights, and distortions found in Houk et al. (2012) that negate scientifically meaningful results from their regional comparison of fish markets across Micronesia and representation of CNMI's fisheries.

Monitoring and Assessment of Marine Sanctuaries (Funding source: Sport Fish Restoration):

- FRS staff are working on procuring HOBO Water Temperature Data Loggers and HOBO Dissolved Oxygen Data Loggers to monitor lagoon environmental parameters to help monitor climate change
- Plans to conduct surveys within the MPA's around Saipan have been postponed until the following year. The FRS has shifted focus towards other pertinent projects.
- A database system for the MPA data is being finalized for the Fisheries Research Section. This program would improve fisheries independent data storage and analyses.
- A draft manuscript for the Sasanhaya Bay Fish reserve is being developed. An analysis of information collected between 2007 and 2013 will be made to determine changes in resources within the MPA.

Fish Tagging Study within and around Managaha Marine Conservation Area (Funding source: Sport Fish Restoration):

- Procurement of fish sutures was initiated.
- The final pieces of the recirculating aquarium system were procured.
- Planning for integrating additional types of tagging including t-bar tags, coded wire tags, and elastomer was initiated.
- Fish sampling is commencing to perfect capture techniques and to use to practice surgical techniques.
- Test receivers were monitored for longevity. Several of the test receivers were missing and new methods for securing them to anchors were discussed.
- 5 additional concrete anchors were made and 10 small sand anchors were procured for receiver deployment.

Comprehensive Inshore Creel Survey (Funding source: Western Pacific Regional Management Council, Sport Fish Restoration, NOAA WestPacFIN, NOAA PIRO):

Saipan (Sport Fish Restoration)

- Still receiving funding through SFR funds. At least 15 surveys per month are being done to estimate fishing pressure and CPUE within the western lagoon of Saipan. Between 3-6 surveys per month are being conducted on the eastern shores (Laolao Bay to Coral Ocean Point Beach).
- Positive interactions with fishermen are increasing due to a new incentive/outreach effort on Saipan. Raffle tickets are handed out to interviewed fishermen along with “iFish responsibly” T shirts and hooks (if available). These items have been received very well and are commonly requested for by fishermen and non-fishermen alike.

Tinian (Western Pacific Regional Management Council)

- Ben Muna (DLNR) and Ian Cruz (Mayor’s Office) were identified as the candidates to conduct the creel survey. A week long training was conducted on Saipan in August which focused on fish identification, interacting with fishermen, taking measurements, estimating catch and creel survey protocol/procedures.
- Tinian creel survey route and vantage points were investigated and need to be finalized. Operational equipment have been acquired to include field gear and uniforms. A vehicle was allocated to Tinian DLNR for exclusive use in Tinian Creel Survey Project.

Rota (NOAA PIRO)

- DFW participation in this project has stalled due to pending authorization from federal granting agencies. Progress has been made in the amendment of DFW grant proposal to allow Saipan DFW to assist in Tinian and Rota Creel projects.
- A press release soliciting interested individuals to conduct the Rota Creel Survey was advertised. Little interest was generated among the Rota population. Data collection was to begin with Saipan individuals (Micronesian Environmental Services and DFW (when approved)) travelling to Rota to conduct 3-5 surveys every 6 weeks until someone from Rota was identified to take over.

Northern Islands (NI) bottomfish sampling (NOAA WestPacFIN)

- Sampling of NI fishing vessels is difficult because of the lack of communication between fishermen and DFW. Return day and times are often changed resulting in last minute notification of DFW enforcement and non-notification of Fisheries staff.
- Activities from this project are currently not covered by any grant making it difficult to justify DFW involvement.

Fish Life History Evaluation (Funding source: Sport Fish Restoration, NOAA WestPacFIN):

- The Division's fish life history program has begun sampling 2 new species: Triple Tail Wrasse (*Cheilinus trilobatus*) and Blue Barred Parrotfish (*Scarus ghobban*).
- Analysis of the life history information from Yellowtail Kalikali (*Pristipomoides auricilla*), Redlip Parrotfish (*Scarus rubroviolaceus*) and Humphead Wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*) is continuing.
- Preparations for publication of data from previously collected fish orange-spined unicornfish *Naso lituratus* and violet soldierfish *Myripristis violacea* was conducted.
- DFW is continually collaborating with Micronesian Environmental Services and their biosampling program to collect and process life history information on Bluespine unicornfish/Tataga (*Naso unicornis*), Yellowtail Emperor/Mafute (*Lethrinus atkinsoni*), Orange-striped Emperor/Mafute (*Lethrinus obsoletus*) Dashdot goatfish/Satmoneti (*Parupaneus barbarinus*), Yellow-striped Goatfish/Satmoneti (*Mulloidichthys flavolineatus*), Fork tailed rabbitfish/Hiteng (*Siganus argenteus*), .
- There is an increasing need to place greater focus on life history characteristics of nearshore reef fish species targeted for local commercial markets, however the SFR does not allow for funds to be used for this purpose. The Fisheries Research Section therefore wishes to work more closely with the Council in targeting these nearshore reef species for research on understanding fishery dynamics, biomass and life history characteristics.
- Meetings were held with Bob Humphreys (PIFSC NOAA) about upcoming Life History research cruise. Logistics of sampling were discussed and continue to be worked out.

FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Fish Aggregating Devices (FADS) (Funding source: Sport Fish Restoration):

- Aquatic Education & Outreach Coordinator and FAD program manager are working on producing a short social survey to capture Saipan fishermen's knowledge and use of FADs
- FRS staff replaced the navigation light for FAD LL after it was reported defective by a fisherman
- USACE approved new FAD site DE northwest of Rota Harbor; USCG permit application for FAD DE is still in the review process
- A contract to deploy FADs CC, DD, EE, and FF has been awarded to Diversified Ventures, Inc for \$19K and will take place in Spring 2014
- A purchase order for ropes has been awarded to on-island vendor and shipment is still in process
- Eight new FAD buoys were fabricated and delivered to FRS warehouse in December 2013
- FADs program manager presented on CNMI FADs at the annual APASEEM conference

All-Other Activities within Fisheries Research Section

- Reviewed permits for Shark and Ray touch tank business.
- Collaborated with Tasi Tours for the installation of a jellyfish barrier.

- Developed and received notification of funding a tagging project in collaboration with NOAA PIFSC and fishermen in the CNMI.
- Reviewed and provided comments on the Military MITT EIS
- RISC Meeting – participated in assessment and discussion of invasive species

BOATING ACCESS PROJECT

- Completed and forwarded a draft BA 5year Plan Proposal to the acting director for review.
- Continued to maintain the boat launching ramps by removing accumulated sand/corals and debris whenever needed.
- An as-build plan for the Fishing Base Right-of-Way and Parking Stall is about 90% completion, waiting for the request to transfer funds to Professional Services sub-account. The transfer request is for the procurement of a Perculation Testing services as per DECRQ request to finalize the ponding basin Calculation.
- Collaborated with concern boaters and permitting agency on the temporary maintenance dredging at Sugar Dock.
- Traveled to Tinian and Rota on Jan. 2014. BA PL conducted a thorough assessment at the facility and specially the floating dock system. PL discovered massive damages at the Rota Floating Dock. As per Tinian, certain concerns were discovered as well. PL submitted a purchase order to do repair work at both facilities.
- Continued the monthly maintenance work (bush cutting, garbage disposal and water blasting) for Tinian and Rota Marina Facilities.
- A purchase order for repair and maintenance work at both Tinian and Rota had been approved to procure manpower services to do needed urgent repairs.
- BA PL traveled to Tinian on Feb. 2014 to oversee the repair work. Replaced the rubber hinges at Fingers #1 to #4 and #6 to #9, also removed and replaced the broken nailers beneath the main dock deckings, removed and replace broken bumper boards, fixed bumpers. Welding works were performed on concerned areas at the stiffarm and the railings. Repainted the stiffarm brackets, fences, sign board, and the railings to upkeep the facility.
- Completed the removal of Fingers #7 and #8 at Rota West Harbor Marina. Both fingers were placed on land to conduct further assessment on the structure. Completed the replacement of the rubber hinges at fingers #2, #3, and the main docking area. Also, an ongoing work at the gangway and the repainting of the railings were still in progress. BA PL will travel to Rota next month to assess damages at Fingers #7 and #8, make final determination if fingers were repairable.

SMILING COVE MARINE DOCK FACILITY

- Daily maintenance of Smiling Cove Marina dock facility.
- Routine grounds upkeep (mow, bush cut, air blower, trash pick up, etc.)
- Continue enforcing Marina Rules and Regulations
- Issue delinquency notices, update tenants lease agreement

CNMI SEA TURTLE PROGRAM UPDATE

- One adult and fifty-six immature turtles were tagged during in-water surveys of Saipan, Rota, and Tinian between November 14, 2013 and February 13, 2014; of these, 54 were green turtles, three were hawksbill, and eight were recaptures.
- No in-water surveys were executed during the month of October due to small craft advisories resulting from heavy typhoon activity. For the first time since in-water surveys began in 2006, a satellite tag was deployed on an adult male green turtle (SCL: 85.6 cm) by DLNR STP staff. The turtle's movements along with six other sub-adult turtles satellite tagged last quarter are currently being tracked by Dr. Todd Jones of NOAA PIFSC.
- The CNMI STP participated in a special joint project with Dr. Jennifer Keller of the National Institute of Standards and Technology to take blood and scute samples from Saipan and Tinian turtles for contaminant analysis and submission in a marine environmental specimen bank based in Charleston, SC. Twenty green and four hawksbill turtles were sampled for blood and scute scrapings as part of this project.
- On Saipan the first nesting turtle of the season thus far emerged and nested on Obyan beach on February 12, 2014. Staff performed nocturnal surveys and found that this turtle is a recapture having originally been flipper tagged in 2007, she returned to nest in 2010, and has once again returned this year. Staff also plan to deploy a satellite transmitter on this turtle upon her 6th nesting emergence this season.
- Ten strandings were recorded during this time period; six of these cases were juvenile green turtle carapace confiscations by DLNR-DFW Enforcement officers. One juvenile hawksbill turtle was recovered live but severely disfigured and entangled in marine debris (nylon rope). One juvenile green turtle was recovered floating dead, necropsied, and tissue samples shipped to USGS NWC for diagnosis of death. One juvenile green turtle was recovered by STP staff during in-water surveys when it was found with rubber ties binding its foreflippers together from an unsuccessful poaching attempt. The turtle was untied, tagged, measured, and released. The final case involved the recovery of bones and scutes from a juvenile green turtle wrapped in clothing and discarded on a Saipan beach.
- Turtle Program staff continue education outreach efforts and have presented to a total of 574 high school and elementary school students on Saipan during this period. Additionally, staff have been designing and drafting newspaper "turtle trivia" ads and bumper stickers for future distribution as outreach tools.