

# NOAA Fisheries Service

Pacific Islands Regional Office

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## REPORT TO THE 162ND 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 161st Council meeting.

### RULEMAKING

On October 28, 2014, PIRO published in the *Federal Register* a final rule implementing the management framework described in Amendment 7 to the Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for specifying catch and effort limits and accountability measures for pelagic fisheries in American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI). Using the framework, the final rule also specified a catch limit of 2,000 mt of longline caught bigeye tuna for each U.S. territory in 2014. View the *Federal Register* notice and supporting documents here: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2012-0178>

On December 2, 2014, NMFS issued a final rule (79 FR 71327) to implement a decision of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) that restricts the use of fish aggregating devices (FADs) by U.S. purse seine vessels in the western and central Pacific Ocean in 2015. View the *Federal Register* notice and supporting documents here: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0115-0006>

On January 14, 2015, PIRO published in the *Federal Register* a proposed rule and request for comments to implement the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument Expansion. The intent of this rule is to implement fishery management measures required by Presidential Proclamation 9173. The comment period ended on February 13, 2015, and PIRO is preparing the final rule. View the *Federal Register* notice and supporting documents here: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0142>

On January 20, 2015, NMFS published in the *Federal Register* a proposed rule to revise the guidelines for National Standards (NS) 1, 3, and 7 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The proposal include 12 specific revisions to improve and streamline NS1 guidelines, address concerns raised during the implementation of annual catch limits and accountability measures, and provide flexibility within current statutory limits to address fishery

management issues. View the *Federal Register* notice and supporting documents here: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2012-0059>

On February 19, 2015, NMFS issued a final rule (80 FR 8807) to implement decisions of the WCPFC for fishing restrictions on the oceanic whitetip shark, the whale shark and the silky shark in the western and central Pacific Ocean. View the *Federal Register* notice and supporting documents here: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0086-0045>

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

### **Sustainable Fisheries**

PIRO continues to provide protected species workshop (PSW) training to the longline fishing communities. In 2014, PIRO provided PSW training for 255 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. On January 23, 2015, PIRO trained 15 observer candidates in protected species handling and release, followed by a sea turtle dehooking exercise aboard a local longline vessel.

PIRO continues to update Information on fish catch limits in Pacific Island fisheries at [www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD\\_regs\\_3.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_regs_3.html).

PIRO continues to provide up-to-date information about interactions between the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery and sea turtles at [www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD\\_turtleint.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_turtleint.html).

In July 2014, NMFS listed the Indo-West Pacific scalloped hammerhead shark distinct population segment (DPS) as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and in September 2014, NMFS listed 20 species of reef-building corals as threatened under the ESA. These two listings triggered the need to consult under 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 October 6, 2014, NMFS determined the management and operation of fisheries managed under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pacific Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region would have no effect on the ESA-listed reef-building corals.
- On January 16, 2015, NMFS determined that the management and operation of the fisheries managed under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIA FEP) would have no effect on the ESA-listed reef-building corals.
- On January 20, 2015, NMFS determined that the continued authorization of the PRIA FEP fisheries is not likely to adversely affect the Indo-west Pacific scalloped hammerhead shark DPS.

Other consultations, including the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery, American Samoa FEP and Mariana FEP fisheries, are ongoing or in preparation.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), PIRO completed a categorical exclusion covering the Council's grant application for 5-year base operations and programmatic activities. Some of the proposed Council projects will require additional NEPA review once project details are available.

In coordination with Council staff and NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), PIRO released the *Pacific Islands Region Electronic Reporting and Electronic Monitoring Implementation Plan*. This plan, dated January 2015, guides the use of electronic reporting (ER) and electronic monitoring (EM) for fisheries management in the Pacific Islands region. NMFS and the Council are currently testing ER for fishermen and observers in the Hawaii longline and U.S. purse seine fisheries, and plan to expand this technology to the American Samoa longline fishery in 2016. The EM-ER plan is available at [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/pdfs/2015\\_PIR\\_Electronic\\_Reporting\\_Monitoring\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/pdfs/2015_PIR_Electronic_Reporting_Monitoring_Plan.pdf).

In February 2015, NMFS released a new policy to serve America's 11 million recreational and non-commercial saltwater fishermen and the communities that rely on them. The policy – developed with input from recreational fishing and boating communities, conservation organizations, and managers across the nation -- reflects fishermen's voices on existing and emerging concerns, including public access, resource stewardship, regulatory education, science innovation, and better lines of communication between state and federal rulemakers with the community. View the policy here: [www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/policy/index.html](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/management/recreational/policy/index.html).

PIRO is reviewing and ranking 35 applications for Saltonstall-Kennedy funding. The technical review will be complete by March 13, 2015, and will result in a ranked list of projects recommended for funding. NMFS will consult the councils regarding the initial rankings prior to a constituent panel meeting the week of April 13, 2015, in St. Petersburg, FL. The constituent panel recommend projects to fund, and will forward their final rankings to the NMFS Assistant Administrator (the selecting official) for final funding determinations. NMFS has scheduled funding to be available in May 2015.

PIRO is developing a statement of work for hiring a consultant to develop a NEPA analysis of offshore aquaculture in the region. The analysis will support to Council's recommendation to amend the FEPs to include permitting and reporting provisions for aquaculture in the Federal waters. PIRO will keep the Council updated on its progress.

PIRO is also developing the NEPA analysis necessary to support Kampachi Farms application for a coral reef ecosystem special permit for the third phase of its offshore floating pen project "Vellela Delta."

PIRO is processing renewals of Hawaii longline limited access, Western Pacific (WP) general longline, and WP receiving vessel permits -- these permits expire on March 3, 2015. PIRO mailed renewal reminders and online renewal instructions to permit holders in mid-January. This is the second year that PIRO is offering online renewals of Hawaii longline permits. As of mid-February, PIRO processed 89 renewals, of which 25 were online.

Permit holders may download Marine Mammal Authorization Program certificates and report forms from the PIRO Permits website if they need replacement certificates.

### Pacific Islands Fishing Permits

(As of February 20, 2105. Current permit status, applications, and other information are available at [www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD\\_permits\\_index.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_permits_index.html).)

<b>Permit</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b><i>Pelagic</i></b>	
Hawaii longline (limited entry)	141 (of 164 available)
American Samoa longline (limited entry)	48 (of 60 available)
Western Pacific general longline	1
Receiving vessel	31
PRIA troll & handline	7
Pelagic squid jig	0
<b><i>Hawaii</i></b>	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	4
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious coral	1
Crustaceans	2 lobster, 5 shrimp
<b><i>American Samoa</i></b>	
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious coral	0
Crustaceans	1 lobster, 1 shrimp
<b><i>Mariana Islands</i></b>	
Guam large vessel bottomfish	2
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	6
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious coral	0
Crustaceans	0 lobster, 0 shrimp
<b><i>Pacific Remote Island Areas</i></b>	
Bottomfish	2
Special coral reef ecosystem	0
Precious corals	0
Crustaceans	0 lobster, 0 shrimp
<b><i>Monuments</i></b>	
Non-commercial and recreational charter	0

### Protected Resources

#### Hawaiian Monk Seal Critical Habitat Proposed Revision (ESA)

NMFS expects to publish a final rule revising Hawaiian monk seal critical habitat in 2015. This rulemaking was initiated in 2008 in response to a petition from Center for Biological Diversity, 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 MHI

and extending critical habitat in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (76 FR 32026). Public comment periods were open for 150 days, and six public hearings were held. NMFS continues to consider all public comments received, and is working to ensure that any new information is incorporated and significant issues are addressed in the final rule.

#### Eight Reef Fish Species Petition to List (ESA)

NMFS expects to publish a 12-month finding for the orange clownfish (*Amphiprion percula*) in 2015. On September 14, 2012, NMFS received a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity (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). NMFS has initiated a status review for the orange clownfish. Information on all aspects of its behavior, biology, threats, and demographics was solicited until November 3, 2014.

#### Corals (ESA)

A final rule listing 20 coral species as threatened under the ESA was published on September 10, 2014. Of the 20 listed species, 15 are found in the Indo-Pacific, and five in the Caribbean. Of the 15 listed Indo-Pacific species, only seven species are confirmed in U.S. waters thus far: six species in American Samoa, and three species each in Guam, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), and PRIA, as explained on the PIRO Corals webpage and linked species descriptions at [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd\\_listed\\_coral.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_listed_coral.html). On January 13, 2015, an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) was published soliciting information to assist NMFS in evaluating whether 4(d) protective regulations are necessary and advisable for the conservation of these species. During the public comment period, webinars, conference calls, and meetings were held with Territorial Government representatives, Territory-based federal agency representatives, and other interested parties. More information about the ANPR and instructions on how to submit public comments can be found at <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2014-0158-0001>

#### Green Turtle Status Review (ESA)

NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) have completed a status review on green sea turtles and we anticipate a 12-month finding to be published in early 2015. On February 15, 2012, NMFS and USFWS received a petition from the Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs to classify the green sea turtle in Hawaii as a DPS and delist the DPS. On August 1, 2012, NMFS and USFWS published a 90-day finding that the petitioners presented substantial scientific and commercial information indicating that petitioned action may be warranted.

#### Humpback Whale Status Review (ESA)

NMFS has completed a status review on humpback whales and we anticipate a 12-month finding to be published in early 2015. On April 17, 2013, NMFS received a petition from the

Hawaii Fishermen's Alliance for Conservation and Tradition, Inc. to delist the north Pacific population of humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*). After reviewing the petition and information in the files, NMFS determined that the petitioned action may be warranted and published a positive 90-day finding on August 29, 2013 (78 FR 53391). On February 26, 2014, we received a second petition from the State of Alaska to list the Central North Pacific population of humpback whales as a DPS and delist it. On June 26, 2014, we published a positive 90-day finding on this petition (79 FR 36281) and committed to continuing the status review.

#### Scalloped Hammerhead Shark Next Steps (ESA)

On July 3, 2014, NMFS published a final rule to list 4 DPSs of the scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*) under the ESA. This was in response to a 2011 petition received from WildEarth Guardians and Friends of Animals. Our next step, led by the NMFS Office of Protected Resources, is to determine if proposing critical habitat for these four DPSs (Indo-West Pacific DPS, Eastern Pacific DPS, Eastern Atlantic DPS, and Central & Southwest Atlantic DPS) is prudent and determinable. Additionally, the NMFS Office of Protected Resources is in the early stages of recovery planning for the four listed scalloped hammerhead DPSs.

#### Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team (ESA)

The next Hawaii monk seal recovery team meeting will be held on March 3-4, 2015, in Honolulu. Under the authority of the ESA, PIRO has reconvened the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team with a new organizational structure and revised membership to meet changing needs for Hawaiian monk seal recovery implementation. The team is composed of 12 members who are not representative of any constituency, organization, or affiliation, but were selected for and serve as individuals based on their own knowledge and experience. The team will continue to serve in an advisory capacity to PIRO and will primarily assist with and advise on aspects of the development and implementation of the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Plan and other associated program planning and guidance documents (e.g., new ESA-Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) permit and Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan, etc.). The first meeting of the new team was held on August 27-28, 2014, at Pier 38 in Honolulu. Topics covered during this first meeting included team introductions, orientation to the current Hawaiian monk seal recovery program, discussion of the team's role and tasks, and overarching issues in the draft Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan (see below).

#### Main Hawaiian Islands Hawaiian Monk Seal Management Plan (ESA)

NMFS plans to release a draft of the Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan for public review by mid-2015 and finalize the plan by the end of FY15. The Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team has been reviewing the plan and will discuss it at its March meeting. The Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Plan (2007) directs NMFS to create a Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Monk Seal Management Plan that addresses the full scope of monk seal management needs in the MHI. The MHI Hawaiian Monk Seal Management Plan will serve as a non-regulatory guiding document to the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Program and partners. At the time of the Recovery Plan's revision in 2006-2007, MHI issues had started to grow and were identified as emerging management challenges. However, the team did not have the time or information available to



comprehensively analyze and address the MHI challenges in the Recovery Plan. The team recognized this and instead recommended that NMFS spend time after the Recovery Plan revision to create a separate management plan that meets the MHI-specific management needs. 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. PIRO has and will continue to engage important groups, such as fishermen, ocean safety, law enforcement, partner agency staff, and the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team in the development and finalization of the plan.

#### 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. The FY15, Federal Funding Opportunity Request for Proposals to solicit projects for funding closed February 18, 2015. Selected projects will likely be finalized by May. In FY14, 12 projects received funding. These efforts include sea turtle fishery bycatch mitigation research, sea turtle research and conservation, and community educational outreach and public management projects. 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 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](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_fishing_around_sea_turtles.html).

#### Hawaii False Killer Whale Take Reduction (MMPA)

In December 2014, PIRO, in consultation with the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team, completed a Monitoring Strategy for the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan. The document will guide our evaluation of compliance with and effectiveness of the Plan. The next in-person Team meeting will be held April 29-May 1, 2015, in Honolulu. Information about the Take Reduction Team and Plan, including the Monitoring Strategy, is available online: [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd\\_FKW\\_take\\_reduction\\_team.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_FKW_take_reduction_team.html)

The 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. The Plan includes a "Southern Exclusion Zone" (SEZ), which 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 or 2014, 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, are available on the website listed above.

## **Habitat Conservation Division**

### **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 military build-up activities in the Mariana Islands, and harbor development and/or large scale maintenance dredging projects, are ongoing and may take months or years to complete. Recent successful consultation efforts and outcomes for non-fishing impacts include Navy agreements to change the design footprint of construction of piers and boat ramps, and conducting coral transplantation to minimize impact to EFH coral and sea-grass habitat in Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii. 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 participated 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., refining and improving utilization of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern (HAPC), EFH five-year reviews, formal/informal EFH consultations, EFH source documentation].

PIRO also participated in a Fisheries Habitat Science Prioritization for the Pacific Islands Working Group (with Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and Western Pacific Fisheries Management Council staff), to help identify which fish species/stocks (Management Unit Species) would benefit most from improved habitat science (e.g., improved EFH and/or stock assessments), upon which future funding priorities may be guided.

### **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:

#### **CNMI:**

PIRO managed the ongoing collection of creel data from the island of Rota, coordinated meetings with local agencies to garner comments regarding a possible regulation implementing ESA section 4(d) for the three threatened coral species found within the region, released the CNMI 2013 Fisheries Workshop Summary on the NOAA Coral Reef Information System (CoRIS) website, worked with the U.S. Coast Guard regarding the development of an oil spill response plan, completed analysis and management recommendations from the 2014 Saipan, Tinian and Rota reef resilience study, worked with Department of Defense to explore mitigation alternatives related to impacts proposed within



the CNMI Joint Military Training (CJMT) draft EIS, and represented the Pacific region both on NOAA's National EFH Coordinators calls and Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) meetings.

#### Guam:

Efforts are progressing with the Guam Habitat Blueprint Focus Area Site at the Manell-Geus Watershed in Merizo. Baseline ecological monitoring began with a team from PIFSC and PIRO, funded by NMFS Science and Technology, with additional support from the Guam Long-Term Monitoring Program. Data were collected within the Achang Marine Preserve, along the Cocos Lagoon Forereef and inside the Lagoon. PIRO continued to work with The Nature Conservancy and University of Guam researchers to get additional baseline ecological monitoring sites established as well as compile existing data in preparation for meetings with the community. PIRO completed the pilot watershed restoration projects in Manell and Geus and was awarded another \$125,000 from CRCP to expand efforts.

A significant Algal Bloom continued along the southeastern reef flats and in Cocos Lagoon (tentatively identified as a *Chaetomorpha* species). PIRO worked with local partners to monitor this bloom and develop management strategies to address it.

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". PIRO is finalizing a geodatabase of corals listed under the ESA to help track sightings of these and other species of local concern.

PIRO continues to support the Mariana Island Area Contingency Plan efforts and is working with the U.S. Coast Guard, Guam Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to gather habitat and response information for the Geographic Response Plans. Efforts also continue to address EFH concerns associated with the Guam Military Build-up Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement as well as other projects proposed in Guam.

#### 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, implementation of management work with the National Park Service in eradicating nitrogen-fixing invasive trees, Tamaligi, and re-planting native trees for stream stabilization within Faga'alu, conducting climate resilience and adaptation outreaches in priority management sites such as Vatia and Aunu'u, coordinating planning meetings for the implementation of the community restoration work in Pala Lagoon, and assisted Le Tausagi, a government environment educators group, in revising its strategy plan. In addition, PIRO coordinated meetings with local resource partners to solicit comments regarding the possible regulation implementing ESA section 4(d) for listed corals, and coordinated logistics and planning with the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, American Samoa Community College-University of Hawaii Sea Grant, and Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center for an Education Day of tours on the NOAA

Ship Hi'ialakai. PIRO also reviewed and provided EFH comments through consultations with federal partners and local applicants on development projects, such as the American Samoa underwater fiber optic project to improve telecommunications, and shoreline protection projects for permits.

#### 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 staff attended the 11<sup>th</sup> regular session of the WCPFC, December 1-5, 2014, in Apia Samoa. Workshops on disproportionate burden as well as management objectives were held prior to the start of the meeting. The WCPFC adopted conservation and management measures (CMMs) on tropical tunas, Pacific bluefin tuna, harvest strategies, sharks, the Commission vessel monitoring system, and revised standards, specifications and procedures for the record of fishing vessels.

PIRO staff attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organization (SPRFMO) and subsidiary body meetings, January 30-31 and February 2-6, 2015, in Auckland, New Zealand. SPRFMO adopted CMMs for jack mackerel, transshipment, and a Commission compliance and monitoring scheme.

### **Observer Program**

The coverage for 2014 for the Hawaii longline deep set fishery was 20.8%, with 271 vessels observed out of 1301 departures. Coverage for the Hawaii longline shallow set fishery was 100%, with 75 departures observed and 36 observed deployments out of California. The coverage for the American Samoa longline fishery was 19.4%, with 19 trips observed out of 98 departures. The recent observer training class ended on February 9, 2015 with 13 graduates.

The coverage for 2015 through February for the Hawaii longline deep set and shallow set fisheries was 19.2% and 100%, respectively, with 26 departures observed and 16 observers deployed out of California. The Observer Program currently has 60 observers, including those serving the American Samoa fishery. The maximum number of observers that will be deployed out of American Samoa is five.

CLS, the contractor for the e-Reporting initiative, sent two programmers to work with the Observer Program staff in the development of the e-reporting tablet. Goals accomplished thus far are:

- Thorium App overview and presentation
- Presentation outlining program goals and phased-timeline
- Fishing operations overview (providing context to forms sequencing)

- Forms breakdown and sequencing

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

The Observer Program participated in the Fifteenth Regional Observer Coordinators Workshop (ROCW) and the Second Parties to the Nauru Agreement Observer Coordinators Meeting in Noumea, New Caledonia, during February 9-14, 2015. One of the main topics of discussion centered on the developing e-reporting effort. The second major topic addressed the Cost Recovery plans initiative that all programs are required to develop.

### **Marine National Monuments Program**

Two videos highlighting features of the Pacific Marine National Monuments, produced by Open Boat films and Sisbro Productions through a NOAA grant, were released in January 2015. The films describe the fragile marine resources found in these protected areas and the efforts of NMFS, USFWS, and territorial partners to safeguard these special places.

Links:

"Our Deepest Waters" at <https://vimeo.com/87202587>

"Marvelous Musical Report" at <https://vimeo.com/101320425>

### **Okeanos Explorer Work**

PIRO and PIFSC staff are participating in planning for the 2015-2017 Okeanos Explorer in the Pacific. Planned 2015 work will include Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Hawaii Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary, and the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (Johnston Atoll). 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.

### **Marianas Trench Marine National Monument**

The 11th Marianas Trench Monument Advisory Council (MTMAC) meeting was convened on December 2, 2014, but cancelled due to lack of a quorum. The meeting is to be rescheduled in early 2015 following confirmation of CNMI membership by Governor Inos, and subsequent NOAA and USFWS approval.

Continued progress is being made to prepare the draft Marianas Trench Marine National Monument management plan in collaboration with USFWS, the MTMAC, and CNMI Government representatives. The draft plan is anticipated to be available for public review spring/summer 2015. Progress is also being made in preparing a memorandum of agreement between the CNMI Government and the federal agencies to convey the 0-3 nm of submerged lands at Farallon de Parajos, Asuncion, and Maug to the CNMI.

The Marianas Trench Monument Advisory Council monument visitor center recommendations report is in the final stages of completion and expected to be forwarded to NOAA and USFWS in April 2015. The MTMAC will make it available to the public with the support of NOAA and USFWS on their websites.

Research interest in the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument continues. The Schmidt Ocean Institute's research vessel *Falkor* returned to conduct remotely operated vehicle dives in the Mariana Trench in November 2014, while NOAA's Pacific Marine Environmental Laboratories (PMEL) completed a month long study of the Monument's Volcanic Unit/Arc of Fire Refuge in December 2014. Both projects relied on the support of many partnering scientists and resulted in several new discoveries, including re-mapping of the Ahyi seamount following eruption in April (PMEL), and a new depth record for fish species (Schmidt Ocean Institute).

#### Pacific Remote Islands Area Marine National Monument

During the November, 2014 World Parks Congress in Sydney Australia, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell joined Republic of Kiribati President Anote Tong to sign a Cooperative Arrangement, also signed by NOAA Administrator Kathy Sullivan. The Arrangement will serve to coordinate and jointly support research and conservation activities for nearly 490,000 square nautical miles of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument in the United States and the Phoenix Islands Protected Area in Kiribati.

#### Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

PIRO staff convened a quarterly meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) for Rose Atoll Marine National Monument on December 12, 2014 via conference call. Topics of discussion included a proposed in-person IGC meeting to be held in spring, 2015 and identification of IGC members and delegates to serve on the steering committee for the PIFSC's planned American Samoa Ecosystem Science Plan development workshop. NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries shared the success of the recent inter-agency Google Streetview/Catlin Seaview mapping project at Rose Atoll. NMFS discussed its on-going sea turtle research at Rose, including the September 2014 access that resulted in deployment of 10 satellite tags. Agency representatives also learned of the outbreak of Crown-of-Thorns starfish impacting the Monument.

#### Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

Fifteen applications for work in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM) were submitted for the February 1, 2015 deadline. Permit application totals for 2015 are as follows:

- 9 Conservation and Management (3 issued)
- 7 Research
- 1 Special Ocean Use (1 withdrawn)
- 3 Native Hawaiian Practices
- 0 Recreational Activities - allowed only at Midway Atoll
- 3 Education

One permit amendment was also submitted. All submitted PMNM permit applications are reviewed by PIRO to ensure compliance with regulations pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, and Magnuson Stevens Act.