



# NOAA Fisheries Service

## Pacific Islands Regional Office

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### REPORT TO THE 163RD 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 162nd Council meeting.

#### **RULEMAKING**

On May 21, 2015, NMFS issued an interim final rule (80 FR 29220) to implement a decision of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) limiting the number of fishing days for U.S. purse seine vessels in the U.S. exclusive economic zone and on the high seas in the western and central Pacific Ocean in 2015.

#### **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

##### **Sustainable Fisheries**

PIRO continues to provide protected species workshop (PSW) training to the longline fishing communities. Since January 1, 2015, PIRO has provided PSW training for 125 Hawaii-based longline vessel owners and captains and other interested individuals. Another 48 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 completed revisions for the shark sections of the American Samoa, Hawaii, and Western Pacific General longline fishing regulation summaries. WCPFC restrictions for the oceanic whitetip shark and the silky shark apply to all commercial fishing vessels of the United States fishing for highly migratory species in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Convention Area. The crew, operators, and owners of U.S. fishing vessels are prohibited from retaining any part or whole carcass of an oceanic whitetip shark or silky shark caught in the Convention Area unless requested to do so by a WCPFC observer. Revised regulation summaries were uploaded in the PIRO SFD Compliance

Guides and Regulation Summaries webpage, and this topic is now included as part of the PSW course content. Longline regulation summaries and be viewed here: [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD\\_regs\\_2.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/SFD/SFD_regs_2.html)

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 March 2, 2015, NMFS determined that the continued authorization of the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the Pacific Pelagic Fisheries of the Western Pacific Region is not likely to adversely affect the Main Hawaiian Islands insular false killer whale DPS and the Eastern Pacific scalloped hammerhead shark DPS.
- On April 9, 2015, NMFS determined that the continued authorization of the coral reef, bottomfish, crustacean, and precious coral fisheries under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the American Samoa Archipelago is not likely to adversely affect the Indo-West Pacific scalloped hammerhead shark DPS and ESA-listed reef-building corals.
- On April 29, 2015, NMFS determined that the continued authorization of the coral reef, bottomfish, crustacean, and precious coral fisheries under the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for the Mariana Archipelago is not likely to adversely affect the Indo-West Pacific scalloped hammerhead shark DPS and ESA-listed reef-building corals.
- On May 8, 2015, NMFS reinitiated consultation for the continued operation of the American Samoa pelagic longline fishery.

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).

NMFS completed reviews of the Saltonstall-Kennedy proposals for federal funding the technical review phase began this past December and continued through March, 2015. April was devoted to the final review phase - the Constituency Panel. In May, NMFS completed the internal review and selection procedures before project selections will be announced by NMFS in June.

PIRO processed renewals of Hawaii longline limited access and WP receiving vessel permits -- these permits must be renewed for longline fishermen to continue fishing beyond March 3, 2015. This is the second year that PIRO is offering online renewals of Hawaii longline permits. PIRO processed 136 Hawaii longline renewals to date, with 41 of those (30%) online. In the same period, PIRO processed 17 Hawaii longline permit transfers. Several new vessels entered the fleet, while a few left or changed ownership.

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

## **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 (CBD), 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 main Hawaiian Islands (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 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, three species in Guam and Pacific Remote Islands, and two species in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) (see the PIRO Corals webpage and linked species descriptions at [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd\\_coral.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_coral.html)). In response to an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR) in early 2015 on whether 4(d) protective regulations are necessary and advisable for the conservation of these species, NMFS received 300 public comments. We are currently analyzing these public comments and determining if it is necessary and advisable to proceed with coral 4(d).

#### Green Turtle Petition Finding and Proposed Rule (ESA)

On March 23, 2015, NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (the Services) issued a proposed rule to list 11 green sea turtle distinct population segments (DPS) under the ESA. The Services found that the green turtle is composed of 11 DPSs that qualify as “species” for listing as endangered or threatened under the ESA, and propose to list eight as threatened and three as endangered. Although the Hawaiian green turtle population (referred to in the proposed rule as the Central North Pacific population) does constitute a DPS, the Services do not find removing this population from the ESA warranted at this time. The Central North Pacific DPS is proposed as threatened, and the Central West Pacific DPS (includes Guam and CNMI) and the Central South Pacific DPS (includes American Samoa) are proposed as Endangered. All green sea turtles in the Pacific Islands Region are protected by the ESA and remain protected under the proposed rule. The proposed rule was informed by a comprehensive status review, which NMFS initiated in 2012 (77 FR 45571), and a petition to designate and delist DPS. The status review was released concurrently with the proposed rule. NMFS held a public hearing on the proposed rule in Honolulu on April 8, 2015, and the public comment period is open until June 22, 2015. Additional public hearings are being planned for the end of June and first part of July. Dates for the additional hearings will be announced in the Federal Register the first half of June.

#### Green Turtle Critical Habitat (ESA)

At the same time that NMFS and USFWS released their proposed rule in March 2015 to list 11 green sea turtle DPSs under the ESA (see above), they announced their intent to consider (or revise) green turtle critical habitat. NMFS and USFWS are currently soliciting and gathering relevant information to identify areas with physical and biological features

essential to the conservation of green turtle DPSs occurring within U.S. jurisdiction. During May, NMFS reached out to state and territory partners to inform them of the process and to solicit information. Comments and information pertaining to critical habitat is requested by June 22, 2015 (see 80 FR 15271). For more information about critical habitat generally, see <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/criticalhabitat.htm>.

#### Humpback Whale Status Review and Proposed Rule (ESA)

On April 21, 2015, NMFS issued a proposed rule to divide the globally ESA-listed humpback whale into 14 DPSs, remove the current species-level listing, and in its place list 2 DPSs as endangered and 2 DPSs as threatened. The Hawaii population and Oceania population (which includes American Samoa) would not remain listed if the rule is finalized as proposed, but the Western North Pacific population, which includes Guam and CNMI, would be listed as threatened. The proposed rule was informed by a comprehensive status review, which NMFS initiated in 2009 (74 FR 40568), and two petitions to designate and delist DPS. The status review was released concurrently with the proposed rule. NMFS held a public hearing on the proposed rule in Honolulu on May 6, 2015, and the public comment period on the proposed rule is open until July 20, 2015.

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

NMFS is currently determining if designating critical habitat is prudent and determinable for 3 DPSs of the scalloped hammerhead shark (Indo-West Pacific DPS, Eastern Pacific DPS, and Central & Southwest Atlantic DPS; NMFS is not evaluating the Eastern Atlantic DPS as its range is outside of U.S. jurisdiction). This action follows the July 3, 2014, final rule to list 4 DPSs of the scalloped hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*) under the ESA, in response to a 2011 petition received from WildEarth Guardians and Friends of Animals. The Indo-West Pacific DPS (which includes the U.S. Pacific territories & all Pacific Remote Island Areas except Johnston Atoll) and the Central & Southwest Atlantic DPS are listed as threatened; and the Eastern Pacific DPS and the Eastern Atlantic DPS are listed as endangered. The Central Pacific DPS (which includes the Hawaiian archipelago and Johnston Atoll) and the Northwest Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico DPS were not warranted for listing. Additionally, the NMFS Office of Protected Resources is in the early stages of recovery planning for these 3 DPSs.

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

The Hawaii monk seal recovery team held a meeting on March 3-4, 2015, in Honolulu. The team devoted most of the meeting to reviewing a draft version of the Main Hawaiian Islands Monk Seal Management Plan (see below). The team recommended enhancing the integration of Hawaiian culture into various sections of the plan, as well as clarifying and enhancing approaches to outreach, community engagement, and involvement of state government agencies and other key partners. PIRO intends to hold regular recovery team meetings to continue to receive the team's advice on various monk seal recovery topics. The next meeting may be scheduled for late 2015, depending on team member availability and other considerations.

#### 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 July 2015 and finalize the plan by the end of FY15. As noted above, the Hawaiian Monk Seal Recovery Team reviewed the Plan 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. PIRO's FY15 Federal Funding Opportunity Request for Proposals (RFP) resulted in 11 submitted applications of which five were selected for full or partial funding. An additional seven projects will also receive FY15 support which includes all three sea turtle programs in the U.S. territories. In general, funded projects include internationally-based fishery bycatch mitigation, sea turtle monitoring and conservation, and community educational outreach and public management. 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 Hawaii 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)

NMFS convened an in-person meeting of the False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team April 29-May 1, 2015 in Honolulu to consider initial monitoring efforts for the Hawaii False Killer Whale Take Reduction Plan. The Team discussed a number of issues, but reached consensus on recommendations related to: a) encouraging voluntary efforts by fishermen to use stronger branch lines; b) seeking Team member access to observers' videos of false killer whale and other odontocete interactions (subject to confidentiality restrictions) to assist in learning more about the nature of hookings and to improve release techniques; and c) developing a unified and simplified message to captains and crew regarding false killer whale handling and release. PIRO is currently developing a meeting summary.

The False Killer Whale 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. In December 2014, PIRO, in consultation with the Take Reduction Team, completed a Monitoring Strategy for the Take Reduction Plan. The document will guide our evaluation of compliance with and effectiveness of the Plan.

The Plan's "Southern Exclusion Zone" (SEZ) 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, as well as information about the Take Reduction Team and Plan, are available at [http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd\\_FKW\\_take\\_reduction\\_team.html](http://www.fpir.noaa.gov/PRD/prd_FKW_take_reduction_team.html)

## **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 the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the military build-up activities in the Mariana Islands and the CNMI Joint Military Training (CJMT) NEPA and EFH pre-review were completed during this quarter. 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 updating the Council on the status of the West Hawaii and Guam Manell-Geus Habitat Focus areas as well as meeting with staff to discuss collaboration opportunities at both sites.

### **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; 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 CJMT draft EIS; and represented the Pacific region both on NOAA's National EFH Coordinators calls and Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) meetings. NMFS participated as a cooperating agency in completing environmental review of the proposed efforts on Tinian and Pagan for CMJT and attended all three public hearings held on Saipan and Tinian in April.

#### Guam:

Efforts are progressing with the Guam Habitat Blueprint Focus Area Site at the Manell-Geus Watershed in Merizo. Baseline ecological monitoring are in progress 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 continued the watershed restoration projects in Manell and Geus.

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. Strategies for how best to manage for this development and community removal efforts have been implemented to raise awareness and assist in the control.

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.

#### 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 assisting Le Tausagi, a government environment educators group, in revising its strategy plan. PIRO also reviewed and provided EFH comments through consultations with federal partners and local applicants on development projects.

#### 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 attended an International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-Like Species in the North Pacific Ocean (ISC) management strategy evaluation workshop, April 16-17, 2015 in Yokohama, Japan.

PIRO participated in the 15<sup>th</sup> renegotiation session for the South Pacific Tuna Treaty, May 12-15, 2015, in Nadi, Fiji. After over 6 years of negotiations, agreement was reached on a revised Treaty text, along with its appendices and ancillary documents. Additionally an agreement was reached with what are now termed the “non-Vessel Day Scheme” (VDS) countries on an exploratory fishing arrangement whereby after paying an upfront fee, vessel operators will pay \$6,000 per fishing day – but only when fish are actually landed by the vessel (the definition of fishing in this case does not include searching or skunk sets). Unfortunately the US could not reach a similarly successful arrangement with the VDS countries over number and price of multilateral fishing days for calendar 2016. The next negotiation session is tentatively scheduled for early July, back in Nadi, Fiji.

PIRO will attend the 89<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) from June 29 – July 3, 2015, in Guayaquil, Ecuador as well as the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ISC from July 15-20, 2015, in Kona, Hawaii. PIRO will also attend the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Intersessional Working Group on the WCPFC Regional Observer Programme, July 6-8, 2015, in Nadi Fiji, the 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the WCPFC electronic reporting and electronic monitoring working group, July 8-10, 2015, in Nadi Fiji, the 11<sup>th</sup> regular session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, August 5-13, 2015, in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia, and the 11<sup>th</sup> regular session of the WCPFC Northern Committee, August 31-September 3, 2015, in Sapporo, Japan.

### **Observer Program**

As of May 16, 2015, the coverage for the Hawaii longline deep set fishery was 19.7%. The coverage for the Hawaii longline shallow set fishery was 100%, with 78 departures observed and 26 observed deployments out of California. The coverage for the American Samoa longline fishery was 21.4%. The next observer training class is August 24 – September 14, 2015.

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.

### **Marine National Monuments Program**

#### **Okeanos Explorer Work**

The NOAA research vessel Okeanos Explorer will be involved in a series of cruises in the Pacific from 2015 – 2017. 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. The vessel is expected to arrive in Honolulu in June.

#### Marianas Trench Marine National Monument

Continued progress is being made to prepare the draft Marianas Trench Marine National Monument management plan in collaboration with USFWS, the Marianas Trench Monument Advisory Council (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 MTMAC 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.

#### Rose Atoll Marine National Monument

The PIFSC, in cooperation with the PIRO, the National Marine Sanctuary of American Samoa, local American Samoa government agencies, and the local scientific community are hosting an American Samoa Science Workshop in Pago Pago, American Samoa on May 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup>. The workshop is designed to solicit input from our AS partners on the needs and priorities for research activities in the Archipelago. Also, a one-day add-on meeting will be held on May 29<sup>th</sup> to discuss a possible cruise of the NOAA vessel Oscar Elton Sette in 2016, and to seek research proposals that could be accommodated on the cruise.

#### Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument

To date in 2015, a total of 30 permit applications have been submitted for access to the PMNM. A total of four permits have been issued and another twenty applications are in various stages of the reviewing process. Six applications have been withdrawn.