

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

MARINE CONSERVATION PLAN

Prepared in accordance with Section 204 of the Magnuson
Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act



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I. Introduction

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996, as amended, authorizes the Secretary of State, with the concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, to negotiate and enter into a Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA). These agreements, which would be developed with the concurrence, and in consultation with the Governor of CNMI, would allow foreign fishing within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) adjacent to the CNMI. As stated in the MSA, before entering into a PIAFA, the appropriate Governor, with the concurrence of the Council, shall develop a three-year Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) providing details on uses for funds to be collected by the Secretary under the PIAFA.

In addition to PIAFA funds, the MSA provides that fines and penalties of violations by foreign vessels occurring within the EEZ around CNMI, including sums collected from forfeiture and disposition or sale of property seized by the federal government, are to be deposited into the CNMI Treasury and to be used to implement the CNMI MCP.

Also authorized by the MSA is the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund, which allows the Council to use funds to implement projects contained in the CNMI MCP.

The MSA requires that the MCP shall be consistent with the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for the Mariana Archipelago and the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pacific Pelagic Fisheries. The MSA also requires that the MCP include, but not limited to, the following conservation and management objectives:

- (i) Pacific Insular Area observer programs, or other monitoring programs, that the Secretary determines are adequate to monitor the harvest, bycatch, and compliance with the laws of the United States by foreign fishing vessels that fish under Pacific Insular Area fishing agreements;
- (ii) conduct of marine and fisheries research, including the development of systems for information collection, analysis, evaluation, and reporting;
- (iii) conservation, education, and enforcement activities related to marine and coastal management, such as living marine resource assessments, habitat monitoring, and coastal studies;
- (iv) Education and training in the development and implementation of sustainable marine resources development projects, scientific research, and conservation strategies; and (v) western Pacific community-based demonstration projects under section 112(b) of the Sustainable Fisheries Act and other coastal improvement projects to foster and promote the management, conservation, and economic enhancement of the Pacific Insular Areas.

This MCP was developed by the CNMI Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). It identifies several activities that represent prioritized projects. This format provides DLNR with the flexibility it needs to address marine conservation and management issues through the implementation of a specific MCP project.

III. MCP Objectives and Projects

This following lists the objectives and activities of the MCP, which are consistent with the MSA and Council's Marianas Archipelago and Pelagics FEPs. Each objective has several projects that have been ranked either as high, medium, or low in terms of implementation priority. These activities are intended to fulfill the objectives of the plan. The following also lists evaluative criteria related to each objective, which serve a measuring stick to evaluate how implemented projects address objectives.

Objective 1: Improve fisheries data collection and reporting

Evaluative criteria: Currently, the only fisheries dependent data collection in the CNMI is through opportunistic creel surveys and dealer reporting. CNMI is moving towards mandatory commercial fishing reporting. This objective will have been met if DLNR, working with the Council and NMFS, improves fisheries data collection by broadening the current creel survey and/or requiring mandatory reporting for various fishing sectors.

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| A. Support activities to determine the current status of fishery resources, and the possible impacts of proposed management measures, are based upon the best information available | Medium |
| B. Support efforts in the areas of collection, analysis, and dissemination of commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries catch and effort data | Medium |
| D. Support expanded data collection efforts necessary to assess the social and economic values of the different types of fisheries | Low |
| E. Support comprehensive fishery database that would function as the primary storage and reporting system for commercial fisheries data | Medium |

Objective 2: Conduct resource assessment, monitoring, and research to gain a better understanding of marine resources and fisheries

Evaluative criteria: Fisheries are dynamic and subject to substantial variations depending on prevailing conditions. In addition, climate change has the potential to negatively impact marine resources and habitat. Based on potentially significant impacts from climate change, there is a need to monitor resources as well as to conduct research to help identify adaptation strategies. This objective will be met through research and monitoring projects that provide useful information in the management of marine resources as well as respond to changing conditions.

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| A. Support activities that assess biological stock conditions and monitor changes in those conditions over time | Medium |
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Objective 4: Promote responsible domestic fisheries development to provide long term economic growth and stability and local food production

Evaluative Criteria: Fisheries development is a major issue in CNMI. Many fisheries are underutilized (e.g., pelagic HMS species and deep-water bottom fish) and there are no major commercial fisheries occurring in the CNMI. With its tourism economy, proximity to Asia with daily flight linkages, and increasing military presence in the Marianas, CNMI stands to benefit from responsible fisheries development. The objective will be met through funded projects that support fisheries development and resulting in the harvest of the optimal yield of marketable species for both local consumption and export markets.

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| A. Support the deployment of Community Fish Aggregation Devices (CFADs), which can provide community benefits such as accessible and maintained commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing opportunities, community fish sharing, youth education of fishing knowledge and practices, and cooperative research | High |
| B. Implement activities that assist communities in developing their fisheries, including supporting the construction of cold storage and fish processing facilities, fish markets, the procurement of ice-making machines (Rota & Tinian), product transportation, vessel designs, training vessels, and fishing gear. | High |
| C. Support construction of or improvements to boat harbors, piers, boat ramps, and vessel access points that allow for more efficient and safer access for fishing vessels | High |
| D. Support the establishment of fuel storage facilities for remote communities that currently pay significant fuel costs for fishing vessels | Medium |
| E. Identify, develop, and fund fisheries training programs and workshops in seamanship, fishing technology, fish handling, and quality, vessel or gear maintenance, etc. | Medium |
| F. Support sustainable aquaculture development through partnerships with institutions, organizations, agencies, industry, and communities for best practices and environmentally responsible operations | High |
| G. Support fisheries technology and education program for commercial fishing, fish handling and quality control (e.g., HACCP) as well as value-added product processing and product marketing could help promote local processing ventures | Medium |
| H. Support training in large vessel operation and navigation, as well as vessel repair and maintenance methods, could help provide qualified operators and mechanics and could help promote a vessel servicing industry | Low |

and local CNMI regulations to promote an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

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| A. Support efforts to help coordinate fisheries conservation and management in the Pacific region, including active participation in the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Forum Fisheries Agency, and other international organizations | Medium |
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Objective 7: Recognize the importance of island cultures and traditional fishing practices in managing fishery resources and foster opportunities for participation

Evaluative Criteria: People have been fishing sustainably in the Mariana Archipelago for thousands of years. There is a need to recognize the traditional indigenous fishing practices and the importance of island cultures in the management of CNMI's marine resources. This objective will be met through the incorporation of traditional fishing practices into ecosystem-based management plans that recognize the connections between the land and sea, fishing seasons, and adaptations to change.

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| A. Support projects identified and consistent with the Western Pacific Community Development Program, Western Pacific Community Demonstration Program, Western Pacific Marine Education and Training Program or other community funding programs that promote the management, conservation, and economic enhancement of communities in the region as well as to foster traditional and indigenous fishing practices and rights | Medium |
| B. Support and coordinate community meetings to assess needs and priorities within indigenous fishing communities | High |
| C. Support a workshop series on teaching traditional indigenous fishing techniques and practices to young people, along with the development of curriculum for all grade levels | Medium |
| D. Conduct a study on the economic and social impacts of regulations on indigenous communities | Low |
| E. Support the development and use traditional lunar calendars for community-based management of marine resources | Medium |
| F. Support projects that help to document traditional fishing practices and generational ecosystem knowledge used by indigenous communities | High |
| G. Support village-based aquaculture facilities for certain valued seafood species | Medium |