



## **FINAL Report of the CNMI-Mariana Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting**

Thursday, February 27, 2020

6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Micronesian Environmental Services Conference Room  
Garapan, Saipan, CNMI

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair, welcomed everyone and provided the introduction. CNMI AP members presented included: Michael Fleming, Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Lawrence Concepcion, Jun Yamagishi, Ray Tebuteb and Ray DelaCruz. Members absent included Perry Mesngon (excused), Michael Fleming (excused) and George Moses

Also in attendance was Floyd Masga, Mark Fitchett and Marlowe Sabater (Council Staff).

The Vice Chair reported that he continues to meet with the AP Chair and Vice Chairs on outreach activities and data collection and will be sharing more information as it becomes available.

### **2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations**

The Vice Chair went over the last AP meeting with members. He spoke of AP outreach activities to include working with AP members and Council staff to create a fishermen contact listing for the CNMI. He said they were also conducting a monthly/quarterly KKMP Interview with fishermen to talk about current Council issues and fishery needs with the CNMI, such as better data collection. He added that during the last AP meeting, members provided proposed themes for the next Lunar Calendar.

### **3. Council Issues**

#### **A. Update on Territorial Bottomfish**

Council staff went over the results of the P\* and SEEM analysis meetings held in January 2020 in Saipan which identified an 11% percent reduction (P\*) and 5% reduction (SEEM) from the Allowable Biological Catch to be specified by the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee. He also presented on the options for specifying the Marianas Bottomfish Annual Catch Limits noting the following actions:

- Option 1: No Action – do not specify the ACL
- Option 2: Specify the ACL based on the SSC recommended ABC and results from the SEEM analysis
- Option 3: Specify the ACLs lower than the results of the SEEM analysis

During discussion, an AP member inquired what the cause was of the increase in landings in 2012. Council staff responded that this may data collection issues or expansion. Another AP member indicated that the discrepancy is most likely related to data collection. The Vice Chair also added that some of the decline in catch could have been caused by typhoons in 2015 and 2018.

The Vice Chair asked for greater detail on the different options and how it would affect the fishermen, particularly Option 1. Council staff responded that the Council would be in violation of the MSA.

An AP member asked how the CNMI's ACL could be increased in the future. Council staff said that a new assessment would have to be done to adjust the quota. Ultimately, he said, better data collection is needed for both the stock assessment and the uncertainty analyses presented in P\* and SEEM.

The Vice Chair shared with AP members a comment which was shared during the P\* and SEEM meeting regarding an exemption for the CNMI from federal reporting to mirror Hawaii. He said that if there is an adequate local fishery reporting system, than there would be no need for Federal reporting.

Discussion by the AP included separating the shallow and deep species, the importance of data collection, and ecosystem effects including Fukushima radiation from Japan.

*AP members agreed and recommended the Council select Option 2 - Specify the ACL based on the SSC recommended ABC and results from the SEEM analysis.*

#### **B. CNMI Marine Conservation Plan**

Council staff reported that the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) and the Office of the Lt. Governor conducted outreach activities within the CNMI with regard to updating CNMI's Marine Conservation Plan. Activities included meetings with community members, Mayors from each Island as well as obtaining recommendations from CNMI's Advisory Panel Members. DLNR also conducted an electronic Survey (through Survey Monkey) which was sent to resident emails and social media platforms. The survey collected 100 completed responses. A total of 77 written responses were also collected on how MCP funds would be spent.

A draft report and recommendations was submitted to Lt. Governor Arnold Palacios for his review and approval. Upon receiving approval from the Lt. Governor Palacios, the DLNR Secretary forwarded CNMI's Marine Conservation Plan to the Council on February 5, 2020.

An AP member hoped that the administration will consider the community recommendations. The Vice Chair said that key projects like the Garapan Fishing Launching Ramp Improvement project should be included in order the help commercial and recreational boaters. An AP member added that he hopes that some of the funds will be considered to buy back the Smiling Cove Marina.

#### **C. Pelagic Issues-2020 Territorial Bigeye Specifications**

Council staff went over the 2020 Territory Bigeye Catch Limit Specifications. He reported that during the 178th Council Meeting in June 2020, the Council voted on Amendment 9 to the Pelagics FEP for the territories to have no catch limit and a 1,500 mt allocation limit. He added, that Amendment 9 (three year specs) was held up on unexpected new information (Deepset BiOp

and American Samoa longline BiOp). Because of this, the Council will need to revisit allocation limits for 2020 under the existing Amendment 7. Council staff noted that that final action during the 181<sup>st</sup> Council meeting, will look at recommending the specification of 2020 longline bigeye catch and allocation limits for US Participating Territories of American Samoa, Guam, and CNMI. Council staff provided three options presented which can have several possible outcomes.

After discussion on the different options, the *AP members agreed and recommended Option 3 as it provides the most flexibility for the territories and industry to negotiate.*

#### **4. CNMI Reports**

Council staff went over the different CNMI reports that the Council will get presented on at its 181<sup>st</sup> meeting. He reported that the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) has hired (2) project support staff to assist in all Marine Conservation Projects to include the bottomfish vessel the Kirida. The individuals are tasked with ensuring that all projects timelines are met to include the management and operations of Kirida. Staff are now working with the Administration in conducting bottomfish training for the Island of Rota. Previously, obtaining NEPA clearance delayed the use of the vessel, however on January 15th, clearance was received. Currently, weather has been a factor in delaying the use of the vessel.

Council staff also reported that a request for assistance from Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) Director to support the implementation of CNMI's Mandatory Data Reporting Regulations as well as improving the DFW Permitting Process by providing an ID Card Machine was met. He said that the Council provided DFW with a ID Card Machine, supplies and identification software that will be used to create identification cards for fishers as well as streamline their permitting process electronically. DFW has indicated that with the new machine they will purchase a dedicated computer in order to provide security with regard to confidentially of fishers. In addition, DFW will also train and assign a staffer to operate the machine.

With the support CNMI's Governor's Office, DLNR has awarded \$64,000.00 to the Saipan Fishermen's Association (SFA) Community Outreach Program to conduct youth outreach activities with regard to fisheries. SFA will hold classroom activities and outdoor practical exercises to include conservation of the environment, fish identification, vessel safety, CPR and First Aid, Tournament planning and fundraising, fishing techniques from trolling, deep and shallow bottomfishing, shoreline casting, net throwing skills and spear fishing. Lastly, SFA will use the funds to promote fisheries by funding (4) issues of the SFA Marianas Pond Magazine.

Council staff also provided an update of current legislative actions including fish size restrictions, seasonal use of surround nets, a non-resident sport fishing license fee, and sunscreen bans. An AP member indicted that a similar law for non-resident licenses was once proposed, however it did not gain support from pervious legislators as it may be unconstitutional since CNMI residents are not required to pay for a fishing license.

Council staff reported that with the help of CNMI Advisory Members, the 2020 CNMI Lunar Calendars were received and distributed to the Island of Rota, Tinian and Saipan. Council staff

also worked with KKMP Radio on outreach to get attendance at the January meetings on bottomfish and shark depredation. Both of those meetings provided an opportunity for fishermen to interact with scientists doing research on resources in the CNMI. He also provided updates on the fishing tournaments where the Council provides outreach information and activities.

The Vice Chair added that the AP will identify three tournaments where the members will conduct outreach activities. He said that the AP will be working to help sponsor categories in a couple fishing tournaments in the coming year.

#### **5. Report on CNMI-Mariana Archipelago FEP AP Plan Activities**

The Vice Chair reported that AP members will be conducting outreach activities at fishing tournaments on the importance of data collection and face to face interactions. He added that the AP Plan will look at limiting activities to what is attainable, focusing on the importance of data collection and fisherman information in order to conduct outreach. An AP member voiced his concern about bringing individuals to participate on the different islands.

#### **6. Island Fishery Issues and Activities**

AP members were concerned about FAD deployments. Council staff reported DFW and the contractor met earlier this month as the FADs are ready for deployment, however the fisheries vessel is down due to mechanical issues and weather has been bad. DFW is looking at an alternative vessel to guide the deployment.

AP members shared concerns of the comments being posted on Facebook from a community member that as a Northern Marianas Descent (NMD) the poster should not be required to pay for a Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) Throw Net Permit. Numerous comments have been posted attacking DFW and its Director.

An AP member shared that currently the CNMI has not celebrated a Lunar Festival and only the local Chinese Community has an event. *He suggested that the AP work with the local tourism agencies to hold a Fishery Lunar Festival.*

Another AP member said that due to the economic downturn in the CNMI and the government's austerity, up-coming tournaments may be affected with regard to support. He added that support from tournaments on Tinian has decreased and they may not have a fishing tournament during the fiestas.

An AP member also was concerned about the Fukushima Nuclear Plant radioactive water being intentionally released into the ocean. He was concerned about the effects, given CNMI's distance from Fukushima, Japan and asked that the AP continue to follow this issue.

#### **7. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

## **8. Discussion and Recommendations**

The CNMI Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

- **Regarding bottomfish ACLs, the CNMI AP recommended the Council select Option 2 and use the SSC's ABC and SEEM results**
- **Regarding territory bigeye specifications, the CNMI AP recommended the Council select Option 3**

## **9. Other Business**

There was no other business.