



WESTERN
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COUNCIL

Report of the CNMI-Mariana Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, September 5, 2020

By Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) Vice Chair, opened the meeting at 9:00 am and welcomed the participants. AP members in attendance included: Ray Tebuteb, Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Micheal Fleming, Lawrence, Concepcion, Jun Yamagishi and Ray Delacruz. Absent was Rota AP member Perry Mesngon.

In support was Council staff Floyd Masga, Joshua DeMello, Zach Yamada, Marlowe Sabater and Council Member John Gourley

Members of the public included Joe O'Malley (NMFS PIFSC), Austin Kino (Progression Energy), Michael Tenorio (CNMI-DFW), and Maria Angela

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff reviewed the report of the last AP meeting held on June 6, 2020 noting the members in attendance and the items discussed. Council staff also reviewed previous CNMI AP recommendations with regard to the removal of fishing prohibitions in the Marine Monuments, NMFS PIFSC to provide presentations to the fishing community on research and results from work beginning conducted, looking at the potential reporting duplications between the CNMI's Mandatory Reporting and Federal Reporting and the resignation of George Moses (AP Alternate). The Council took up all of these recommendations at its 182nd Meeting in June 2020 and included its recommendations for the response to EO 13921. Council staff is working on the other recommendations to provide presentations to the community, and reviewing potential reporting duplication.

3. Council Issues

A. Development of an Offshore Energy Policy for the Western Pacific

Council staff presented the Development of an Offshore Energy Policy for the Western Pacific region. He provided a background of the Council's concerns regarding offshore energy projects including the closure of areas and the disturbance of fish migration patterns. This policy would help to provide guidance to offshore energy projects on the Council's concerns. He provided the definition for offshore energy and the guidelines in the draft policy. He noted that the Council will decide at its 183rd meeting in September whether or not to add it to the Council's SOPP (Standard Operating Policies and Procedures).

An AP member asked if the project activities are taking up a certain area of the ocean, will they have a mitigation plan to compensate for the loss of fishing. Council staff said the emergency plan guideline might cover that. The member asked about the depth of these projects. Staff said it depends on the project and placement.

An AP member said he went to a CMSP meeting in Honolulu and the idea of offshore wind and a group would be put together to address issues and provide input. Council staff said there was a

project that held constituent workshops a few years ago in which they participated and provided input.

An AP member asked if there are any projects being considered for CNMI. Council staff said none that they know of. The member also asked if there is a pilot plan for these types of projects so they can learn from it. Council staff said that offshore energy has been done in other areas of the US.

An AP member asked what happens if the offshore wind farm breaks away from the mooring. Council staff responded that the policy considers that in the emergency plan guideline.

An AP member said it was hard to provide support for the policy without hearing more from the people in CNMI about offshore energy. Council staff noted that this is the Council's concerns that would be provided to any offshore energy project in the Western Pacific to address prior to conducting activities. The AP member was okay with supporting it understanding that it can be changed in the future.

The CNMI AP supported the draft offshore energy policy and looks forward to potential public input on these issues as well.

B. Modification of PRIA Objectives and Activities for the PRIA MCP

Council staff presented the Modification of Pacific Remote Island Area (PRIA) Objectives and Activities for the PRIA Marine Conservation Plan (MCP). He noted that the AP reviewed a previous MCP draft that the Council approved at its 182nd meeting in June, however, upon revision for the final draft, staff found the PRIA projects did not address the region's fisheries needs. The staff provided an update to the PRIA projects by aligning the projects with the Council's Pelagic Fisheries Research Plan and added a project that was a result of its Area Based Management workshop held in June. He noted that the Council will look at these changes at its June meeting and may decide to adopt these changes prior to transmittal of the MCP to NMFS.

The Vice Chair asked if this would affect the Marianas MCP. Council staff responded stating that this would not directly affect their MCP. This action would require the Council to accept the changes that staff has made, or keep the PRIA MCP as is.

The CNMI AP had no further comment on the draft MCP but supported the changes to the PRIA MCP.

C. Bottomfish Outreach and Data Collection

Council staff presented Bottomfish Outreach and Data Collection and said the Council is working with CNMI DFW to launch the Catch-it Logit app to comply with the mandatory reporting requirement in CNMI. Council staff has had training with the AP and agency staff and developed flyers and brochures for fishermen to understand the importance of data. Unfortunately there are some delays due to COVID-19 for the general fishermen and dealer training but staff will convene this training when possible. Council staff said that radio ads and public service announcements are being developed to assist in the outreach. He thanked the AP for their assistance in this effort.

An AP member asked if the outreach plans included outreach on Tinian and Rota. Council staff responded stating that it would be ideal to do as much outreach as possible. They would have to coordinate and plan this outreach for Tinian and Rota. The AP member asked if this would comply with the new CNMI mandatory reporting ruling. Council staff responded stating that this app training would be the back end and provide a reporting platform.

The CNMI AP agreed to work with Council staff to plan and conduct Catch-it, Log-it app training on Tinian and Rota.

D. Council Response to Executive Orders on Promoting Seafood Competitiveness (EO 13921) and Regulatory Relief (EO 13924)

Council staff presented the draft Council response to Executive Orders on Promoting Seafood Competitiveness (EO 13921) and Regulatory Relief (EO 13924). He provided a background on the EOs noting that the purpose is to ensure that US seafood is competitive and that this is the first time that the White House has asked for the Council's direct input. The President asked the Council to identify those regulations that are burdensome on the fisheries and to identify actions to relieve those burdens. Council staff developed a draft list of 16 burdens that keeps US fisheries from maximizing its efficiency, including fishing prohibitions in the Marine National Monuments, as well as other regulations and guidance under the ESA, MMPA, and the MSA. He noted that the AP's recommendations from its last meeting were included in the draft response and he thanked them for their addition. He said that the AP is able to provide comments on the draft response prior to its submission to NMFS in October.

4. CNMI Reports

Council staff reported on the activities in the CNMI fisheries since the last Council meeting. One major activity was the training of bottomfish fishermen in the CNMI which included classroom and hands-on training. Staff reported on the Garapan Fishing Improvement Projects. He noted that the project is moving, and they are trying to support the parking lot from erosion. With support from the DFW and Lieutenant Governor Palacios, are working to fully implement the mandatory license and reporting requirements. The CNMI held 3 tournaments. These tournaments did have to adjust due to COVID-19 restrictions. This includes changing multi day tournaments to a 1 day tournament, and having a single gear tournament turn into a multi gear tournament. Staff did outreach at other tournaments as well, including Deer Meat for Dinner tournament on Rota. He also said that the CNMI has completed its CARES Act proposal and will be submitting it to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission for approval.

An AP member explained that they did a one month tournament to cater to all the fisheries and they had over 40 participants from all different gears that participated to fish for giant trevally. It was a success and they look forward to continuing this type of tournament in the future.

AP members agreed to help with efforts.

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

The Vice Chair reported that they have worked on their AP plan by providing outreach to tournaments but will be working to amend the plan for next year given the consequences of COVID-19 on the fisheries.

6. Island Fishery Issues and Activities

The AP member from Rota submitted a report on the issues in Rota to the Vice Chair who provided the report to the AP. He said the West Marina is experiencing an invasive algal bloom. He wanted to know if there was someone that could help identify the algae and what they could do about it. Another AP member reported that strong currents in the marina may help to clear out the algae.

AP member reported that VHF channel 2 has been offline for two years and would like to have that fixed by the US Coast Guard (USCG). He also said that there needs to be a repeater placed on Goat Island (Aguigan) and one at Anatahan. It is a dead zone behind some of those islands with no cellphone service behind the islands, which is a safety concern. He also said the USCG light on Rota as well as one on Tinian on the northern side doesn't work anymore. He has also been approached by fishermen in Saipan to see if the Federal government could assist the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) in procuring drones to use for patrol of preserves and protected species. He noted that COVID has caused furloughs and layoffs so the enforcement and monitoring sectors have been impacted.

An AP member noted that a local phone carrier was issuing weather forecasts on Channel 13 but it has been out the past couple of days. He hoped to have this available as an alternative to the USCG channel that hasn't been working. *The AP agreed this was a concern that the USCG should be made aware of at the Council meeting.*

Tinian members thanked staff for the delivery of the outreach material and noted they will be providing it to the agency offices and in high traffic areas. They reported that fishing has been sporadic. The Vice Chair reported that there is someone who is going to be hired to address the effects from typhoon Yutu and that there has been an increased presence of the military, including one positive COVID case on island.

7. Public Comment

John Gourley commented that Micronesian Environmental Services (MES) is doing biosampling to have a glowing stock assessment for the next round. They are having problems with the current catch data for their assessment. He requested to work hand in hand with the AP with providing samples to his agency. He asked if they could drop off their fish at his facility where he would collect life history information, and clean and gut their fish. After they collect what they need, then they could drop off their fish or the fishers can wait until they are finished. He said that they will be conducting a future market survey and may be calling on the AP to get their perspective on the bottomfish fishery.

Joe O'Malley added that the information is important for stock assessments. The biological samples inform scientists about how fast fish grow, how old they get, and how big they are when they reach maturity. All of this is used in stock assessments. The sooner the scientists get the samples, the sooner they can get the information into the assessments and any help would be greatly appreciated.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

The CNMI Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

Regarding the draft Offshore Energy Policy

- **The CNMI AP supported the draft offshore energy policy and recommended the Council adopt the policy.**

Regarding the changes to the PRIA MCP

- **The CNMI AP supported the changes to the CNMI MCP and recommended the Council accept the changes as presented.**

Regarding the response to EO13921

- **The CNMI AP supported the draft response to EO 13921 and recommended the Council send the response to NMFS.**

Regarding CNMI Fisheries Issues:

- **The CNMI AP recommends the Council request the USCG provide a repeater and navigational light on Aguigan (Goat Island) and Anatahan to assist fishermen in identifying the island, as well as fix the lights on Rota and Tinian (cross point) and assistance on fixing VHF Channel 2 (24 hour USCG Weather forecast). This is a safety issue for fishermen in the CNMI.**

9. Other Business

The Vice Chair noted that the 183rd Council Meeting is being held September 15-18, 2020. Council staff noted that there is a hosted site for the virtual meeting at the Hyatt.

Council staff noted that training for the Catch-it Log-it app will be held September 26, 2020 at the Hyatt as well.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m.