



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Report of the Non-Commercial Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, October 29, 2020

1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, opened the meeting. Members in attendance included: Steve Kaneko (HMRFS), Dean Sensui, Gene Weaver, Phil Fernandez, Ben Walin, David O'brien, and Hongguang Ma.

Also in attendance was Zachary Yamada, Asuka Ishizaki, Marlowe Sabater, Felix Reyes, Floyd Masga (Council staff); Bryan Ishida (DAR)

2. NCFAC History

Council staff provided a history of the Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee (NCFAC) noting its beginnings as the Recreational Fisheries Data Task Force (RDTF) in 1999. The RDTF was concerned with collecting recreational fishing data in the region and ended up bringing the Marine Recreational Fishing and Statistical Survey (MRFSS) to Hawaii. Recognizing the increase in the number of recreational fishing issues and including subsistence, sustenance and other fishing, the RDTF was revised into the NCFAC.

The reconstitution of the NCFAC is to provide advice to the Council on non-commercial fishery issues, data collection, and research. DeMello said that the NCFAC will also be asked to provide input to the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Pacific Islands Regional Implementation Plan (PIRIP) and the Council's Annual SAFE Report modules. The NCFAC would also play a role in future electronic reporting in terms of the non-commercial data collection.

3. NCFAC Duties and Charge

A. MRIP Pacific Islands Regional Implementation Plan

Council staff presented on the collaborative efforts in developing the regional plan developed by the Council, NMFS, state of Hawaii, and territorial agencies. It describes how the agencies in the region will coordinate data collection as a function of the Council's Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee. Data from the territories are warehoused in WPacFIN with Hawaii non-commercial fishing data warehoused in DAR and NMFS Office of Science and Technology. Full funding of surveys to meet minimum survey standards, improve timeliness, and develop an algorithm to extract the non-commercial component of the creel survey catch are included in this plan.

B. Annual SAFE Report Module

Council staff presented the Pelagic Annual SAFE Report Non-commercial Fishery module providing the data and analysis. Total catch and trips were compared with the non-commercial catch and trips to provide a non-commercial percentage of total catch. Non-commercial catch percentage is high in the Marianas and very low in American Samoa with Hawaii at about a quarter of the total catch. He noted that detailed data on species level is only available from

Hawaii while total pelagic and charter catch are available throughout the region. He noted the NOAA recfish snapshot should be made available by NMFS for the next year's module. The recfish snapshots only include data/estimates from an individual year and were completed for 2015 and 2017. Catch estimates were made for the most popular species that differed by island area.

Members discussed surveying charter boats in Hawaii. While surveys have not been conducted on the charter fishery in Hawaii since 2007, data is collected by the state's Commercial Marine License (CML). Concern was expressed about potential issues with the CML double-counting and tracking, if the vessel owner/captain and crew both report the catch. Members said it differs island to island on how the fish is counted.

Members also noted that this year has seen a higher perceived rate of shark predation and that should be reviewed for next year's annual report.

C. Research Priorities

Council staff presented on the Council's research priorities. The Council is responsible for developing Five-year Research Priorities under the Magnuson Stevens Act, Cooperative Research Priorities to the NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, the Marine Conservation Plan priorities, and the Council's Five-year Program Plan. These research priorities cover all fisheries including non-commercial needs such as life history and stock assessments. He queried the NCFAC for potential research needs specifically for non-commercial fisheries.

Members noted the importance of stock assessments and including the correct non-commercial estimates; the need for inshore fisheries stock assessments; and the need for data, particularly on invertebrates as they are not included in HMRFS. It was also noted that a non-commercial analysis on the deep seven bottomfish was being completed by looking at the HMRFS data.

A research priority that was discussed included smartphone applications and electronic monitoring and how these would work and fit in with statistically designed surveys. Members noted the popularity of the technology and thought having research on how electronic reporting would work with existing data collection systems is important.

It was noted that the non-commercial fishery has a lot more participants and thus potential for more user conflicts. There needs to be a way to counter misinformation, especially about food fish. Studies should prioritize food fish like akule and halalu that are important to the non-commercial fishery to combat misinformation.

Members said research is good but communicating the results to the public through effective education and outreach is more important.

D. Electronic Reporting and Non-Commercial Data Collection

Council staff said that mobile technology is more sophisticated and accessible than ever before and the future of data collection is in smart devices. Fishermen can be involved in what is going on and play a citizen scientist role in their fisheries. In 2018, the Council began developing a

fishermen reporting app to provide data to the territorial agencies. This app suite includes a personal log for fishermen to keep track of their own data and a vendor log as well to capture what was sold. The Hawaii longline fishery is transferring to electronic reporting and a couple of Hawaii groups are also looking at the best way to report small-boat fishery data through electronic reporting. On a national level, word is that electronic reporting systems only work if there is mandatory permitting and reporting. The Council's current app suite was developed in conjunction with the CNMI's mandatory permit and reporting efforts. The mandatory permitting and reporting provides the universe of who is part of the fishery and who is expected to provide a report. This framework is made to determine the number of fishermen that should report.

A member noted the development of the Lokahi app that enables fishermen to report their catch. It is a simple process where fishermen can provide a photo, weight, number of pieces, a time element for effort and location. The point of it is to get enough data provided so catch per unit effort can be determined. Participation is increasing with a monthly online tournament where a random weight and species is selected. The primary concern for the Lokahi app is making sure that the data being collected is useful to managers and scientists.

Another member noted that HFACT is hosting Hawaii Fishers Feeding Families on Facebook where fishermen report what they catch, where, and approximately how many pounds caught and how many people were fed. It is a private group with over 2,300 people reporting a variety of catch from a variety of gears. He said the amount and variety of fish is astounding and part of the project is about getting a handle on what species are being targeted to determine what metrics are needed for those species.

4. Discussion on Non-Commercial Fishery Issues

A. Data Issues

NCFAC members were asked to provide issues with data. The member from HMRFS said that getting people to participate in the survey continues to be an issue and it seems as if it is always the same people getting asked so there is a worry about survey fatigue. HMRFS is also looking at figuring out how to reincorporate charter information back into the survey as well. Another issue is that since the survey is voluntary, there is difficulty in getting fishermen to provide length and weight measurements.

Another member said it took a while for PIFG and NOAA to gain trust from fishermen in the bottomfish fishery because of other issues such as the Bottomfish Restricted Fishing Areas. He said that mythbusting needs to be done because people think that reporting too much fish means they are catching too much and may in fact mean the opposite. He said there needs to be a concentrated effort on educating the fishing community on the importance and uses of their fishing data.

A member noted that among fishermen, the issue with reporting is regarding protected species and reporting interactions will give you a bad mark and fishermen will be credited with having created the problem. Individual fishermen don't want to cross that line because it not only affects them but also their entire community. He said when you google protected species, the first 10 sites are about conservation and protection and very little information that is explanatory to fishermen on what is going on with protected species. Their view is that it's the world of

conservation and environmentalists, and therefore, you shouldn't go there. He said fishermen are afraid about anything policy related and some of them just want to be left alone with no interest in policy as someone else will take care of it.

Discussion on data issues centered on what happens to the data. Members said that fishermen ask where the data goes and what is being done with it. They see it as a black box that comes back as a regulation. Feedback on what happens with their data is appreciated and provides for positive reinforcement. One member said that the current data collection system is a negative feedback loop where what they provide ends up hurting them. There needs to be a way to change it to a positive feedback loop where fishermen see the benefits of providing data to provide encouragement to participate. He noted that there have been several scientists asking for fish samples or data and information on what happened with it was never provided back to them. Another member said a good example of positive participation was the paipo/ulua tagging program as it was very popular because it provided information back to fishermen on fish movement, growth rates, etc. It opened up the possibility of citizen science in fishery management and helped to develop a sense of pride with fishermen.

Members said that it comes down to trust. Promises were made to fishermen to provide reports or results of the data yet it never happened. Surveys are provided and the next day the tax department shows up. They said that the word spreads quickly through fishermen networks and all agencies are lumped together as "the government" confusing the situation. Members again emphasized outreach to develop relationships with the fishing community and said that providing incentives for data would help as well. One member said that because the trust and outreach isn't there, fishermen are put on the defense from the get go and the message of data collection being good for to help future generations is lost. Other members noted that there is interest in having a license if it can help with management but it cannot be a tax or a penalty on fishermen.

B. Protected Species Issues

Council staff provided an overview of protected species issues and the Council's involvement and then provided a briefing on a rule for safely deterring marine mammals being proposed by NMFS. Proposed rules would allow for persons to employ measures to deter marine mammals from damaging fishing gear, catch, property and to provide safety. The guidelines are for safely deterring marine mammals using recommended measures that would not result in the death or serious injury of the marine mammal. Avoidance is encouraged as the first step before deterrence and reviewed the different deterrents being allowed under the proposed rule. Staff requested input from the NCFAC on specific tools that could be evaluated as a deterrent or suggestions for making the guidelines more practical or useful to fishermen.

One member noted that paintball guns are expensive and carrying air cartridges is unrealistic for fishermen. He also noted that it would not look good to the public if fishermen were shooting monk seals with paint balls and paint getting in the water. Another member said that reporting interactions can put the fishery into a different category and possibly require observers. Council staff noted that isn't part of this rule, but that is a concern for the commercial fisheries listed under the List of Fisheries for marine mammals.

5. Public Comment

No public comment

6. Discussion and Recommendations

The NCFAC did not make any specific recommendations.

7. Other Business

Members decided to look at a quarterly meeting schedule to coincide with Council meetings and meet as needed. Members were also encouraged to provide staff with any additional potential NCFAC members.