



Report of the CNMI-Marianas Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, March 13, 2021

9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Via webconference

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) vice Chair, opened the meeting at 9:11 a.m. and welcomed the participants. AP members in attendance included: Ray DelaCruz, Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Michael Fleming, Lawrence Concepcion, and Jun Yamagishi. Clay Tam, AP Chair was also present. Absent were Ray Tebuteb, and Perry Mesngon.

Others in attendance included Floyd Masga and Joshua DeMello, Council Staff. Members of the public included Thomas Remington and Herb Yamada.

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff provided an overview of the last AP meeting and recommendations. The AP was concerned with Guam fishermen fishing in the CNMI EEZ near Rota and data being allocated to Guam's fishery. The AP recommended the Council relay to NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) the concerns of bottomfish fishing at the Rota Bank to correctly allocate fishing catch and effort in the next assessment. Council staff reported that this concern was relayed to NMFS PIFSC who responded that they will work with Guam DAWR and CNMI DFW to properly account for catch and effort as part of the data workshop for the next benchmark stock assessment.

3. Council Issues

A. Guam Bottomfish Update

Council staff provided a brief summary of the issue regarding bottomfish fisheries in Guam. In October 2019, NMFS PIFSC concluded a benchmark bottomfish stock assessment that resulted in Guam bottomfish being categorized as overfished. Staff noted that CNMI was not affected by the stock assessment, but there was a lot of uncertainty in the data so fishermen should be mindful of that. NMFS issued a change of stock status memo that alerted the Council to a requirement to rebuild the stock. The Council set out to develop a rebuilding plan for the Guam bottomfish fishery by providing an ACL that would allow fishing to continue while ensuring the rebuilding of the fishery. The Council will look at these options at its 185th meeting and the AP may want to provide its input.

The vice Chair asked if Catch-it, Log-It (CILI) has provided any information that could help with these issues. Council staff responded that it is too early to tell with CILI. The current usage in CNMI is at 20% so there needs to be a more regular reporting of catch in order for the data to be useful. He noted that the issue of fishing off of Rota Bank is good but it is difficult to determine where the fish was caught to be able to allocate to either Guam or CNMI.

B. Catch-It, Log-It Implementation

Council staff updated the AP on CILI noting that there were currently 103 users with 251 reports provided to date. There is some concern regarding delays in reports coming from the vendor side of the CILI program (Sell-It, Log-It) as the data lags about a week or more before data is uploaded. There is a need to provide more training as some are not familiar with the technology. Staff reported that there was an effort to register fishers at a recent wahoo tournament and outreach continues by providing recognition of fishers on social media. He said that WhatsApp has been the most popular way to provide information to the fishers and DFW is assisting in providing outreach to vendors.

C. Status of Fishery Biological Opinions

Council staff presented on the status of the Biological Opinions (BiOp) and noted that NMFS PIRO is working to determine the impacts of the CNMI bottomfish on oceanic white tip sharks. The BiOp is supposed to be done in 135 days but since this one was started in early 2019, it is overdue. Staff hoped to be able to provide a draft to the AP for its consideration at this point but a draft is not yet available. PIRO hopes to provide a draft prior to the June Council meeting and at that time, the AP will be able to review the draft as well.

The vice Chair asked about the results of the ongoing shark depredation study. Council staff noted that some of the DNA results have come back and so far no samples have shown that the fish was taken by an Oceanic Whitetip.

4. CNMI Reports

Council staff reported on CNMI Community Activities and Issues. Staff reported that the fishery development projects undertaken by the CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources are continuing with plans for bottomfish training in Rota and a renovation of Garapan Fishing Base. DLNR is working on permitting and procurement in order to begin implementation on these projects. Regarding Coral Critical Habitat (CCH), he reported that staff is working with the NMI Administration to have a unified response to the CCH proposed rule. He noted that there is a CCH Legislative Resolution being in the legislature. He also reported that the CNMI Administration submitted Marianas Trench Marine National Monument (MTMNM), Marianas Trench Monument Advisory Committee (MTMAC) nominations and which are pending approval. He also noted that an FR Notice announced the opportunity for public comment on the MTMNM with the last day to submit comments is May 25, 2021. Under Education and Outreach Initiatives, staff reported that a PSA was conducted with Council Vice-Chair John Gourley during the morning show with KKMP Radio on the Coral Critical Habitat, the Marianas Trench Monument and updates with regard to the Catch-it Logit App. Staff also reported that for the 2022 Lunar Calendars, AP members submitted recommendations with regard to the next Calendar themes for consideration. Themes included Seafood, Species, and background biological information

The AP was concerned about the Coral Critical Habitat and suggested that the deadline to provide comments on the proposed rule did not provide enough time for the MTMAC to be seated and review the document. One AP member noted that previous federal issues provided an open-house format for providing comments and this method allowed for the least tech-savvy of the community members, including the elderly, to provide comments. He hoped that NOAA

would provide this type of opportunity especially in light of the large amount of area that is being proposed. Another member was concerned with the areas where the designations of CCH might be as it may affect his fishing. The vice Chair said that he reviewed the Critical Habitat issue and asked if everyone saw the maps that were created showing where CCH would be located. Council staff responded that the Rota, Tinian and Saipan maps were created and DFW hoped to have the rest of the maps completed by next week. The AP argued that the Coral Critical Habitat was already delayed in being implemented, what is another couple of months until they can seat the MTMAC. The AP agreed to continue to work with their Council member and staff on an approach to provide greater opportunity for comment by the community.

5. Report on Mariana Archipelago FEP AP Plan Activities

The vice Chair reported that the Pika Festival Wahoo Derby on Tinian went on with 30 participants and the AP provided outreach at the event. AP members Delacruz, Raiukiulipiy, Farrell, and Fleming provided handouts of CILI to the community at the event as well as provided lunar calendars to those that were interested. He reported that the AP continued to assist in the outreach for CILI with a presentation on Tinian at the Mayor's Office which resulted in registering more users.

He also reported that Council staff and AP member Raiukiulipiy provided outreach to the community at the Tasi To Table Wahoo derby that featured students running the entire process from registration to weigh-ins. Tasi To Table has also requested assistance from the Council for a future derby as well.

6. Fishery Issues and Activities AP Members

An AP member reported that a "Tuna Mix" tournament will be held in August by Tasi To Table. It is a one-day tournament for kids to participate that targets yellowfin or skipjack tuna. He also reported that a separate Mafute Tournament will be held in Saipan that same month. There will also be a Pagan Derby sponsored by the Saipan Mayor's Office where pre-paid fuel will be transported to the Northern Islands to assist in fishermen's efforts, along with ice and storage. The tournament will target pelagic species for two days and bottomfish on the third with a floating weigh station. So far they have received interest from over 20 participants from both Guam and CNMI. Lastly, he reported that the new US Coast Guard cutters arrived in Guam and one will be making a trip to CNMI in August.

Another AP member noted the lack of women participation in fisheries and suggested that a women's category be incorporated into future tournaments. Another AP member who organizes a tournament agreed to incorporate a women's category into the next Tinian tournament. The vice Chair noted that Tinian is also working to hold an "all-women" fishing tournament as well.

The vice Chair noted the issues from Rota regarding the broken cleats and loose slips in its marina. He also reported that shark depredation was increasing with a loss of at least six lures per trips to sharks in recent trips. For Tinian, the vice Chair reported that he will continue to work with Tinian Ports Authority on the navigational lights for the Tinian Channel.

7. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

8. Discussion and Recommendations

The CNMI Advisory Panel did not make any recommendations but continued to be concerned regarding the Coral Critical Habitat issue.

9. Other Business

There was no other business discussed.

Vice Chair Farrell adjourned the meeting at 10:47 a.m.