



**185th Meeting of the
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
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Isla Informe: Guam Island Report

Michael Dueñas

Tuna, especially yellowfin and skipjack tuna, are moving east with a good part of that through Micronesian waters attributed to many factors, including climate change. Guam, being the largest, most populated and metropolitan island in Micronesia, is well positioned to be the hub for vessels who must get their catch to markets as quickly as possible to get the best prices.

In the 1980s, Guam was the base for large ocean going purse seine vessels operated by the Zuanich brothers, a major tuna fishing company. After the company left, they for the most part took Guam's tuna industry with them leaving only one company, Tidewater which continued to fish in the region using Guam as their home port operating seven long line vessels. Tidewater continued to transship catch to markets in Honolulu and Japan when flights were available under Covid-19. The modern port infrastructure left behind by Zuanich had great capacity and was used by Tidewater to operate a viable transshipment activity. This was helped by the presence of Guam-based Asia Pacific Air cargo planes owned by the Tan family from Saipan which had connectivity to all the Micronesian islands, Honolulu, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Hong Kong.

Sadly, due to the market for fresh tuna drying up in their key markets due to Covid, Tidewater's operations was forced to shut its doors on December 28, 2020. All seven vessels were moved to Okinawa.

The Guam Fishermen's Coop depended to a great extent on the supply of low cost fresh tuna from Tidewater, as did the community as they had mobile sales outlets around the island.

The Port is now planning to convert the empty tuna handling facility to be a port customs facility.

The Council had hoped Guam can be the hub for tuna transshipment for the region.

GUAM FISHERMEN'S COOP'S NEW BUILDING

The Guam Fishermen's Cooperative is making strides in its plans to construct a new facility on the present location and hope to complete the new facility by August 2022. Funding was secured with a \$1 million guarantee from the Port Authority of Guam and another \$1 million from the Guam Economic Development Authority, to add to the \$1.1 million on hand appropriated by the Guam legislature several years ago to total \$3.1 million.

Installation of a seawall to prevent erosion will begin in July 2021, followed by the laying of a boardwalk along the waterfront and behind the new facility expected to be completed by early November 2021. The main structure will be a single story building and construction of that will begin in July 2021 with completion of the project slated to be mid to late August 2022. The main entrance to the new facility will be from the oceanside. There will be a drive around along the boardwalk from the entrance to the exit for vehicles. There remains plans to find funding to put a second floor for retail and meeting rooms.

Although it is not yet known if the Coop's operations will continue while the new facility is under construction, 40-foot containers are already in place adjacent to the existing building and ready to be converted into fish processing and sales facilities.

Monique Amani

January through March 2020, the first quarter of 2020, was the pre-Covid-19 period. Although the Covid restrictions were implemented towards the latter part of March, this time of year the water is always rough anyways so fishing activity, especially spear and bottom fishing was slow but out of necessity, the charter fleet and the mosquito fleet remained active having a need to satisfy client demands.

When Covid-19 came, and after the initial lockdown, there was a lot confusion amongst fishers because that fishing was not included as part of the essential set of allowed activities. Fishers did not know what they can or cannot do. In the beginning, only two people from the same household are allowed on the boats.

What was also interesting with Guam's fisheries during 2020 was that the duration of calm waters which normally starts from April to July lasted all the way to the early part of October. And because of the lockdown, folks were mostly staying home and having nothing to do. This resulted in an evolution of new fishers. With the Covid-19 impact funding, many bought boats and electric reels and we saw catch effort increase to a point not seen before when fishing was allowed. Many were from the younger generation who took to social media to post their catch. Their photos dominated the internet during this period. And fish caught was either shared with family and friends but some made it to stores too. During Covid-19, the charter fleet was the one that had it worst because the rule only allowed gatherings of between two people and eventually up to six people but must be from the same household. This eventually was lifted but not until November when there is no tourism and no customers.

One AP member said fishers who fished anywhere around the island caught and many caught enough to throw in the towel. Deep bottomfish, shallow bottomfish, and pelagic. My restaurant bought fish from many new fishers, including from kayakers, which we never did before. Mostly bottomfish of onaga, paka, monchong, lehi, and others from different fishers.

With the lifting of restrictions, we are hopeful fishers can again begin to get their lives back together.