

# **185th Meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council**

## **CNMI AGENCY REPORT**

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
Department of Land and Natural Resources,  
Division of Fish and Wildlife

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation since the last Council meeting, during the time period of **January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020–March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2021**. The report covers Fisheries Monitoring and Research, Rulemaking and Legislation, Resource Protection and Enforcement, and Other Fishery Activities.

### **Fisheries Research and Monitoring (Fisheries Data Section)**

- All fishery data collection programs are being performed as proposed. Staffing continues to be an issue for DFW Data Section. DFW will recruit a Fisheries Data Analyst as soon as the interview and the local advertisements take place. A Fisheries Data Officer has been selected and will begin work within the next few months. The Fisheries Data Technician positions remain vacant. The Data Section is currently being managed by the Fisheries Research Section biologists on a rotating basis.

An update of the data collection programs activities are listed below.

- a. Boat-based Creel Survey
  - Surveys for the boat-based creel are being performed as scheduled.
- b. Shore-based Creel Survey
  - Surveys are being performed as scheduled, and are adjusted to adhere to COVID restrictions. Government mandated curfew is still 2am to 4am.
  - Surveys scheduled for the hours between 12am and 6am have resumed, but are with the exception of the 2am to 4am curfew.
- c. Commercial Receipt System
  - Receipts have been collected from participating vendors, hotels, and restaurants up to the month of January. However, data entry is still ongoing.
  - From the months of July to December, an estimated 207 lbs of bottom fish, 311.5 lbs of reef fish, and 3,039.5 lbs of pelagic fish were sold.

### **Rulemaking and Legislation**

- a. Updates on Mandatory data recording and reporting.

The Mandatory Data Recording and Reporting requirements have yet to be implemented. Fisheries Research Section biologist taking the lead on the Mandatory Data Recording and Reporting project have been in rotation since October 2020. Outreach was performed Fisheries Data Staff and DFW Enforcement to inform businesses and fishers about the reporting law. A printer for commercial fish licenses was acquired and is with the DFW Director. A permit application for commercial fishermen and vendors was drafted and is pending review and approval. The commercial purchase reporting form was updated to reflect items required within the law. DFW staff worked to develop a CNMI fisherman's reporting logbook, which needs to be approved and finalized.

- b. Update on the CARES Act Spend Plan and Application process.

The CNMI Administration is working with the Department of Lands and Natural Resources - Division of Fish and Wildlife in assisting fishers with their applications. The deadline to submit their application is in March this year.

### **Resource Protection and Enforcement**

- a. Updates on fishery permitting  
federal bottomfishing permits
- b. Update on enforcement activities  
JEA
- c. Community interactions

### **Other Fishery Activities**

- a. Updates on the FAD Program  
The CNMI has 11 active FADs around its waters. DFW plans to conduct maintenance work for existing FAD systems and procure replacement materials for future deployments.
- b. Boating Access updates
  - Saipan Marina and Docks
    - CNMI-DLNR/DFW has received Public Assistance (PA) Notice of Award for the repairs to the Smiling Cove Marina caused by previous years storms. Pending the hiring of an engineering firm by the Public Assistance Office to finalized scope-of-work and also to oversee the proposed projects
    - December 12, 2020 a Wahoo Derby was held at Smiling Cove Marina. A Special Event Permit was issued to SFA
    - In collaboration with USACE representative and local permitting agencies on the process of acquiring permit for Sugar Dock proposed maintenance dredging project.
    - Continued the operation and maintenance of the Smiling Cove Marina.

- Tinian Marina
    - CNMI-DLNR/DFW has received Public Assistance Notice of Award for the replacement of the Tinian Marina. Pending the hiring of an engineering firm by the Public Assistance Office to finalized scope-of-work and also to oversee the proposed projects.
    - Continued the ground maintenance services for the marina facility.
  - Rota Marina
    - The Rota West Harbor Marina Rehabilitation Project ITB were advertised (Jan.2021). A Pre-Bid Conference was scheduled on February 5, 2021.
    - Continued the ground maintenance services for the marina facility.
- c. Updates on the Turtle Program
- No poaching or stranding (dead, trapped, injured, or sick turtles) reports were recorded for this time period, however the program continues to receive community reports on sea turtle tracks and nests. Three nesting sea turtles are currently being monitored and this number is expected to increase during peak nesting season (March-July). Media (newspaper, television, radio, Facebook) and in person outreach is continually being broadcasted/conducted. The program's Section 6 species recovery grant will be completed in June 2021. The program is awaiting grant award notification (to be announced sometime in March) to determine if monitoring and outreach efforts will continue.
- d. Fish Life History update
- Fish gonads (n=191) of *Scarus rubroviolaceus* were sent to the University of Hawaii for histology. An additional 745 samples will be sent next month to the same vendor for processing.
- e. Miscellaneous updates
- Indo Pacific Man O War Jellyfish warning sent out in December
  - Public Meetings on Coral Critical Habitat
  - IT Coordinator Hired in January
  - 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Mahi Mahi Derby:
 

The derby was held on December 12, 2020 after it was postponed earlier in the year. DFW staff weighed an estimated total weight of 164.4 pounds of mahimahi. Wahoo were also weighed for the fishing contestants side bets. An estimated total of 205.0 pounds of wahoo was weighed for this tournament. The maximum weight measured for mahimahi and wahoo were recorded as 18.3 pounds and 26.7 pounds, respectively. A total of 49 boats were registered for this event. However, only 33 boats submitted qualifying fish.