



Report of the CNMI – Mariana Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Friday, November 18, 2021
1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. (ChSt)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) vice-Chair opened the meeting at 1:33 p.m. CNMI AP members in attendance included: Michael Fleming, Lawrence Concepcion, Ray Tebuteb, Ray Delacruz, Jun Yamagishi, Cecilio Raiukiulipiy and Perry Mesngon.

Others in attendance included Council staff Joshua DeMello, Zach Yamada, and Diana Kitiona.

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff presented the report of the last CNMI AP meeting held on September 11, 2021. He reviewed the recommendations made at that meeting and provided an update on the status of those recommendations.

3. CNMI AP Issue Reports

A. Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs)

The Council, at its 187th meeting, directed staff to work with the AP on determining and addressing FAD issues in the Marianas. Council staff is working on developing a list of issues and working with the AP on developing solutions. To assist in this work, the CNMI AP developed a working group and met on Thursday, November 18, 2021 to discuss FAD issues.

The FAD working group was provided presentations on FAD components and designs through a video from the Pacific Community (SPC) called Fish Smart, Set FADs as well as a presentation on FADs from the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW). The SPC video resulted in the discussion on the requirements needed to install FADs and the types of FADs that are available. FADs require permits and working with the US Coast Guard and that maintenance is required due to constant wear and tear. FAD materials such as bamboo rafts or bungee type of rope would need to be approved by the permitting process.

The DFW presentation provided the type of FADs put out in the CNMI and the types of issues that the division deals with and noted that design, placement, and deployment input can be provided by the fishing community. It was noted that tying up to FADs will cause damage and could result in FAD loss. The group discussed the potential for submerged FADs that could help prolong use.

An AP member also presented a list of issues facing FADs in the CNMI with possible solutions. He noted that rough weather conditions are the main issue and said a possible solution is moving the FADs to a location that is less vulnerable and away from shipping lanes or heavily used areas. Another AP member noted that maintenance is another issue and suggested that the FAD working group work with the local agencies and the US Coast Guard.

AP members agreed to continue the FAD working group to continue to list issues and a plan for implementing solutions. The vice Chair agreed to work with members to obtain funds to support community FADs.

B. Fishery Infrastructure

The CNMI AP consistently provides updates on fishery infrastructure concerns in Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. The harbor lighting, marina docks, and even radio antennas needed for the fishing community are in disrepair and the members are looking for assistance on maintenance of these facilities. To better address these local issues, the CNMI AP assigned a work group to determine concerns and provide suggestions for solutions.

The CNMI AP Infrastructure Working Group met on Thursday, November 18, 2021 to discuss infrastructure issues. Working group members shared concerns with regard to Saipan's marinas and boat ramps, including Sugar Dock which has been closed due to increased sand accumulation. Major work is needed to address break water concerns for Rota, Tinian, and the outer Smiling Cove Marina on Saipan; docking systems that have become hazards to the public; and lighting for safety. The group noted that some of these concerns were provided to local authorities and work is underway to fix some issues but others are dependent upon permitting and funding. Council staff also presented on the current U.S. National Parks revetment project at the Garapan Smiling Cove Marina as well as projects to repair the existing revetments in 3 separate locations in the area.

An AP member said that he had met with harbor personnel and other agencies and reported that marina work on Rota and Tinian is ongoing. Another AP member shared that if grants are to be used in helping the infrastructure, a fee should be added to users in order to maintain the facilities. The fee would include commercial vessels that are utilizing the facilities.

4. CNMI AP Outreach and Education

Council staff provided an update on outreach and education projects including the lunar calendar and outreach efforts at tournaments. Staff reported that the 2022 Lunar Calendar is nearly complete and minor edits are being made with regards to photos and recognition of individuals that assisted in creating the calendar. In addition, numerous outreach events were completed by AP members to include fishing tournaments on Rota, Tinian, and Saipan, where AP members promoted and assisted in the recruitment of Catchit Logit (CILI) participants. Staff noted that AP members also participated in Tasi to Table's high school presentations on all three islands as well as participated and provided input in the virtual fisher meeting held by the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group.

5. CNMI Fishery Issues and Activities

A. Military Issues and Concerns

There were no military issues and concerns presented and the vice Chair asked the AP to table the report until more information can be provided. The AP agreed and will work with Council staff to identify issues as well as a liaison from the military to discuss issues at a future meeting.

B. Catch It, Log It Transfer and Mandatory Reporting Requirements

Council staff reported that the CILI program is being transferred to the CNMI DFW and will be used to satisfy the mandatory reporting requirements for the commercial fisheries. DFW has created a draft implementation plan and is currently being reviewed by the DFW Director. He provided an update of the data and noted that there have been a total of five vendors and 112 fishers reporting on CILI. Data shows a total of 1,301 sales reported with 147,894.73 pounds of fish purchased. This is more than the total reported pounds caught (55,358.74 pounds) which means that not all fishers that are selling to the vendors are actively inputting their data into CILI or are not on CILI at all.

AP members agreed to work on improving participation in CILI and providing outreach to the community.

C. SFF Project Updates

Council staff provided an update on projects funded by the CNMI through its territorial quota agreement Hawaii Longline Association. These projects are funded through the Sustainable Fisheries Fund and include bottomfish fishery development, improvements to Garapan Fishing Base, improving resource monitoring and data collection, repairs to fishery infrastructure, vessel maintenance, and project coordination. Staff reported that the bottomfish fishery development projects have been completed and the CNMI is working on starting its next projects as it develops its implementation plan to submit to the Council.

D. Council Coral Reef Program

Council staff presented on an upcoming grant proposal being developed to assist in the Council's coral reef program. Currently, the staff is working on developing a project that would look at the habitat of the shallow-water, coral reef-associated species in order to refine Essential Fish Habitat. He then solicited the AP for any additional ideas for coral reef ecosystem-associated projects to potentially include in the proposal and noted that he will also be speaking with DFW staff as well.

An AP member noted that some species of coral reef fish are regulated in the CNMI but that the information on these rules has not been distributed widely. He suggested that the Council assist the DFW in providing a regulation book on the coral reef fisheries so fishermen understand the regulations.

E. CNMI Fishermen Observations

The Advisory Panels have been recording its observations while fishing, including observations on weather, oceanographic conditions, catchability, and anything out of the ordinary. These events will be provided to the overall AP Chair at a meeting in early 2022 as fishermen observations to be included in the Council's Annual SAFE Reports as potential explanations for trends in fishing data. The vice Chair solicited fishermen observations since the last meeting.

AP members have noticed an increase in gas prices and an increase in shark depredation in recent months. One AP member noted that fishers have been catching a lot of marlin which may or may not be correlated with charter vessels not fishing due to the lack of tourism. Another AP member noted that there had been a large algal bloom within the Saipan lagoon and that

shark depredation increases when bottomfishing between zero and 500 feet. He said that fishing in deeper water has a decreased likelihood of shark incidences.

F. Advisory Panel Issues

The vice Chair asked the AP members to provide any issues in the CNMI fisheries and to report on any efforts and activities in their areas.

An AP member noted that he is working with Rota's Island Specialty Corp Association (RISCA) to help provide fishery data when sold in the markets to assist with the CILI efforts. Another member noted that a tag and release program should be implemented for charter vessels to allow more catch for subsistence fishing and noted that tourists want to come to the islands and catch marlin.

The AP inquired if there was any additional assistance for fishers experiencing impacts from the ongoing pandemic. Council staff reported that he would contact the CNMI grant's office and report back to the AP. An AP member noted that the CARES Act funding provided more to fishermen in Guam than in Saipan. Council staff noted that while both territories received the same amount of funding, the spending plan developed by each government allocated the funding differently.

6. Annual Report of CNMI AP Activities

A. 2021 Plan and Activities

The AP vice Chair presented on the AP's plan and the activities accomplished in 2021. The report included work on CILI, outreach to high schools, assisting Tasi To Table, and providing education and outreach at fishing tournaments.

B. Planning for 2022/End of term

The AP Vice-Chair explained that the AP term ends on December 31, 2022. He noted that he wanted to finish the term strong with the working groups and provide outputs from this group that will be useful to the Council and the CNMI.

An AP member requested if the Lunar Calendars can be promoted during key CNMI events such as the seafood festival and lunar festival. AP members also agreed to provide recommendations on the next lunar calendar.

7. Public Comment

There were no public comments

8. Discussion and Recommendations

The CNMI-Mariana Archipelago FEP Advisory Panel did not make recommendations to the Council. However, the AP did list the following as work items for the AP:

- Work through local agencies:
 - a. to support more community FADs projects;
 - b. on the maintenance of FADs;
 - c. in reporting large debris that may become hazardous to fishers.

- Work with local agency representatives to receive updates on the repairs of Sugar Dock, Susupe.
- Work with local and federal agencies on adding lights at the Smiling Cove and Peace Park to help shore based fishers at night to navigate to the fishing areas as well as attract fish.
- Inquire on status of the San Vicente/Laolao Bay Launching Ramp plans.
- Conduct outreach activities in promoting and registering more CILI participants.

9. Other Business

The vice Chair reported that the CNMI Government quarantine process has changed. Fully vaccinated travelers that are staying at fully vaccinated homes and lodging are exempt from quarantine upon submitting documentation of vaccination.

Meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.