



**Western
Pacific
Regional
Fishery
Management
Council**

December 4, 2020

Mr. Michael D. Tosatto
Pacific Islands Regional Office
NOAA Inouye Regional Center
1845 Wasp Boulevard, Building 176
Honolulu, HI 96818

Dear Mike:

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council at its 184th Meeting held virtually on December 2-4, 2020, received a briefing on the proposed coral critical habitat designations published on November 27, 2020 (85 Fed. Reg. 76262). The proposed critical habitat areas encompass nearly all shallow water areas around the islands of American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), Guam, and the Pacific Remote Island Areas (PRIAs), prompting concerns for potential impacts from the designations.

The Council requests the Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) to conduct public hearings for each of the areas with proposed coral critical habitat designations in American Samoa (Tutuila and Manu'a), CNMI (Saipan, Tinian, and Rota) and Guam. We request PIRO to make the following accommodations to ensure robust public participation and input:

- Hold hearings separately for each of the island areas to account for time zone differences and tailor presentations to include the basis of the proposed designations and the economic impact analyses for each area;
- If the hearings will be conducted virtually due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, arrange for local host sites in the Territories to allow for in-person participation where social gatherings are allowed; and
- Extend the comment period for an additional 60 days to allow sufficient time after the hearing for the public to submit comments.

The Council further requests NMFS depict the proposed critical habitat boundaries, using bottom contours as appropriate, on current nautical charts of all affected islands and make them available to the general public at least 30 days prior to closure of the public comment period.

Sincerely,

Kitty M. Simonds
Executive Director

Cc: Sam Rauch, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Regulatory Programs
Lance Smith, Fishery Biologist, PIRO Protected Resources Division
Archie Soliai, Chair, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
Henry Seseapasara, Director, AS Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources
Anthony Benevante, Secretary, CNMI Department of Lands and Natural Resources
Chelsa Muña-Brecht, Director, Guam Department of Agriculture