



# Pacific Islands Fishery News

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## Celebrating Women Leaders and Diversity



**March was Women's History Month**, and we're celebrating women in positions of leadership in the U.S. government and fisheries sector of the Western Pacific Region. Women face additional challenges to attain positions of leadership, especially nonwhite women. One of the greatest difficulties facing many organizations is creating and maintaining a community that reflects the rich diversity of our country. The case for diversity and inclusion is clear—a team is more productive and creative when there is a variety of skills, ideas and experiences.

Women are often held to higher standards than men, have to contend with gender stereotypes and feel the need to choose between a career and having a family. We are highlighting several women pioneers that have faced these challenges head-on and shine as role models for young girls everywhere.



**Kamala Harris** is not only the first black and Indian-American to serve as Vice President of the United States (as with other offices she has held), but also the first woman. As she said upon becoming vice president-elect in November 2020, "While I may be the first woman in this office, I won't be the last."

Harris was primarily raised and inspired by her Indian mother, who was a breast cancer scientist and pioneer in her field. Harris's childhood was also shaped by civil rights demonstrations and black leaders in the community, including civil rights leader Constance Baker Motley and first black Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall. She was motivated by her experiences to become a prosecutor and focused on children and families through her rise from the district attorney of San Francisco to California's attorney general. Harris personifies not just the American dream, but also the American future since the United States is expected to have a nonwhite majority in about 25 years.

**Debra Haaland**, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, is the first Native American to serve as a cabinet secretary and one of the first Native American women to serve in Congress (elected in 2018). She is a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe and a 35th



generation New Mexican. She is running an agency with a long history of attacks against Native American lands, culture and families. Shortly after her nomination, Haaland said, "It's profound to think about the history of this country's policies to exterminate Native Americans and the resilience of our ancestors that gave me a place here today."

The Department of the Interior oversees half a billion acres of land and more than three times as many acres offshore.

Haaland grew up in a military family, struggled as a single mother, at times relying on government assistance, and put herself through college to become a lawyer. In Congress, she focused on environmental justice, climate change, missing and murdered indigenous women and family-friendly policies.

U.S. Secretary of Commerce **Gina Raimondo** was a lawyer, venture capitalist and general treasurer of Rhode Island, before becoming the state's first female governor. Her new position has authority over NOAA, which encompasses the National



Marine Fisheries Service. Raimondo's tight-knit Italian-American family and childhood experiences shaped her core beliefs in hard work, the importance of financial security and opportunity for all. "We must stay undeterred in our fight to rise above divisions and create a climate and culture of respect and inclusion in the workplace and in our communities,"

said Raimondo. "As we work together to build a better America, we must also foster an environment of diversity, equity and inclusion across the Commerce Department that treats everyone with dignity and respect regardless of what they look like or where they come from."

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### STORY ICON KEY

#### REGIONAL INTEREST



#### CONSERVATION



#### FISHERMEN



#### EDUCATORS



#### GOVERNMENT



Government



Hawaii



Guam/CNMI



American Samoa

*Dedicated to ecosystem-based  
fisheries management in the  
U.S. Pacific Islands.*

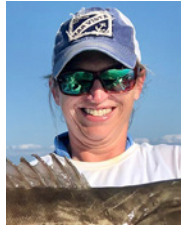


## Women Leaders

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Simonds



Simmons



Muña-Brecht



Brown



Matila



Castro



Demapan

**Closer to home**, we also recognize several women who play important leadership roles in regional fishery management councils and our Western Pacific Region.

**Kitty Simonds** has served as the executive director of the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council for nearly four decades—the only woman to hold this position in the United States until recently. Simonds' own Pacific roots on both sides of her family have enabled her to relate personally to regional ocean interests. Committed concern for fishing and indigenous communities, a willingness to seek out and listen to experts and the capacity to work with communities and decision-shapers at all levels to settle policy issues are a legacy of the Council under her leadership. "I have always been a strong supporter of the Magnuson-Stevens Act," says Simonds, "especially its 'bottom up' approach that encourages stakeholder involvement in fishery management."

**Carrie Simmons** has worked for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council since 2008, becoming the executive director in 2018. A native Floridian, she spent her childhood fishing and scuba diving where she established a deep love for the outdoors and respect for natural resources. Despite numerous setbacks to her final PhD project, such as hurricanes and fish diseases, Simmons persisted in her graduate studies to complete degrees in fisheries biology and coral ecology. "I am proud to serve as the executive director for the Gulf Council and hope to make improvements in public education and involvement in the federal fishery management process in the coming years," said Simmons. "The council process is vital to making fisheries management a success for both stakeholders and natural resources."

**Chelsa Muña-Brecht**, director of the Guam Department of Agriculture, has been a voting member of the Council since March 2019. She brings extensive experience in project development and management working with the Guam Department of Education, government agencies and the private sector. She funded a nonprofit organization whose mission is to expose, educate, empower, enrich and inspire the island community through creating and supporting sustainable environmental and social justice projects. "My inspiration to help the Guam community comes from my love for natural resources," said Muña-Brecht.

**Tia Brown** is the first female and native Hawaiian deputy director of the NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center. She provides guidance and oversight of the science, operations and administrative activities that support stewardship of living marine resources in the vast Pacific Islands Region. Her grandparents played a key role in encouraging Brown to attend college in Washington, D.C., and later work for the late Senator Inouye—a formative time in her career. Brown has worked closely with the Council to support educational and leadership growth opportunities for Pacific Island youth. "As a native Hawaiian, I have always been a strong supporter of students in our region, particularly indigenous youth," said Brown.

American Samoa Director of Commerce **Petti Matila** is the youngest cabinet member of the Lemanu-Talauuga Administration. She was an intern in Washington, D.C. to the late U.S. Senator of Hawai'i Daniel K. Inouye in 2008 and has over a decade of experience in federal grants management and planning. While she benefited from government leadership programs, Matila credits hard work, self-confidence and respect for elders as integral to becoming a young woman leader.

Appointed in 2017, **Janice Castro** is the director for the CNMI Division of Coastal Resources Management, where she first interned in 2005. Born and raised on Saipan, she recognized the significance of the connection between her culture and natural resources, which fueled her passion to pursue a career in conservation and resource management. "I found it difficult to get started on my professional career, but I couldn't let myself accept defeat," said Castro. "Now, I am working my dream job—protecting and effectively managing some of the most critical resources we as islanders have in order to sustain our livelihoods and support future generations."

**Carey Demapan** began working in May 2021 at the CNMI Division of Environmental Quality as the air quality program manager, which falls under the same Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality as Castro. Demapan is a past recipient of the Council's U.S. Pacific Territories Fishery Capacity-Building Scholarship, working at the Department of Lands and Natural Resources as a sea turtle outreach specialist after graduating from the University of Hawai'i at Hilo. The scholarship program's main goal is to support the aspiration of American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI to build their capacity to effectively manage their fisheries and related resources through employment of their own people. 🐟





# Highlights from 185th Council Meeting

## March 23–25, 2021

### Measures to Address Overfishing for Striped Marlin

To address the relative impacts of U.S. vessels on the internationally overfished North Pacific striped marlin, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council recommended an initial catch limit of approximately 1 million pounds (457 metric tons) in 2022. This applies to all U.S. vessels fishing north of the equator and west of 150 °W. An in-season accountability measure would also be implemented to track catch relative to the limit. Retention and landing of striped marlin would be prohibited in longline fisheries when the catch limit is projected to be reached.

Due to highly uncertain historical foreign catch and discards, the Council noted the U.S. relative impacts are unclear. This uncertainty in part will likely be reconciled in 2022 with new analyses by an international science provider. Beginning in 2023, the Council recommended a catch limit corresponding to a



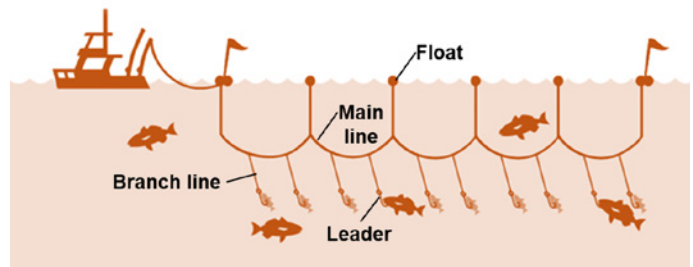
The Council recommended a domestic catch limit of about 1 million pounds per year in 2022 for North Pacific striped marlin to help address overfishing primarily due to foreign landings. *Photo: Marc Montocchio.*

proportional fishery-wide reduction to end overfishing. Based on the current best scientific information available, the limit would be 690,000 pounds (313 metric tons), which the Council will specify for 2023. U.S. Pacific fisheries, including the Hawai'i longline fishery, landed approximately 19% of reported striped marlin catch from 2013 to 2017, including discards that only the United States reports.

### Oceanic Whitetip Sharks and Gear Changes in the Hawai'i Longline Fishery

The Council took a step towards a regulatory change to prohibit the use of wire leaders in the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery, including a requirement to remove trailing gear from Endangered Species Act-listed oceanic whitetip sharks. This supports the Hawaii Longline Association (HLA) initiative to voluntarily switch from wire to monofilament nylon leaders announced in December 2020 and helps to address the Council's domestic obligations for the relative impacts of U.S. vessels on international overfishing of Western and Central Pacific Ocean oceanic whitetip sharks.

The Hawai'i longline fishery uses wire leaders as a safety measure to prevent gear flyback, an unintended consequence of using required weighted branch lines. However, wire leaders make it difficult to remove the terminal portion of the branch line from sharks and other protected species that cannot be brought on board.



The Council recommended a Hawai'i longline fishery gear change from wire to monofilament leaders (located above the baited hook) to support conservation measures for oceanic whitetip sharks and other protected species. *Base image: NMFS, labels added.*

International fishery commissions have adopted nonretention measures to help conserve oceanic whitetip sharks. To further address overfishing in international longline fisheries, the Council recommended increased observer coverage in areas where risk of interactions are highest, and improved shark handling and reduction of trailing gear to further safety at sea and promote post-release shark survivability.

### Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plan

The Council deferred action on the Guam bottomfish stock rebuilding plan to a future meeting. This allows for a coordinated effort among the relevant agencies to finalize the Council's rebuilding plan and develop the Territory's Bottomfish Fishery Management Plan—essential to ensure the stock is rebuilt in the shortest time possible, not more than 10 years, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

A National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) 2019 stock assessment determined the Guam bottomfish stock to be overfished. In December 2020, the Council chose a preferred alternative annual catch limit (ACL) of 31,000 pounds. The stock would be rebuilt within six years if catches are kept below that limit. NMFS updated its biomass projection in January 2021, which resulted in a rebuilding projection of 19 years instead of six years. An alternative that addresses the rebuilding requirement is an ACL of 27,000 pounds. If catch is kept below this level, the stock would rebuild in eight years.

Join us at the Council's next quarterly meeting, which will be held by web conference June 22–24, 2021. An agenda, meeting documents and link to the Webex are available on the Council website at: [www.wpcouncil.org/event/186th-council-virtual-meeting](http://www.wpcouncil.org/event/186th-council-virtual-meeting) 🐟



The Council and Guam government asked for more time to coordinate their efforts to rebuild the Guam bottomfish stock.



# Council to Report Barriers to Equality in Western Pacific Region

## On Jan. 21, 2021, President Biden issued Executive Order (EO) 13985

on advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities through the federal government. This order directed his administration to pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. Section 5 and 7 of this EO gives federal agencies an opportunity to identify barriers faced by these communities and develop a plan to achieve equity for them.

At its March 2021 meeting, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council directed staff to review the EO as it applies to the region's fishery ecosystem plans, programs and Pacific Island fishing communities. Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds emphasized that "historically, all of our indigenous people in the Western Pacific Region are underserved, marginalized and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality." This report is due to the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy by Aug. 6, 2021. Federal agencies will work together to produce a plan to address barriers by Jan. 20, 2022.

Section 2 of the EO defines the term "equity" as the consistent and systematic, fair, just and impartial treatment of all individuals. Over 75% of the population

	Percent of Population Living Below Poverty Line	Median Income	Roundtrip Airfare to Washington DC
National Average	12.3	\$65,712	N/A
Hawai'i	9.5	\$83,102	\$600
American Samoa	57.8	\$23,892	\$1,000
Guam	22.9	\$48,274	\$1,400
CNMI*	52.3	\$19,958	\$2,200

Poverty, income and airfare to Washington D.C. values for Pacific Islands Region residents.

Source: Poverty line and median income data from 2010 U.S. Census.

\*Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

in the Pacific Islands Region identify as indigenous, Asian American, Pacific Islander or other persons of color—all groups that fall under the EO's definition of underserved communities that have historically been denied equitable treatment.

An example of a policy that creates barriers in the Pacific Islands Region is National Standard 1 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), which requires the Council to manage fisheries in its fishery ecosystem plan through specified catch limits. This has negatively affected the Guam and American Samoa bottomfish fisheries because local data collection programs are inadequate to produce reliable estimates of fish abundance and monitor catches in real time. This requirement unintentionally

disadvantages the small-scale fisheries in this region. The Council has explored options to exempt or allow for other standards to be used in data-poor fisheries without much success. Efforts also continue to increase funds to improve territorial data collection programs to meet MSA requirements.

Congressional statutes directly provide benefits for Pacific Island indigenous communities which have not been supported by the federal government. For example, the Community Demonstration Project Program is a grant program under the MSA that allocates \$500,000 annually to support fishery demonstration projects. It is designed to encourage participation of native peoples in federally mandated Western Pacific fisheries and foster traditional indigenous fishing practices. While the program received funding in the early period, it has been unfunded for more than 16 years.

Examples of other barriers facing Western Pacific communities include geographic time zone differences, high travel costs, lack of representation on regional and national groups, structure of competitive grant programs and funding availability for federal programs.

The Council will highlight these and other issues in its response to President Biden's EO 13985. 🐟



CNMI is one of the poorest areas in the Western Pacific Region, with more than half of its population living below the poverty line. Photo: Rota mayor staff.



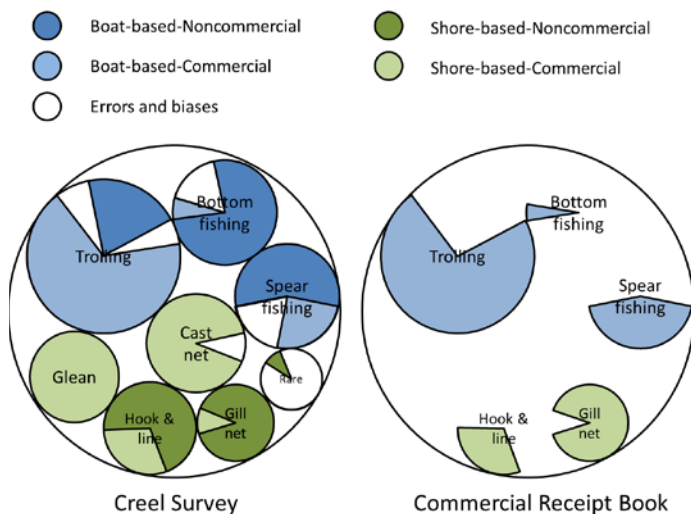
# Using the Right Tool for the Job: From a Data Collection Perspective

**Hammers drive nails.** Saws are for cutting. Wrenches are for tightening and loosening nuts and bolts. Even the do-it-yourselfers know that using the right tool for a particular job gets the work done effectively. The same is true for collecting data from different fisheries. Each fishery has a different set of characteristics that requires a different tool to extract accurate information.

For decades, the Pacific Islands Region has used four types of tools to collect fishery information:

1. Creel surveys collect general fisheries information for boat and shore fisheries in American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). (voluntary)
2. Commercial receipt book systems capture the portion of the boat and shore fisheries that is sold to seafood markets in American Samoa and the CNMI. (mandatory)
3. The Hawai'i Fisherman Reporting System compiles catch data from commercial fishermen via paper reports or online. (mandatory)
4. The Hawai'i Marine Recreational Fishing Survey gathers data from noncommercial fisheries. (voluntary)

Creel surveys are considered a general method to sample different fisheries and the data are estimated based on predetermined standards. The goal of this survey method is to capture a broad snapshot of the fisheries. The accuracy of catch and effort estimates depends on the survey design. Taken as a whole, it captures a snapshot of the fisheries on a large spatial and temporal scale (such as the whole territory and on an annual level) (**Figure 1a**). The surveys can have error and biases that prohibit fishery managers from understanding the whole fisheries picture. For example, the surveys could be improperly implemented or the survey design could fail to accurately describe specific fisheries. It's the right tool if

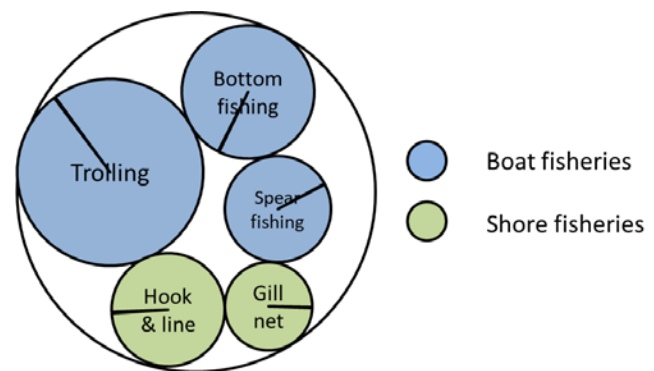


**Figure 1.** A graphic diagram of: **a)** the creel survey system that captures the different fisheries at a broad scale with the associated errors and biases (left), and **b)** the commercial receipt book system that captures the segment of the total catches sold.

we want to capture the broad sense of the fishery. It's not the right tool if we want more specific information by species on a shorter time frame.

Some of the total catch is sold and some are kept. **Figure 1b** shows the subset of the total catch captured in the commercial receipt book system. If the territories only have voluntary systems of submitting this information, there is no way to know whether the reported data are complete. The difficulty with voluntary systems is that the universe of who should report is unknown. It is challenging to tease out nonreporting from those expected to report and those who are not required to report. This is the right tool to collect commercial fishery information but only if managers implement a mandatory licensing system.

A new tool recently became available for the U.S. Pacific Island territories—the Catchit Logit electronic self-reporting app. The Catchit Logit system is designed to support mandatory license and reporting regulations being developed in the territories. If the agencies implement the regulations, it would define a set of fishery participants that are expected to report (**Figure 2**). The Catchit Logit system is the right tool for capturing the commercial fisheries on the boat and shore side as long as compliance with the reporting requirement is maintained at a high level. The Hawai'i Fisherman Reporting System follows a mandatory license and reporting plan and the Civil Resource Violations System enhances compliance with the regulations.



**Figure 2.** A graphic diagram of the Catchit Logit electronic self-reporting system, assuming it is implemented with a mandatory license and reporting regulation.

The Western Pacific Fishery Management Council is working with the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, fishing communities, and state and territorial fishery agencies to upgrade the different tools. The tools are put into the data collection toolbox and used to build a better fishery management framework. The ideal comprehensive toolbox would have a creel survey system that addresses the inherent biases from nonconformity of the survey design with the current fishery situation. This can be done by redesigning the survey to better capture the fisheries data important to managers. The toolbox should also have an electronic self-reporting system that is supported by a mandatory license and reporting regulation and fully enforced. 🐟





# From Paper to Tablets: Modernizing Catch Reporting in Hawai'i and American Samoa Longline Fisheries

**When do we expect to reach the bigeye tuna quota this year?** How much fish did the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline vessels catch last year? Since the early 1990s, we in the Pacific Islands Region have relied on fishermen filing paper catch reports called "logbooks" to answer these important management questions. In summer 2021, all Hawai'i and American Samoa longline vessels more than 50-feet long will switch from paper to electronic logbooks, ushering in a new era for monitoring these fisheries.

With the old way, longline captains fill out one logbook sheet for every day of fishing during their trip. Then they submit their full trip's log sheets to the Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) when they return to port. The data are verified and then manually entered into a database by PIFSC staff. There is a delay between when the paper logbook is filled out by the captain and when it becomes available to managers to compare the latest catch information with catch quotas. The data lag can easily be two to four weeks, which makes it challenging to predict when the fleet will reach the annual bigeye tuna catch limit.

Enter the tablets. Electronic logbooks, commonly referred to as electronic reporting (ER), automate and streamline many of these steps, allowing near-real-time catch reports. Captains use a tablet to enter their catch records daily while at sea,

with the ability to enter their fishing location coordinates with the tap of a button instead of hand-writing the latitude and longitude every single day. Once captains enter their daily report, another tap sends the data through the vessel's existing satellite tracking and communication system to PIFSC's secure server. Development of the ER system for the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries ramped up about 2014. After several years of development, PIFSC began rolling out the tablets in 2019 for Hawai'i longline vessels to use on a voluntary basis.

Change can be scary for anyone, but especially for old-time fishermen who have used paper logbook for decades and may not be as technologically savvy. The Hawai'i longline fishery also had cultural and language barriers to overcome since the majority of the fleet is now operated by Vietnamese-American fishermen. Many of these fishers have been in the Hawai'i fishery since the late 1980s when mainland fishing vessels from the Gulf of Mexico and East Coast relocated to Hawai'i for better fishing opportunities.

## Overcoming Barriers to Success

The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council hired a Vietnamese-speaking staff to support PIFSC's ER outreach to Vietnamese-American fishermen. Over the past year, Kim-Dung Nguyen has worked closely with the ER rollout team to meet with longline captains. The team introduces the tablet, conducts training and follows up with them after their initial trips to help resolve any issues. Despite the slowdown from COVID-19 restrictions, Nguyen gradually built trust and connections with hesitant captains. Many returned from their first trip using ER never wanting to go back to paper. Those enthusiastic captains spread the word to others in the fleet and phone calls to Nguyen requesting training continue to pour in. The team has added 40 vessels into the ER system since March 2020. As of April 2021, more than 100 of the approximately 140 vessels are voluntarily using the tablets ahead of mandatory implementation later in the year.

In September 2020, the Council recommended that the ER system for the Hawai'i and American Samoa longline vessels become mandatory this year. The rulemaking process will start soon and will include a public comment period. The ER rollout team will continue their outreach efforts to bring all vessels online before the mandatory requirement kicks in. 🐟

Kim-Dung Nguyen at the Hawai'i longline docks during an outreach effort in pre-pandemic March 2020 to encourage fishing vessel captains to switch from paper to electronic catch reporting ahead of mandatory requirements. In-person outreach and training resumed in October 2020. Since then, the electronic reporting rollout team has added 40 boats to the online system.  
*Photo: Kim-Dung Nguyen.*





# Tackling the Biden Administration's 30x30 Initiative

**On Jan. 27, 2021, President Biden signed an executive order** to address the climate crisis within the United States and abroad. The action directs the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) to outline steps to achieve the president's commitment to "conserve at least 30% each of our lands and waters by the year 2030," known as the "30x30" initiative or goal. The DOI was directed to undertake the process with broad engagement, including agricultural and forest landowners, fishermen, outdoor enthusiasts, sovereign tribal nations, states, territories, local officials and others to identify strategies that reflect the priorities of all communities. The Departments of Agriculture, Commerce and the Interior and the Council on Environmental Quality released a preliminary report to the National Climate Task Force on May 6, 2021. The report made recommendations on how to best measure and assess the country's progress toward the 30x30 goal and to properly account for the many innovative and effective ways that communities are conserving their lands and waters for current and future generations.

But where are we in terms of meeting this goal based on the status quo? Aren't most of the waters under the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council's responsibility already achieving this goal? The U.S. Geological Survey reports that "only 12% of lands are permanently protected. Studies show that roughly 23% of America's ocean is currently strongly protected, with the vast majority of ocean protections found in the western Pacific Ocean." This is where we addressed our concerns and commitment to the Secretary of the Interior, Debra Haaland. In a March 29, 2021, letter to Haaland, we expressed that the contribution to the 30x30 goal is disproportionately on the shoulders of the communities in our region. Waters under the Council's jurisdiction carry the conservation burden of the entire United States in this regard by encompassing 27% of the 30% national goal. To date, 53% of the 2.24 million square miles of waters in the Western Pacific Region include fishery closures, spanning 1.2 million square miles that are considered "strongly protected."

Area-based management is very important for the Council and the many Pacific Island fishing communities whom have limited secure access to fishery resources. These communities have low income, disadvantaged populations that will suffer severely if their ways of life are further constrained. We want to help develop science-based guidelines or best practices for spatial management in both insular waters and in oceanic "blue-water ecosystems." We convened an International Workshop on Area-Based Management of Blue Water Fisheries in partnership with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in June 2020 ([www.wpcouncil.org/Blue-Water-ABMT-workshop](http://www.wpcouncil.org/Blue-Water-ABMT-workshop)).



## CONSERVING AND RESTORING AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

2021

*A preliminary report to the National Climate Task Force recommending a ten-year, locally led campaign to conserve and restore the lands and waters upon which we all depend, and that bind us together as Americans.*

As directed by President Biden's executive order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, the report from several federal agencies released May 6, 2021, provides recommendations on how the United States should achieve the goal of conserving at least 30% of our lands and waters by 2030. [www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf](http://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/report-conserving-and-restoring-america-the-beautiful-2021.pdf)

The workshop goal was to link management objectives with appropriate area-based management tools, including adaptive dynamic management, to deal with changing ocean conditions.

Fishery closures impact underrepresented Pacific Islander communities of the United States who have been surviving off fishery resources for their food security and commerce for more than a millennia. We are committed to stewardship and sustainability of natural resources as prescribed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act and by its Pacific Island constituents, which depend on marine resources to thrive—socially, culturally and economically. 🐟





# Region-Wide Request to Collaborate on Coral Critical Habitat Designation



CNMI House of Representatives holds a public meeting on the proposed joint resolution for coral critical habitat designation. Photo: Floyd Masga.

**Leaders from the U.S. Pacific Territories** of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) are working together to comment on a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for threatened Indo-Pacific corals. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is proposing to designate critical habitat for seven of the fifteen reef corals listed under the Endangered Species Act that are present in U.S. waters around its Pacific territories (and the Pacific Remote Island Areas). Once species are listed, NMFS evaluates and identifies whether any areas meet the definition of critical habitat—an area that contains habitat features essential for the conservation of a species. The agency has indicated 17 such areas, totaling approximately 230 square miles (600 square kilometers) of marine habitat.

NMFS considers economic and other relevant impacts during the designation process and some areas are excluded due to national security reasons or existing artificial structures. The public is asked to comment on proposed critical habitat designations and provide relevant information, including the identification of the geographical area and depths occupied by the listed species, and physical and biological features essential to the species' survival.

After two virtual public hearings were held in January 2021, the governors of American Samoa, Guam and CNMI sent a joint letter to NMFS requesting an extension to the public comment period. The deadline was extended from Feb. 25 to May 26, 2021.

At the March 2021 meeting, Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council members expressed their frustration with the 'broad brush' approach used to draw the critical habitat areas included in the proposed rule. The maps show most of the shallow areas around the islands to be within

the boundaries of the critical habitat designation, rather than only depicting the essential features that comprise the actual critical habitat. CNMI Vice Chair John Gourley said that these maps are not appropriate for use in future ESA consultations, which are required on any federally authorized, permitted or funded projects that may affect designated critical habitat.

To compound the issue, NMFS announced in January 2021 that it would initiate the first five-year status review as required under the ESA, and is also preparing a series of recovery planning workshops in May 2021. Gourley emphasized that these reviews should be completed before the coral critical habitat designation so that NMFS can base its decisions on better information. "Corals are notoriously difficult to identify, even by experts, and there is much uncertainty about the existing records for the territories," said Gourley.

A working group of Council members from American Samoa, the CNMI and Guam collaborated to update islands maps using their on-the-ground expertise. They identified noncritical areas such as commercial waterways and sewer outfalls to provide a more realistic identification of essential areas.

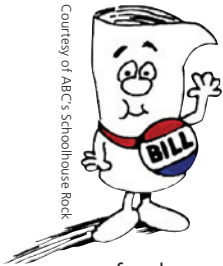
Territory resource management agencies requested in March that NMFS delay the current proposed coral critical habitat designation process until the five-year coral status review and recovery plan can be completed. To further strengthen their cause, island areas sought assistance from their legislators. Both the CNMI and Guam legislatures adopted resolutions to support the governors' request and expressed dissatisfaction with the process.

(See also the Winter 2021 issue of *Pacific Islands Fishery News*, "Proposed Critical Habitat for Coral Species Raises Concerns in Territories.") 🐟



# Congressional Corner

Courtesy of ABC's Schoolhouse Rock



**More funding is going to the fishing industry** to provide relief from the coronavirus pandemic. Earlier this year, the 117th U.S. Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, which provided another financial boost to fishers,

seafood processors and the fishing industry. Funding totaling \$255 million was allocated for fishery participants negatively affected by COVID-19 restrictions. Each state and territory is developing spend plans and will work with the interstate marine fisheries commissions to distribute the monies.

Potential changes to fisheries and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) are also working their way through Congress.

Congressman Young (R-AK) introduced H.R. 59, the "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act," that would require stock assessment plans to be published every three years. The bill would also:

- Authorize regional fishery management councils to use alternative fishery management measures in a recreational fishery.
- Consider changes in ecosystem and the economic needs of the fishing communities when establishing annual catch limits.
- Base fishery stock rebuilding time frames on science given the biology and characteristics of such stocks.

A draft bill that proposed changes to the MSA was circulated in late 2020, but has yet to be introduced in the House. Congressman Huffman (D-CA) and Congressman Case (D-HI) held listening sessions around the country to gather input on a potential MSA revision. The bill is expected to be introduced during this session, which ends Jan. 3, 2023. Other bills introduced in Congress address restoring coral reefs, eliminating shark sales and improving management of driftnet fishing and forage fish.

For up-to-date information on the bills that would affect your fishing, the fishing industry or the fishing community, visit [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov). 🐟

## In Memoriam



**Estanislao (Stan) Maratita Taisacan** (age 67) of Rota, CNMI passed away May 7, 2021. He is fondly remembered for his kindness and passion for helping the community, including canoe building and fishing method demonstrations. Taisacan was an active Council family member from 1998-2014, serving on the Advisory Panel from 2003-2014. He worked for the CNMI government for 24 years, including 12 years for the Division of Fish and Wildlife in Rota. Taisacan contributed to

several publications such as *CNMI As a Fishing Community*, published by NOAA, and *An Analysis of Archaeological and Historical Data on Fisheries for Pelagic Species in Guam and the CNMI*. Throughout his career, he helped to preserve fishing and the Marianas crow, and perpetuated the Chamorro culture.

## Notices

The American Samoa Government Department of Commerce issued a request for proposals from qualified marine shipbuilders and engineering firms to build four new commercial fishing vessels (alias or double-hulled catamarans). The vessels are intended to support the development of the local fishing fleet and industry. **Proposals are due by June 14, 2021.** For more information, contact Lucille Leota at [leotaasgprocurement@gmail.com](mailto:leotaasgprocurement@gmail.com) or Tia I'amanu at [tia.asgprocurement@gmail.com](mailto:tia.asgprocurement@gmail.com).

NOAA will hold four public meetings to receive comments on a draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for an aquaculture management program in the Pacific Islands. The statement outlines potential management alternatives, and analyzes the potential direct, indirect and cumulative impacts on the environment. **The virtual meetings will be held between June 15 and June 24, 2021.** See the *Federal Register* notice for meeting details: [www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2021-0044](http://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2021-0044).

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA are extending by 60 days the public comment period for a draft management plan for the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. The draft plan describes proposed goals, objectives and strategies for managing the Monument over a 15-year period. **Comments are due by July 26, 2021.** The *Federal Register* notice, draft management plan and supporting documentation can be found at [www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2021-0003](http://www.regulations.gov/docket/NOAA-NMFS-2021-0003).

## Council Family Updates

**At the 185th Council meeting**, the Council supported the following advisory body changes:

- **Jay Gutierrez**, Guam Div. of Aquatic & Wildlife Resources (DAWR), on the Education Committee, Fishery Data Collection and Research Committee-Technical Committee (FDCRC-TC), and Scientific and Statistical Committee.
- **Robert Ahrens**, NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC), and **Bryan Ishida**, Hawai'i Div. of Aquatic Resources (DAR), on the Archipelagic Plan Team and the Pelagic Plan Team.
- **Keith Bigelow** and **Danika Kleiber**, NMFS PIFSC, and **Jude Martinez**, Guam DAWR, on the Archipelagic Plan Team.
- **Frank Roberto**, Guam DAWR, **Frank Villagomez**, CNMI Div. of Fish & Wildlife, and **Chelsey Young**, NOAA Pacific Islands Regional Office on the Pelagic Plan Team.
- **Jason Helyer**, Hawai'i DAR, on the FDCRC-TC.
- **Leah Beth Naholowaa**, Guam Dept. of Education, on the Education Committee.





# Data Collection and Tournaments Must Continue

The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) has continued to host fishing tournaments in 2021, while being respectful of local COVID-19 restrictions. The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council staff and contractor collaborated with event organizers, taking these opportunities to recruit people to use Catchit Logit, the Council's e-reporting app. As of May 2021, Catchit Logit has registered 120 fishers and seven vendors, logging 3,760 pounds from bottomfishing, 20,742 pounds from trolling and 182 pounds from spearfishing.

## 2021 17th Mahi Mahi Derby

On April 10, 2021, the Saipan Fishermen's Association held its 17th Annual Mahi Mahi Derby. The event was well attended with 59 vessels with 223 fishers entering this year's tournament. Prizes included \$2,000 cash for 1st place, \$1,500 for 2nd place, \$1000 for 3rd place and consolation prizes for 4th and 5th places. The CNMI Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) Fishery Data Section was among the tournaments many sponsors, collecting information to later use for fishery management.

The Saipan Fishermen's Association one of the longest running fishing organizations in the Mariana Islands. Established in 1985, it has continually promoted sports fishing events, including wahoo derbies and the longest running fishing tournament, the Saipan International Fishing Tournament, coming up on its 37th year on July 10-11, 2021. 🐟



[1] CNMI Catchit Logit Administrator Lino Tenorio (middle) poses with new app users Masaki Kitano (left) and Kalama Fernandez. Photo: Lino Tenorio. [2] 1st place winner 10/7 Captain Alvin Iglecias (4th from left) poses with his family and crew members, along with Saipan Fishermen's Association members. [3] 10/7 crew members Ivan Ilmov (left) and Brandon Ecahlico pose with the winning 18.9-pound mahi mahi. [4] DFW Fishery Data Section Supervisor Michael Tenorio (left) and Fishery Tech Wilgene Dela Cruz weigh their catch. [5] 59 vessels with 223 anglers registered for the 17th Annual Mahi Mahi Derby held in April 2021. All photos, unless otherwise noted, by Floyd Masga.

## Tournament Winners

Place	Boat Name	Captain	Mahi Mahi Weight (lbs)
1st	10/7	Alvin Iglecias	18.9
2nd	CAT-SIKA	Jesse Sablan	18.2
3rd	Kingfisher 2	Eutemio Azarcon, Jr.	17.4
4th	Salty Bandits	Masaki Kitano	16.5
5th	MV Gloria	John Sablan	14.4





# American Samoa Fishing Tournaments Resume After Yearlong Hiatus

## The first Catchit Logit Flag Day Fishing Tournament

was held April 15–16, 2021, in Pago Pago, American Samoa. Both recreational and commercial fishermen enjoyed the festive event hosted by the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources (DMWR). Nineteen boats, including three from the island of Manu'a, registered for the first tournament to kick-start the year. DMWR Director Taotasi Archie Soliai said the event was “the highest boat turn-out for a tournament in recent years.” All fishing competitions and social gatherings have been canceled since the implementation of COVID-19 restrictions in March 2020.

The tournament had a good turnout of female anglers, with more than 10 signing up to participate. What is normally seen as a “male sport” in the territory is slowly being infiltrated by women. Among the winners were female anglers Jade Cox and Sally Asafo of *Double Hooked*. Jade Cox, 17, won first place for landing the heaviest fish of the tournament—a 296.4-pound marlin. Sally Asafo snagged the top prize for the yellowfin tuna category by landing a 128.6-pound fish on the second day.

The two-day event focused on encouraging fishermen to record their catch data using the Catchit Logit electronic reporting app. “The app will help DMWR and American Samoa to improve data collection gaps that currently exist,” said Soliai. During a boat captains’ meeting, participants registered in the Catchit Logit online system, downloaded the app and learned how to log information on their personal devices.

The app was developed by the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council to address issues with “data-poor” fisheries in the territories of American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. DMWR has led app training for local fishermen and fish vendors.

The event also featured a silent fish auction—a first for a local tournament—raising funds for the Pago Pago Game Fishing Association, the American Samoa Alia Fishing Association and Hope House. 🐟



**Above left:** Sally Olafaatasi Asafo of team *Double Hooked* with her 1st place 128.6-pound yellowfin tuna. **Above right:** Jade Cox landed the largest fish of the tournament on the second day—a 296.4-pound marlin. At 17, Cox was the youngest angler at the tournament. *Photos: American Samoa DMWR.*



Captain and crew of the *Salvation* with their 56-pound yellowfin tuna that landed them in third place for their category. *Photo: American Samoa DMWR.*

## Tournament Winners

Category	1st Place (lbs)	2nd Place (lbs)	3rd Place (lbs)
Marlin	<i>Double Hooked</i> 296.4	<i>Mainaivasa</i> 268.6	<i>Mumbo</i> 137.2
Masi masi	<i>Mumua</i> 29.65	<i>Double Trouble</i> 28.6	<i>Southwind</i> 21.4
Wahoo	<i>Toe Tasi A</i> 26.72	<i>Double Hooked</i> 23	<i>Eaglet</i> 22.8
Yellowfin tuna	<i>Double Hooked</i> 128.6	<i>Double Barrel</i> 117.4	<i>Salvation</i> 56.08
Skipjack tuna	<i>Sau la</i> 16.09		
Dogtooth tuna	<i>Mumua</i> 15.8		
Misc. (Trevally)	<i>DMWR</i> 23.9		

## High School Summer Courses

We are getting ready to host our **2021 summer Marine Science Course** on Fishery and Resource Management in Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam and the CNMI. The 2-week course blends classroom lectures, field trips and hands-on activities for high school students to build capacity in fisheries-related topics. Look for updates and application materials on our website: [www.wpcouncil.org/high-school-summer-courses](http://www.wpcouncil.org/high-school-summer-courses).



# Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association to Get New Home Soon

**Founded in 1976, the Guam Fishermen's Cooperative Association (Co-op)** located at the Gregorio Perez Marina in Hagatña has been an icon for the fishing community for more than 44 years. The facility's exterior façade and interior persona show its age.

After many years of serving the Guam and Mariana Islands fishing community, the rusty, dilapidated structure is not just getting renovated, but replaced with a new facility. A multi-story, multi-purpose building will replace the old one and include areas for state-of-the-art fish processing, storage and a seafood retail outlet. It promises to once again be the gathering place for everything fishing-related.

The main retail entrance will move from its current location (facing Chamorro Village) to the opposite side (facing the water). Visitors will also have access to a boardwalk along the waterfront near the new parking lot. Construction will start during late summer 2021, is expected to be completed in fall 2022 and cost approximately \$6 million. The Guam legislature adopted a resolution to support the association's new facility in April 2021, requesting funds from the U.S. Congress to supplement funds from the Port Authority of Guam. While the groundbreaking ceremony was held in January 2017, numerous budget and permitting issues delayed the project.

The Co-op started operations with about a dozen members, increasing to 50 members by 1995 and 300 by 2000. Challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other reasons impacted its membership, which is now back to around 50. The Co-op's board of directors, longtime President Manny Dueñas and the new facility chair are working diligently to meet the construction timeline.

## Proud Community Supporter

The Co-op adopted the federal Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point Program in 1997, which ensures fishermen provide high-quality products to customers. This value-added program

plays a major role in the operation's continuing success. To this day, sashimi, Guam-style poke and fish kelaguen are made fresh daily and have become staple dishes shared at office parties, beach barbeques and village fiestas. Sales of fresh-caught fish like marlin, tunas, mahimahi, wahoo, bottomfish, reef fish and others remain the mainstay of the facility's walk-in operations, while it continues to provide high-quality fish to restaurants, stores, and other establishments.

Fishermen benefit greatly from the Co-op's services, offering discounted fuel, ice and a place to sell freshly caught fish. It is the oldest, and perhaps the only, remaining fish cooperative in the Pacific Islands Region. The association does not represent a single group of fishers.

It is representative of the many facets in the

fishing community. There is no industrialized fishing in Guam. The fishery is entirely community-based, mostly using small artisanal boats whose harvest is consumed locally.

Prior to the global pandemic, 200 tourists from Korea alone visited the Co-op daily, which was made popular by social media and Korean, Chinese and Japanese bloggers. Even tour operators made the facility a daily go-to stop to purchase fresh fish samples for their customers as they go about their island tours.

The Co-op believes in giving back to the community. It shares its economic success through regular donations to various medical referral fundraisers, homeless and youth

**The Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council eagerly awaits the new Guam Fishermen's Co-op facility. Over the years, the Co-op has generously hosted many Council public meetings, workshops and receptions, providing lasting memories that remain a part of our shared history.**



Groundbreaking ceremony for the Guam Fishermen's Co-op in January 2017. Photo: Judy Amesbury.



**(Right)** Co-op and former and current Council Advisory Panel members Stephen Meno (left), James Borja and Mayor Dale Alvarez enjoy good food and friends at the groundbreaking ceremony in 2017. Photo: Judy Amesbury.

programs, faith-based organizations and many others. The association also works collaboratively with organizations like the U.S. Coast Guard to improve safety-at-sea and the Guam Coastal Zone Management Program on environmental issues.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, the Co-op sponsored the annual Guam Marianas International Fishing Derby for 24 years, attracting fishers from the Northern Mariana Islands and as far away as Japan. It partnered with local private and public organizations to host the Fishing and Seafood Festival and Chamorro Lunar Festival. Seafood samples were offered at the combined event while participants visited exhibits from various cultural and marine-related organizations promoting awareness of the environment, fishing traditions and resources.

The Co-op looks forward to reviving these events and others once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted. 🐟

## FisheryFacts

**The Port of Honolulu** consistently ranks among the top commercial fishing ports in the nation, landing 29 million pounds (23rd) valued at \$90 million (9th) in 2019. During the same year, recreational fishermen harvested more than 2.1 million pounds of mahimahi in the U.S. Pacific Islands. Find out more in two annual reports recently released by NOAA:

**2020 Status of Stocks**—provides information about U.S. fisheries through Dec. 31, 2020, including stocks that are on the overfishing and overfished lists. [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/status-stocks-2020](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/sustainable-fisheries/status-stocks-2020)

**2019 Fisheries of the United States**—details fisheries statistics for the nation with data on commercial landings and value, recreational catch, the fish processing industry, aquaculture production, imports and exports and per capita seafood consumption. [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2019-report](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/fisheries-united-states-2019-report)



An artist's visualization of the planned Guam Fishermen's Co-op facility, expected to be completed in fall 2022.





# New Outreach Resources

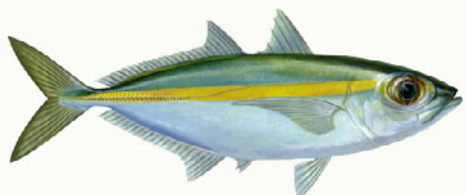
Fact sheets are available on the Council website:  
[www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/education-library](http://www.wpcouncil.org/educational-resources/education-library)

## FORAGE FISH IN THE WESTERN PACIFIC

**Forage fish, also called prey or bait fish,** are small fish and invertebrates eaten by larger fish, seabirds and marine mammals. Many species are short-lived and their abundance is often sensitive to environmental variables. Forage fish are not currently defined in the Western Pacific Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plans. However, two species that could be considered forage fish are big eye scads (akule, *Selar crumenophthalmus*) and mackerel scads ('ōpelu, *Decapterus macarellus*). Other species, such as Hawaiian anchovy (nehu, *Engrasilina purpurea*) and squid, could also be



Source: [www.polynesia.com](http://www.polynesia.com)



Big eye scad (top) and mackerel scad.

Source: [www.thisfish.info](http://www.thisfish.info)

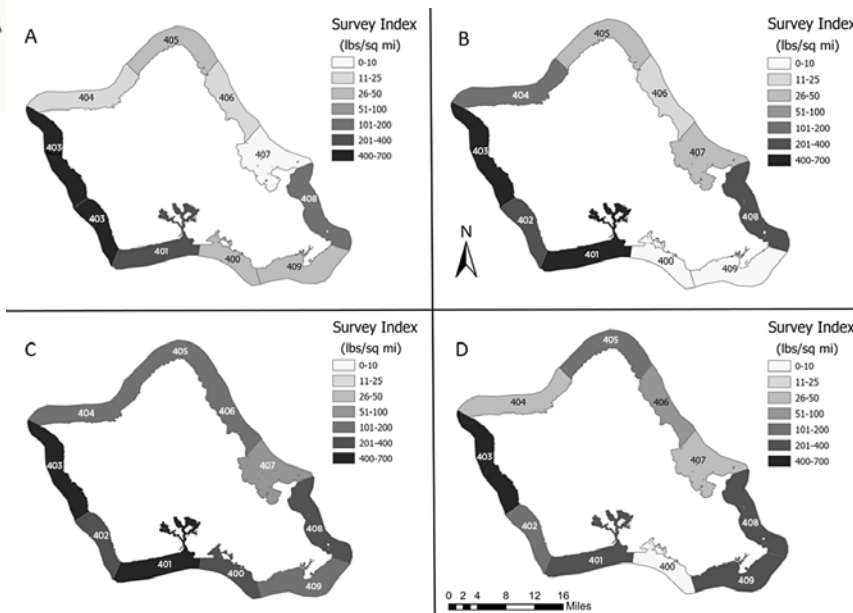


**Aerial abundance indices chart**—biomass estimate (pounds) divided by search area (square mile)—for big eye scad (akule) surrounding the island of O'ahu from November 2015–October 2016, separated by season: (A) Beginning (Nov–Jan), (B) Middle (Feb–April), (C) Peak (May–July), (D) End (Aug–Oct). Numbered areas represent Hawai'i commercial fishing grids.

Source: Wiley J, Sabater M, Langseth B. 2021. Aerial survey as a tool for understanding bigeye scad (*Selar crumenophthalmus*) dynamics around the island of O'ahu, Hawai'i. *J. Fish. Res.*, Vol. 236, 105866, ISSN 0165-7836, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.fishres.2020.105866>.

Species	No. Licences	No. Trips	Catch (lbs)
<b>Big eye scad</b> (akule, <i>Selar crumenophthalmus</i> )	210	1,558	267,551
<b>Mackerel scad</b> (‘ōpelu, <i>Decapterus macarellus</i> )	115	1,082	70,774

Source: 2020 Annual Stock Assessment and Fisheries Evaluation Report for the Hawaii Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan

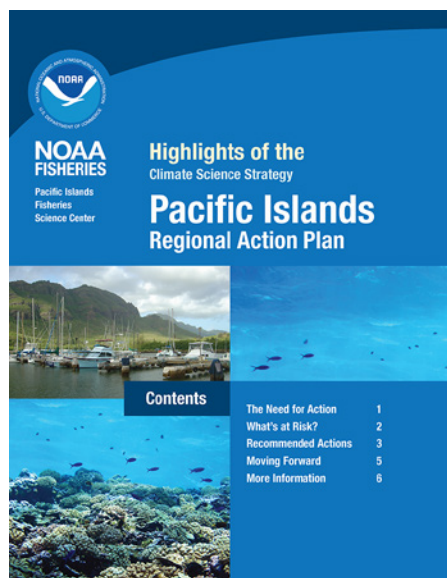




## SHIFTING STOCKS AND CHANGING OCEAN CONDITIONS

The Western Pacific Council's area of responsibility spans both the North and South Pacific, including the federal waters of Hawai'i, American Samoa, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands and the U.S. Pacific Remote Island Areas.

The Pacific Islands Region supports a wide variety of ecologically and economically important species and habitats from coral reefs to pelagic fish stocks. Climate-related changes in the region include a rise in ocean temperatures,



reduced nutrients in the euphotic zone, an increase in ocean acidity, a rise in sea level and changes in ocean currents. Many of these changes have already been observed and are projected to increase further. These changes will directly and indirectly impact insular and pelagic ecosystems and the communities

that depend upon them. Decision-makers need actionable information on how changing climate will impact this region's marine resources and what can be done to reduce impacts and increase resilience.

The NOAA Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center and the Council partnered to develop the Pacific Islands Regional Action Plan that identifies priority needs and specific actions to implement the NOAA Fisheries Climate Science Strategy in the region. The Strategy identifies seven key objectives:

1. Identify climate-informed reference points
2. Create robust management strategies for a changing climate
3. Incorporate adaptive decision processes
4. Project future conditions
5. Understand how things are changing and why
6. Track changes and provide early warnings
7. Build our science infrastructure

## How does the science advice given to fisheries managers take into account changing ocean conditions and potential movement of fishery resources?

In 2019, the Council explored ways to identify the impact of regional oceanographic conditions' (linked to global climate variability) on the recruitment of uku (blue-green snapper, *Aprion virescens*). The Council used Hawai'i Division of Aquatic Resources fishery data to determine that a local eastward current likely serves as a way to retain fish in the area that otherwise may be pushed westward along large ocean currents. Currently, this is the only population dynamic process in local fisheries linked to measurable oceanic or climate processes that can predict local abundance in future years.

A recent modeling study by NOAA and others investigated the effects of climate change on Hawai'i's most economically important commercial fishery for bigeye tuna (ahi, *Thunnus obesus*). It warns of a possible decline in fishery performance due to climate change.

The Council takes this and other information into account to:

- ✓ Make domestic management decisions
- ✓ Recommend international measures to sustainably manage fisheries
- ✓ Improve future access to fishery resources for Pacific Island communities
- ✓ Ensure food security
- ✓ Support ecosystem resilience

## How do managers deal with changing ocean conditions?

The Council participates in workshops hosted by NOAA to address climate change and the vulnerability of Pacific Islands, in particular. The goal of these assessment workshops is to prioritize research needs and indicate how managers may respond to changing climate conditions. The Council leads a process to set annual catch limits for fisheries based on overfishing risks and uncertainty in the information about the fishery status. The process could also incorporate climate uncertainty in determining how conservative or adaptive catch limits should be. Climate information is also monitored through the ecosystem consideration section of the Council's Annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation Reports.

In 2020, the Council organized an international area-based management workshop to address many fishery-related objectives, including reducing climate change impacts on fishery resources in the open ocean. The workshop discussed emerging issues in national waters and in areas beyond national jurisdiction and called for clarity in objectives, monitoring and area-based selection. It also stressed comparing static versus dynamic area-based approaches. Workshop participants produced a "Roadmap to Effective Area-Based Management of Blue Water Fisheries" ([www.wpcouncil.org/Blue-Water-ABMT-workshop](http://www.wpcouncil.org/Blue-Water-ABMT-workshop)). 🐟

## Upcoming Events & Action Item Summary

**The 140th Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting** will be held June 15-17, 2021, via web conference. Direct link to the meeting: <https://tinyurl.com/140SSCMtg>

**Major agenda items include:** Gear and release amendment to improve shark survivorship in longline fisheries (action item); 2022 U.S. territorial bigeye tuna catch and allocation limit (action item); Standardized bycatch reporting methodology review (action item); and 2020 annual Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) reports.

**The 186th meeting of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council** will convene June 22-24, 2021, via web conference. Direct link to the meeting: <https://tinyurl.com/186CouncilMtg>. The meeting will have the following host sites, which are subject to local and federal safety and health guidelines regarding COVID-19:

- Tedi of Samoa Bldg., Suite 208B, Fagatogo Village, American Samoa
- BRI Bldg., Suite 205, Kopa Di Oru Street, Garapan, Saipan, CNMI
- Cliff Pointe, 304 W. O'Brien Drive, Hagatña, Guam

For more information on agendas, meeting documents and the web conference connection, go to [www.wpcouncil.org/meetings-calendars](http://www.wpcouncil.org/meetings-calendars).

**The Council will consider and may take action on the issues summarized below.**

**Gear and Release Amendment to Improve Shark Survivorship in Longline Fisheries:** Most vessels in the Hawai'i deep-set longline fishery use wire leaders in the terminal portion of the branchline between the hook and the weighted swivel to reduce the risk of crew injuries resulting from flyback. Wire leaders make it difficult to remove the terminal portion of the branch line from sharks or other protected species that cannot be brought onboard. Switching to monofilament nylon leaders may facilitate early release of sharks and improve post-hooking survivorship. At its March 2021 meeting, the Council selected the prohibition of wire leaders in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery as a preliminary preferred alternative, and also recommended developing a regulatory requirement to remove trailing gear from oceanic whitetip sharks as part of the alternative. The Council will consider alternatives on gear and release requirements and to which fisheries these would apply.

**2022 and Multi-Year Bigeye Tuna Catch and Allocation Limits for American Samoa, Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands:** The U.S. Pacific Territories are participating territories of the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, which develops longline-caught, bigeye tuna quotas for member countries, such as the United States, operating in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). Participating territories and Small Island Developing States, however, are not subject to limits in recognition of their aspirations to develop their fisheries. Nonetheless, at a time when bigeye tuna in the WCPO was considered subject to overfishing, the Council recommended and the U.S. Secretary of Commerce approved the setting of annual catch limits (ACLs) for

## 2021 Council Calendar

[www.wpcouncil.org](http://www.wpcouncil.org)

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*All meetings will be held virtually.*

### JUNE

**7-10** 97th Meeting (Extraordinary) of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (IATTC) meeting\*

**8** American Samoa Advisory Panel (AP) meeting

**9** Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee meeting • Guam AP meeting (ChST)

**10** Fishing Industry Advisory Committee meeting

**11** Hawai'i AP meeting • CNMI AP meeting (ChST)

**15-17** 140th Scientific & Statistical Committee meeting (SSC)

**21-24** 186th Council meeting

### JULY

**12-16** International Marine Educators Conference\*

**14-16** International Scientific Committee for Tuna and Tuna-like Species in the North Pacific Ocean Plenary meeting\*

**14-17** National Marine Educators Association meeting\*

**27-29** 2021 Hawai'i Conservation Conference\*

### AUGUST

**11-13** 17th Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission Regular Session of the Scientific Committee meeting\*

**16-27** 4th Session of the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction, New York, NY\*

**16-27** IATTC and Agreement on the International Dolphin Conservation Program Annual Meetings\*

### SEPTEMBER

**14-16** 141st SSC meeting

**20-23** 187th Council meeting

*\*Meetings are not hosted by the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council.*

longline-caught, bigeye tuna for the territories as well as the authority for the territories to transfer a portion of their limit to U.S. vessels permitted under the Council's Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP). The Council will consider the catch and allocation limits for the territories for 2022. The bigeye stock is currently considered to be neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing based on the 2020 stock assessment.

In addition, the Council will revisit an amendment to the Pelagic FEP originally approved in 2019 (but not implemented) to modify the annual territorial catch/effort and allocation limit measure and specify multi-year limits. The management measure would be reviewed annually to determine whether new scientific information or the needs of fishing communities warrant any changes.

**American Samoa and Guam Bottomfish Rebuilding Plans:** In February 2020, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) informed the Council that both the American Samoa and Guam bottomfish stocks were considered overfished and experiencing overfishing. The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) requires the Council to develop a rebuilding plan within 15 months of notification. Based on 2020 catch data from the American Samoa and Marianas annual Stock Assessment Fishery Evaluation reports, the Council will consider ACLs and other management alternatives.

**American Samoa Marine Conservation Plan (MCP):** The MCP for American Samoa expires in 2021. The Council will review the new draft plan for consistency with the American Samoa Archipelago Fishery Ecosystem Plan. After review by the Council, the MCP is transmitted to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for approval. The American Samoa MCP is developed by

the governor of American Samoa and outlines projects that can be funded by forfeitures from illegal foreign fishing in the U.S. exclusive economic zone waters around the territory. Monies can also come via the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund, resulting from American Samoa's allocation of a portion of its longline-caught bigeye tuna annual limit to U.S. vessels that are federally permitted and other sources. Approved plans are valid for a period of three years and can be modified at any time and resubmitted for approval.

**Standardized Bycatch Reporting Methodology Review:** In 2017, NMFS published a final rule providing guidance on the MSA requirement that all fishery management plans establish a standardized bycatch reporting methodology to assess the amount and type of bycatch occurring in a fishery. Council staff, in coordination with NMFS, reviewed the Council's five FEPs for consistency with the new guidance. The Council will review the outcomes and consider if plan amendments are needed.

### Main Hawaiian Islands (MHI) Deep-Seven Bottomfish ACLs for Fishing Years 2021-23:

NMFS released an update to the MHI deep-seven bottomfish stock assessment with catch-and-effort data up to 2018 and fishery-independent survey data up to 2020 indicating the stock remains healthy. At its March 2021 meeting, the Council took initial action to keep the current ACL of 492,000 pounds, corresponding to an about 40% risk of overfishing per fishing year. The Council will review the draft Environmental Assessment and consider taking final action on the ACL specification. 🐟





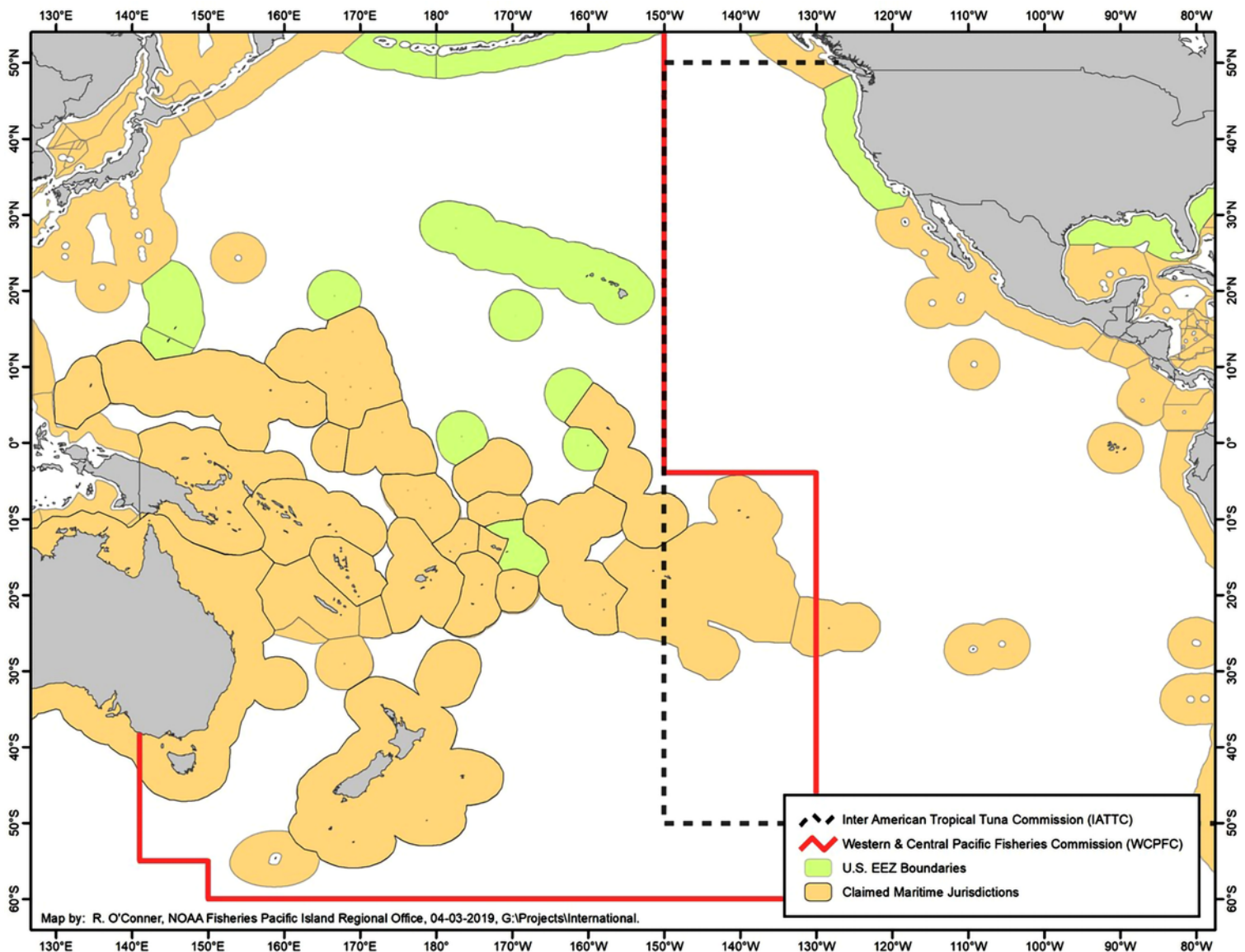
# Western Pacific Council and US Delegation Work Toward Fair International Tropical Tuna Management Measure

By Mark Fitchett, PhD

**Tropical tunas consist of skipjack tuna and ahi**—both yellowfin and bigeye tuna. Bigeye tuna is considered a Pacific-wide stock that is managed and assessed separately by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) and Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission (see map). The Hawai'i deep-set fishery primarily targets the Western and Central Pacific Ocean (WCPO) bigeye tuna stock. This stock is not overfished according to a 2020 assessment and criteria described in the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council's Pelagic Fisheries Ecosystem Plan.

In the WCPO, tuna is harvested across a range of fishing gears, with primary impacts from longline and purse seine fisheries. Longline fisheries target adult fish that have a chance to spawn while purse seine fisheries target smaller, sub-adult fish, which are in high

abundance in tropical regions. Purse seine fisheries target skipjack tuna (mostly as canned tuna) and catch small bigeye incidentally when setting their nets on schools of fish, often of mixed species, that assemble under floating objects called fish aggregating devices (FADs). Skipjack



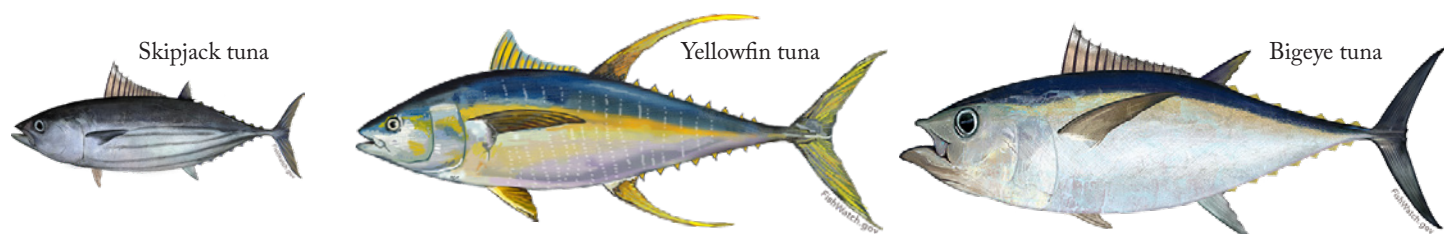


Image: FishWatch.gov/NOAA

tuna are also not considered overfished, however, they are managed with a “target reference point”—an ideal stock level to permit its long-term sustainable use across multiple fisheries and nations. Therefore, harvesting biomass targets of skipjack and bigeye are tied together—the more skipjack caught leads to more incidental catch of sub-adult juvenile bigeye.

The purse seine fishery does benefit small island states through access fees. Fishing vessels pay to fish over an allotment of fishing days in waters governed by many small island nations and territories. This process is referred to as a vessel day scheme. The access fees through this scheme are believed to control fishing effort and provide income for developing Pacific communities, while discouraging fishing effort in high seas areas outside of national jurisdiction.

However, the economic incentives could conflict with biological tradeoffs on the stock if increased purse seine fishing with FADs inside island nation waters is harvesting more juveniles, preventing sustainable fisheries like the Hawai'i longline fishery from harvesting larger fish in the future. Also, there can be conflict when negotiating total catch levels and appropriate levels of exploitations among fishing vessels. For example, the current WCPFC conservation and management measure has allowed nearly one-third of the purse seine fleet associated with island nation members to exempt themselves from FAD fishing closures intended to reduce the impact on the bigeye stock while harvesting skipjack. The WCPFC crafts these measures by consensus. This encourages island nations, which have numerous delegations, to vote as a bloc. Oftentimes, these nations work with other distant-water fishing nations, like Taiwan, Japan, Korea and China, who fish in these nations' waters and pay access fees or pay for fishery resources through “charter arrangements.”

The United States and American Samoa longline fisheries operate either entirely in their own economic exclusive zones, or on the high seas. Hawai'i and American Samoa longline fisheries do not have the large

scale vessels needed to traverse long distances to fish in the productive, national waters between 10° S latitude and 10° N latitude. Hawai'i vessels also do not “transship” at sea—a practice of offloading catch onto a carrier vessel in order to resume fishing without returning to port.

The Hawai'i-based longline fishery operates almost exclusively in a region where stock assessment scientists note the lowest level of depletion. The Hawai'i-based fishery also has the highest observer coverage and monitoring of any fleet, with some of the smallest average vessel sizes among fishing nations. Based on these virtues, the Council has been working with NOAA and the U.S. State Department to build a case for more transparent management of tropical tunas that:

- Rewards high observer coverage and monitoring.
- Incentivizes the termination of transshipping.
- Accounts for the impacts of fisheries on stock depletion, both regionally and stock-wide.

In late April 2021, the WCPFC held a workshop to discuss management objectives. The United States advocated for regional depletion thresholds for bigeye tuna and a stock-wide harvest level and biomass target that would coincide with an agreeable, but low risk of breaching a limit reference point. This would presumably allow longline fisheries, such as the Hawai'i fleet, to increase their quota, while limiting purse seine fishing efforts, which have led to a disproportionate impact on juvenile bigeye tuna. Many of the island delegations objected to the United States' proposed target level, but will entertain the idea and discuss regional depletion levels at a follow-up workshop to be held Sept. 6–10, 2021.

For more information on the stock assessment and management advice for bigeye tuna, see the 16th Science Committee of the WCPFC report here:

<https://meetings.wcpfc.int/meetings/sc16-2020>.

For more information on the April 2021 Tropical Tuna Workshop, visit: <https://meetings.wcpfc.int/meetings/ttmw1>.