



Report of the Mariana Archipelago-CNMI FEP Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, September 11, 2021

9:00 a.m. -12 Noon

Virtual Meeting via Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) vice Chair opened the meeting at 9:05 a.m. CNMI AP members in attendance included: Michael Fleming, Lawrence Concepcion, Ray Tebuteb, Ray Delacruz, Jun Yamagishi and Cecilio Raiukiulipiy. Absent: Perry Mesngon.

Others in attendance included Council staff Felix Reyes, Joshua DeMello, Marlowe Sabater, Zach Yamada, and Mark Fitchett.

Members of the public included: Lino Tenorio (CILI Contractor)

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff presented the report of the last AP meeting held on June 10th. 2021. He reviewed the recommendations made at that meeting and provided an update on the status of those recommendations.

3. Council Issues

A. Proposed Magnuson-Stevens Act Changes

Council staff presented a summary of proposed changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). There are three comprehensive MSA reauthorization bills that would have an impact on fisheries in the Western Pacific region, HR 4690, HR 3674, and HR 59. These bills provide for addressing climate change impacts to fisheries, reinforcing protecting essential fish habitat, and directed changes at the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council and its responsibilities. He noted that there were requests for the Council's comments and solicited the CNMI AP to help guide those comments.

The AP vice Chair asked what the advantages and disadvantages might be for the Council staff to become Federal Employees. Council staff responded that the Councils were set up to be separate from the federal government in order to provide a bottom-up approach to management. This may change that ability to work with the community, but it is unclear what federalizing Council staff actually means.

The vice Chair also asked about the prohibitions on lobbying, noting the provisions would limit the ability to assist the communities. Council staff said that lobbying is already prohibited but the provision would be to prohibit lobbying the administration (i.e. the President). However, the Council may be able to provide facts and advice to anyone upon request.

An AP member asked what would be the next steps to establish the most critical issues as AP's to address on fishery responsibilities. Council staff noted that the Council will be providing

comments as requested. If the AP has anything that is of interest and has comments to please provide it to staff as soon as possible.

AP members discussed the Sustainable Fisheries Fund provision and how it would affect the Marine Conservation Plan. They also discussed how changing the oversight of SFF away from the Council and to political appointees that don't have an interest in managing the resources would have an effect in the success of SFF projects. They noted that the current system is working as the AP and the fishing community has an opportunity to provide comments and review what is going on with the SFF. ***They suggested that the SFF continue under the Council oversight to allow fishing community input as the existing Council process allows for that to occur.***

B. Regional Research Priorities

Council staff presented the updates to the MSA Five-Year Research Priorities to satisfy the requirements of MSA§302(h)(7). The Cooperative Research, the Management Strategy Evaluation, Social Science and Pelagic Research priorities are integrated within this priority document. Staff highlighted some priorities that the CNMI AP might be interested in and solicited other priorities that should be addressed.

An AP member provided ideas for research in the CNMI noting that on the East side of Pagan, birds have been dying with plastic in their stomach. He also recommended that students be included in research activities when available and where appropriate and suggested the Tasi To Table group be involved. Council staff reported that delays for the NOAA research vessels are due to COVID restrictions. Previously they would invite and conduct educational and outreach activities for agencies and students so there are opportunities. Council staff will keep AP informed once the programs are reinstated.

4. Review of US Support to the Pacific Nations

Council staff presented an overview of foreign aid that the US provides to Pacific island and East Asian nations that compete with the US in fisheries. The data provided by USAID showed that in 2018 that just over \$1.6B was provided to East Asia and Oceania for economic development, agriculture, environmental protection, developmental food aid, and food security. Many of the countries under the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission are provided aid and yet do not support the US in its fishery management efforts. He said it is important to note that funding is being provided to support the fisheries in other countries while continuing to see an inequitable share of the catch.

An AP member noted that \$10 million was given to China. Council staff confirmed and would check on allocations to specific areas. The AP member noted that it seems that the US is paying foreign countries to fish their fish.

An AP member asked if under the Oceanic Fishing Nations there are other countries such as North Korea that receive aid. Council staff reported that there are others and that there was \$1.4 Billion provided in 2020 particularly for defense and economic development.

5. CNMI Fishermen Observations Update

Council staff noted the initiative started by the Advisory Panel Chair to incorporate traditional and fishermen knowledge regarding the fishery resources into science and management. This effort includes recording fishermen's observations regarding changes in fishing and the ecosystem observed by fishermen on the water. Physical, biological, oceanographic, economic, or socio-cultural changes play an important role in determining WHY fish catch and effort may be increasing or decreasing. It is important to note these changes so that when stock assessments are developed, the data can be explained by these observations. The Council is currently working on incorporating these observations into its Annual SAFE Reports and the AP Chair encourages the CNMI AP to document their observations for inclusion into these sections.

The AP Chair noted that fuel prices are very high. Tuna is also non-existent in the markets and they are having problems sourcing tuna.

An AP member reported an algae bloom within the Tinian marina. They also noted erosion at Tinian Beaches, making it difficult for fishing access.

Another AP member reported that on South Pagan large amounts of ash are present, so much that running in it is similar to running in mud.

6. Report on Mariana Archipelago-CNMI FEP AP Plan Activities

Council staff reviewed the 2019-2022 Marianas FEP AP Action Plan and noted updates to the plan. The AP agreed to continue their outreach and engagement activities as COVID protocols allow and to work on other ideas for promoting CILI and data collection from fishers.

A. Catch It, Log It Update and Report

Lino Tenorio, CILI administrator, provided an activity report of the sequence of events and problems encountered in implementing the CILI Electronic Reporting Program. He also provided the information on recruitment, reports, frequency of fishers, and other variables. He noted that the CILI app would be transferred to the Division of Fish and Wildlife for administration in the near future.

The vice Chair asked what about the cash value of the catch reported. Tenorio reported that the CILI dashboard provides a market section with information but results are summarized and not attributed to single vendors.

An AP member said that there are many that do not report. Tenorio didn't doubt that there is severe under reporting and shared that it takes dedication and patience and there needs to be more effort to encourage fishers to report their catch and effort. If the effort can keep moving and getting folks to report every month, then that will be a large amount of reports to be able to use for science and management. The use of incentives should be tied to the individual types of fishers and an effort needs to be made to be creative on how to get fishers to report their catch.

The vice Chair said the AP has to continue to push getting people on board and suggested putting on a virtual tournament that requires people to sign up for CILI and report their catch through it. He hopes to push it Marianas-wide to get people on board. An AP member asked if any of

the member incorporated CILI. Council staff noted that American Samoa did have CILI tournaments and that staff on Guam and CNMI did make efforts at tournaments to sign up users for CILI. The vice Chair requested AP members to assist in planning for a CILI tournament.

B. SFF Projects

Council staff reported on the projects being conducted by the CNMI under the Sustainable Fisheries Fund. He noted that there is a project to improve the Garapan Fishing Base that is currently working on permitting requirements for improving the revetment. Another project that hopes to develop the bottomfish fishery in the CNMI is nearing completion and can be reported on at the next meeting. New projects have been approved including additional improvements to Garapan Fishing Base for a fishing platform and walkway, improving fishery resource monitoring and data collection, and coordination of existing projects. Proposed projects that were submitted for funding include supporting scholarships, repairing the Transient Dock at Smiling Cove Marina, and vessel maintenance and operations for Rota and Saipan.

The AP appreciated the update and looked forward to the completion of the projects and future updates.

7. Fishery Issues and Activities

An AP Member reported that shark depredation is still a big issue within the Marpi Reef area, Southern Banks and Esmerelda Bank.

AP members noted the fishing tournaments held since the last meeting. An AP member reported that during the Tuna Mix Tournament they hooked five marlins on the same lure in four hours. The tournament had over 40 participants and the Tasi To Table students managed the event. He suggested that the marine sanctuaries in the CNMI could be re-evaluated to allow fishers to fish in these areas during fishing derbies.

The vice Chair reported that under the CARES Act, funds will be released this September. The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission is working on processing payments. He also reported that Tinian's Community FAD and one FAD on Rota was missing. ***The AP agreed that the FADs need to be designed to be appropriate for the CNMI's weather.***

One AP member recommended that the CNMI Government install mooring buoys on Pagan, Anatahan and Sarigan. Fishers and community members that have been visiting those islands would like to make sure that they can moor without damaging the reef.

An AP member noted that \$798,000 was appropriated for turtles according to the Congressman's newsletter. He wanted to know if that funding would be used to help the CNMI get to eat turtle again. ***The AP agreed that they should continue to push for allowing a take of turtles in the CNMI for food.***

8. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

The CNMI Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

Regarding potential MSA changes:

- The CNMI AP recommends the Council encourage the Sustainable Fisheries Fund to be continued to be managed by the Council as the Council process ensures the ability for the fishing community to participate.

Regarding CNMI fishery issues:

- The CNMI AP recommends the Council request CNMI DLNR to provide for moorings at Pagan, Anatahan and Sarigan for fishermen to avoid damaging the ecosystem.
- The CNMI AP recommends the Council request CNMI DLNR to review the marine sanctuary areas to allow for fishing during derbies in those areas.
- The CNMI AP recommends the Council provide assistance to CNMI gov on developing FAD systems that are appropriate for CNMI's weather conditions.
- The CNMI AP recommends the Council continue to pursue an opportunity for the CNMI to harvest green sea turtles.

10. Other Business

A. Community Funding Opportunities and Unfunded Projects

On March 11, 2021, President Joe Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021. This is a \$1.9 trillion economic relief stimulus package that allocated \$3 billion to the Economic Development Administration to invest in infrastructure innovation and workforce training to create good-paying American jobs and strengthen the nation's global economic competitiveness. This investment will include commercial and recreational fishing, aquaculture, and the businesses and communities that depend on them. Similar to the EDA's program, the Council expects that there will be more funding opportunities that will come down the line. The vice Chair shared that AP members can learn more about the EDA program under ARPA Website.

Meeting adjourned at: 11:06 am