

National Marine Fisheries Service

Pacific Islands Regional Office



REPORT TO THE 192nd WESTERN PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Pacific Islands Regional Office (PIRO) is responsible for assisting the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) in the development of fishery management plans and amendments, initiating Federal fishing regulations, issuing Federal fishing permits, and monitoring fisheries. Other major responsibilities include the conservation and recovery of protected species, conservation and restoration of marine habitats, including the Pacific marine national monuments, and coordination with international organizations to implement fishery agreements and treaties. The following information is provided to update the Council on NMFS activities since the 191st Council meeting.

SPOTLIGHT - Supporting Aquaculture in the Pacific Islands Region

Offshore aquaculture has been developing globally since the early 2000s, and the Pacific Islands region has been at the forefront of research and development for this industry in the United States.

One of the projects NMFS is currently supporting focuses on setting up giant clam, or *hima*, aquaculture in two southern villages in Guam: Inalåhan and Malesso. Guam's Department of Agriculture, Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resources (DAWR) is leading the project, which aims to improve the livelihoods of community members by providing food, jobs, and shells for cultural practices and artisanry. It will also train the next generation of giant clam aquaculture specialists through internships.

DAWR will provide the villages with the necessary materials and knowledge for *hima* aquaculture, including equipment to construct the farm and in-water cages. The Aquaculture Association of Palau is supplying 1,000 giant clams, some of which will serve as broodstock for future projects. The villages will be responsible for constructing and managing the farm.

This effort builds on the success of a NMFS-supported 2021 DAWR pilot project that planted giant clams collected from various Guamanian reefs into Inalåhan tide pools. Learn more [here](#).

RULEMAKING

On April 13, 2022, NMFS issued temporary specifications to extend the effective date of Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) intersessional decisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic on purse seine observer coverage and at-sea transshipment observers (87 FR 21812).

On August 29, 2022, NMFS announced a valid specified fishing agreement between American Samoa and the Hawaii Longline Association. The agreement allocates up to 1,500 metric tons (t) of American Samoa's 2022 bigeye tuna limit to U.S. longline fishing vessels identified in the agreement. The agreement supports the long-term sustainability of fishery resources of the U.S.

Pacific Islands, and fisheries development in American Samoa. The specified agreement was valid as of July 20, 2022. The start date for attributing 2022 bigeye tuna catch to American Samoa under the agreement was August 25, 2022 (87 FR 52704).

On September 2, 2022, the EPA published a notice of availability of the final programmatic environmental impact statement (PEIS) for a potential offshore aquaculture management program in the Pacific Islands, including responses to public comments on the prior draft PEIS. After a 30-day cooling off period, NMFS will publish the Record of Decision (ROD) for the PEIS.

On September 12, 2022, NMFS published a proposed rule to implement fishing effort limits for the U.S. purse seine fishery operating in the western and central Pacific Ocean (WCPO). Regulations at 50 CFR 300.223(a) currently limit U.S. WCPO purse seine fishing effort in a combined area of the high seas and U.S. exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Based on recent decisions of the Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, this rulemaking would implement separate U.S. WCPO purse seine fishing effort limits for the high seas and U.S. EEZ. This rulemaking would also implement a downward adjustment to the 2022 U.S. Longline Bigeye Tuna Catch Limit to account for the overage that occurred in 2021. The comment period ends October 3, 2022.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

International Fisheries

From July 12-14, 2022, NMFS participated in the Seventh Session of the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC)-Northern Committee Joint Working Group on the Management of Pacific Bluefin Tuna and the 3rd Catch Documentation Scheme Technical meeting, which were held virtually.

On July 15, 2022, NMFS participated in the WCPFC South Pacific Albacore Roadmap Intersessional Working Group meeting, which was held virtually.

From July 19-20, NMFS participated in the 5th Session of the WCPFC Electronic Reporting and Electronic Monitoring Working Group, which was held virtually.

On July 27, 2022, NMFS participated in the 2nd Intersessional Workshop on crew labor standards, which was held virtually.

From August 10-18, NMFS participated in the 18th Regular Session of the WCPFC Scientific Committee, which was held virtually. The Scientific Committee reviewed stock assessments for WCPO skipjack, Pacific bluefin tuna, NP and SP blue shark, and southwest Pacific mako shark.

On August 18 and 21, 2022, NMFS participated in the first WCPFC Science Management Dialogue.

Sustainable Fisheries

On May 4, 2022, NMFS shared its first-ever draft national [Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy \(EEJ\)](#), and invited public comments on the draft through August 31, 2022. This national EEJ strategy will provide guidance for incorporating and prioritizing equal and fair treatment, opportunities, and environmental benefits to all people and communities NMFS serves. In mid-

August, NMFS Pacific Islands Regional Office and Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center staff traveled to American Samoa, Guam, CNMI, and the Hawaiian Islands to hear directly from stakeholders on the draft strategy and its relevance to the Pacific Islands region. The national strategy will be finalized in November 2022. Following that, NMFS regions, including the Pacific Islands region, will incorporate the strategy and identify region-specific EEJ implementation goals in our multi-year geographic strategic plans, including additional outreach to the people and communities we serve as we develop those plans.

On June 9, 2022, NMFS completed the final Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact for the for the Garapan Fishing Base shoreline revetment project in western Saipan. NMFS will provide Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Funds (WPSFF) to the Council to support the project, which the Council may then provide to the CNMI Department of Land and Natural Resources to construct the revetment and stabilize 380 feet of shoreline. There was a groundbreaking ceremony for the project in late July, and it is expected to be complete by May 2023.

On July 13, 2022, NMFS completed revisions to the regulation summaries (links below) for the American Samoa and Hawaii Longline Fisheries. These new summaries incorporate newly implemented regulations, updated protected species workshop guides, and other new information that will help fishery participants understand and comply with regulations for these fisheries.

- American Samoa: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/american-samoa-pelagic-longline-regulation-summary>
- Hawaii: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/resource/document/hawaii-pelagic-longline-regulation-summary>

On August 27, 2022, NMFS facilitated a site visit for staff of the U.S. House and Senate Appropriations Committees at two aquaculture facilities on Hawaii Island. Congressional staff visited Taylor Shellfish and Blue Ocean Mariculture, both located in the Hawaii Ocean Science and Technology Park in Kona.

As of August 1, 2022, observer coverage is approximately 19 percent in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery, and 100 percent in the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery. Coverage in the American Samoa longline fishery is 6.9 percent. Coverage in the Hawaii deep-set longline fishery for 2021 was approximately 18 percent and coverage in the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery was 100 percent. Coverage in the American Samoa longline fishery was 5 percent. More information about the Observer Program is at www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/pacific-islands-region-observer-program.

NMFS staff continue to participate in national grant programs that support the management and sustainability of U.S. fisheries.

- June 24, 2022, was the deadline for final proposals for the Fisheries Information System (FIS), Electronic Technologies, Quality Management/Continuous Improvement, and Catch Share programs that collectively making available up to \$5.5 million. This annual funding opportunity supports initiatives that improve the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of fisheries-dependent data collection and management. NMFS staff completed review of all proposals on August 8, 2022, and funding decisions are expected to be completed in September. More information on FIS and the funding

opportunity is at www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/commercial-fishing/fisheries-information-system-program#funding-innovative-projects.

NMFS continues to provide required annual Protected Species Workshop (PSW) training to the longline fleet. From January 1 through August 1, 2022, NMFS completed 142 PSW certifications for Hawaii and American Samoa pelagic longline vessel owners and operators. NMFS offers an online PSW recertification training that may be taken two out of every three years. NMFS also offers in-person live webinar PSW certification courses every Friday morning for vessel owners and operators. NMFS recently completed an animated PSW handling and release video for further outreach and education to vessel owners, operators, and crew. The video is online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydcG1y7oNhg&t=6s. PIRO's Protected Species Workshop Coordinator position is currently vacant, and PIRO is beginning the search to fill the position. In the meantime, PIRO continues to offer protected species workshop services, which are available by contacting pirosw@noaa.gov or (808) 725-5178.

NMFS continues to update information on fish catch limits at www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/commercial-fishing/pacific-islands-annual-catch-limits.

NMFS continues to manage fisheries in consideration of status changes and incidental take events of protected species. Information about interactions between the Hawaii shallow-set longline fishery and sea turtles is at www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/bycatch/sea-turtle-interactions-hawaii-shallow-set-longline-fishery.

NMFS continues to process all applications for fishing permits in the region electronically. Application and payment instructions for all permit types are at www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/resources-fishing/pacific-islands-fishing-permits. Applicants may also contact NMFS for individual assistance at piro-permits@noaa.gov or (808) 725-5190. Current fishing permit status is at www.fisheries.noaa.gov/pacific-islands/resources-fishing/pacific-islands-permit-holders.

Permits as of August 30, 2022:

Permit	Number
Pelagic	
Hawaii longline (limited entry)	148 (of 164)
American Samoa longline (limited entry)	39 (of 60)
Western Pacific general longline	-
Receiving vessel	-
Pacific Remote Island Areas troll & handline	-
Pelagic squid jig	-
Experimental fishing permit	1
Hawaii	
Main Hawaiian Islands non-commercial bottomfish	1
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	2 (shrimp)
American Samoa	
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-

Mariana Islands	
Guam large vessel bottomfish	-
Northern Mariana Islands bottomfish	9
Special coral reef ecosystem	-
Precious coral	-
Crustaceans	-

Protected Resources

NMFS observers have recorded four (4) interactions with false killer whales in the deep-set longline fishery in 2022, one of those interactions occurred inside the EEZ that resulted in a serious injury. The trigger value for the Southern Exclusion Zone (SEZ) closure is four observed mortality or serious injuries of false killer whales incidental to the deep-set longline fishery within the EEZ (85 FR 81184). The False Killer Whale Take Reduction Team convened on February 3, 2022 to discuss the 2021 false killer whale interactions that occurred inside the EEZ. The Take Reduction Team will be convening for a webinar on August 30, 2022 and a multi-day meeting in November 2022.

On January 25, 2021, NMFS received a petition to list the shortfin mako (*Isurus oxyrinchus*) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) from Defenders of Wildlife. As part of the response to this petition, NMFS convened an Extinction Risk Assessment (ERA) team comprised of experts from across NMFS, including the Office of Protected Resources; Office of Sustainable Fisheries Highly Migratory Species Division; Office of International Affairs and Seafood Inspection; Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, and Pacific Island Fisheries Science Centers; and West Coast and Pacific Islands Regional Offices. The ERA team met several times in early 2022 and made recommendations to the Office of Protected Resources regarding the extinction risk of the shortfin mako. Internal review of the status review report has been completed. On June 28, 2022, the Center for Biological Diversity sent notice of intent to sue for missing the January 25, 2022, deadline to complete a 12-month finding on the shortfin mako shark petition. The development of the 12-month finding is currently underway.

NMFS has convened an internal working group to develop a 3-part Recovery Plan (Recovery Status Review, Recovery Plan, and Recovery Implementation Strategy) for the three listed humpback whale distinct population segments (DPS) that occur in U.S. waters (Western North Pacific DPS, Central America DPS, and Mexico DPS). NMFS anticipates publishing draft versions in late 2022. On Sept 8, 2016, NMFS issued a final rule identifying 14 DPSs of the humpback whale (81 FR 62260). Four DPSs are listed as endangered, one as threatened, and nine do not warrant listing.

On June 16, 2022, NMFS received a petition from the Center for Biological Diversity to list the great hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna mokarran*) as threatened or endangered under the ESA. A 90-day finding on the petition is pending with a deadline of September 16, 2022. This is the second petition NMFS has received to list the great hammerhead shark under the ESA. NMFS previously conducted a status review and extinction risk analysis of the great hammerhead shark in 2014 and concluded that the species did not warrant listing at the time.

Habitat Conservation

Coordination and development of Joint Coral Reef Fisheries Management Plans (JCR-FMPs) continues in American Samoa and Guam. NMFS staff are currently assisting local partners in

grouping priority species and identifying indicator species per group to be monitored and evaluated to determine if management targets are being met. The Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) is supporting management strategy evaluation for a number of target species in this effort. This information is needed to complete the fisheries component of the JCR-FMPs. After the fishery component is completed, a second focus will be to integrate non-fishery component attributes into the plans.

In American Samoa, NMFS continues to support the implementation of the American Samoa Coral Restoration Action Plan and related initiatives for management of marine resources.

In the CNMI, NMFS continues to oversee the Saipan Coral Nursery Pilot and coral sexual propagation projects and coordinate a reef resilience study for Rota and Tinian scheduled for 2023. NMFS is working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the CNMI government to improve post-disaster preparedness.

In Guam, NMFS is participating in the Guam Coral Reef Restoration Action Plan, upon invitation, as part of a six-member team. This effort aims to enhance fisheries habitat via coral restoration, and is planned from June to November 2022.

At the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA), NMFS continues to work under the USAKA Environmental Standards (UES) completing environmental assessments, reviews as well as consultations and coordinations for UES protected species.

NMFS and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service partnered with the Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (aka the Udall Foundation) to support the establishment of a Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM) Community Group that can contribute a stakeholder and community perspective to the development of the PRIMNM Management Plan. The PRIMNM Community Group will meet in late September 2022. The agencies are targeting a draft of the management plan to be completed by the end of 2023 and to have a finalized plan by the end of 2024.

Staff from the Council, PIFSC, and PIRO have begun planning for an Ecosystem-Based Fisheries Management Workshop. The goal of the workshop is to bring the three organizations together to discuss priorities, goals, and coordinate on the implementation of ecosystem-based fisheries management in the Pacific Islands Region. Logistics and an agenda are being planned for a workshop this fall.

From July 12-14, 2022, PIRO supported the Council and PIFSC during the Western Pacific Stock Assessment Review (WPSAR) of Level 1 and 2 EFH Models for uku (*Aprion virescens*) in the Main Hawaiian Islands. PIRO staff provided an "EFH 101" presentation describing EFH designations for uku and other federally managed fish species, while also describing the consultation process for the external panel. WPSAR is a cooperative effort between the Council, PIFSC, and PIRO to improve the quality, timeliness, objectivity, and integrity of stock assessments and other scientific information used in Pacific Islands region fishery management. While PIFSC and the Council developed and presented the models discussed at this WPSAR meeting, PIRO is responsible for implementing EFH designations during consultations with Federal agencies to mitigate potential adverse effects to EFH that supports federally managed fish stocks (see below). To this end, PIRO would implement any refinement of EFH, which follows a 5-year MSA-driven process for each individual management unit species that may occur due to the information that these models provide.

Since June 2022, PIRO has consulted on 11 EFH consultations. PIRO is currently consulting on one of the largest projects in our region: the Navy's Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Program proposed submarine drydock upgrades in Pearl Harbor. PIRO also has completed consultation on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permit for the City and County of Honolulu's stream clearing and maintenance activities on Oahu. In addition, PIRO has also completed consultation for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permit for a wastewater outfall at Sadog Tasi and Agingan, Saipan, CNMI. Lastly, PIRO continues to work on our EFH outreach documents for American Samoa and the Marianas.