

**AGENCY REPORT**

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands  
Department of Land and Natural Resources,  
Division of Fish and Wildlife  
November 1, 2022 - February 27, 2023  
194th Council Meeting

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation during the periods of November 1, 2022 - February 27, 2023. The report covers Fisheries Monitoring and Research, Resource Protection and Enforcement, and Other Fishery Activities.

**1. Arongol Falúw**

CNMI Council members and staff will report on various issues to include several projects involving community activities and issues. Members will cover fishery related activities since the last Council Meeting and include the following:

- a) Marianas Trench National Monument Sanctuary five-year review of the nomination for the Mariana Trench National Marine
- b) CNMI Economy – CNMI Tourism

**2. DLNR/DFW Agency Report**

The Island Report entails activities performed by the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) since the last Council meeting. The CNMI DLNR and DFW will provide a report on issues and activities regarding: CNMI CARES Act, legislative, enforcement, fishery, Data Collection, and wildlife resources.

**DFW Fisheries Program updates:****Fisheries Data Collection Programs**

- i. Boat-based & Shore-based Creel Survey Updates
  - a. Boat-based Creel Survey Update
    - Between the months of November to January, 9 survey days have occurred and 37 interviews were conducted. Of the 37 interviews, 4 methods have been conducted, 17 were trolling, 9 were bottom fishing, 3 were spear and 4 were Atulai (done using hook and line but counts as its own category).
    - Boat-based surveys are conducted at 3 main ramps on Saipan, which are located on the western coast of the island; DFW Ramp, Smiling Cove Marina and Fishing Base.
  - b. Shore-based Creel Survey Update

- Between the months of November to January, 18 sample days have occurred and 29 interviews have been conducted. Of the 29 interviews, 26 were hook & line and 3 were cast net.

c. Data Section CREEL Updates

- A new hire was recruited on 10/24/2022 to help with the collection of both boat-based and shore-based surveys.
- Due to being understaffed, it has been difficult to keep up with scheduled surveys, data entry and data validation. 3 new hires under WSFR have been chosen and their recruitment papers are currently routing, we are hopefully expecting them this February.
- Due to fuel issues, the field survey effort has been postponed. This allowed for staff to focus effort on the entry of CREEL survey information and data validation.

ii. Commercial Receipt System (CRS)

a. Commercial Collection, Entry and Validation

- Between the months of November to December, an estimated 51,142.90 bs of marine life has been purchased through the CRS. Of that total number approximately 1,955.14lbs are bottom fish, 8,542.94lbs are reef fish, 36,842.05lbs are pelagic fish, 3,873.25lbs are miscellaneous and 208.52lbs are invertebrates.
- The miscellaneous category is high due to Atulai sales, which falls under this category. A significant amount of Atulai has entered the market, which coincides with catch information collected in the boat-based surveys.
- Currently, there are 43 active participants in the CRS.
- Data provided on this report covers data reported by clientele from November to December of 2022. The remaining of December's data collection will resume when fueling issues are resolved.

b. Data Section CRS Updates

- On October 24, 2022 a new hire came on board which improved staffing capacity within the Data Section. Commercial data entry is currently up to date and data validation has slowed down, as the Acting Data Section Manager takes on additional responsibilities and a staff member is currently on Military leave for 1 month.
- Commercial collection was postponed from January 2023 until present, as there is currently no access to fuel.

iii. Fish Life History Program-

- A total of 887 Blue-Barred Parrotfish *Scarus ghobban* were sampled from commercial fish markets in 2013. Most, if not all, of these samples were collected in the Saipan lagoon.
- Majority of samples (>70%) were obtained from commercial fish markets on Saipan from 2013 to 2016. A preliminary assessment on the maturity of this species shows that the majority of the samples are immature.
- Gonad samples of the Tripletail Wrasse *Cheilinus trilobatus*, *Cephalopholis Argus*, *C. urodeta*, *Epinephelus hexagonatus*, *E. Merra*, and *Cheilinus undulatus* were delivered to the John Burns Medical School at the University of Hawaii for histology work in January 2023.
- DFW staff is also in the process of sectioning otolith samples from *Scarus ghobban* for age determination.

iv. Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) Program

- As of February 17, 2023 one FAD (GG) is active. FRS staff have completed splicing rope for four FADs - DE, EE, KK, & LL. Plans to deploy KK & LL are projected to occur in summer 2023.
- On January 20, 2023 an inspection of GG FAD was conducted. Two FRS staff inspected upper mooring and determined the FAD requires maintenance. Plans to conduct replacement and maintenance of this FAD is scheduled as soon as weather permits.

### 3. SFF Projects Updates

The Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) will provide an update on SFF-IX Garapan Fishing Base updates.

- SFF # 9 2017 - Garapan Fishing Base Improvements  
Staging of the project site is under way. Silt screens have been installed and berms have been built to mitigate runoff.
- SFF#12 2020 - Catch It Log It  
Data entry is ongoing, communication with participants is maintained with the assistance of the council island coordinator.
- SFF # 10 2018 - CNMI Fisheries Training and Demonstration

### 4. Other-Fishery Activities

DLNR Turtle Program –

- Education and outreach efforts have been ongoing via social media platforms Facebook and Instagram, while our Outreach Specialist position was still vacant. The position was finally filled on December 4, 2022. From December 4 - January 31, 2022 the Sea Turtle Program online presence has increased by 294% for Facebook and 2.3k% for Instagram. We did not have any

newspaper ads published during that period; however, we have resumed education and outreach events. There were a total of 2 education and outreach events conducted in January at the Joeten Kiyu Public Library and NMC NRM295 class with a total of 27 participants for both. Outreach presentations were conducted for the WSR 5th grade classes on February 3rd for a total of 91 students. Additionally, an outreach was also done for the Tasi to Table group on February 4th, which consisted of 40 students and mentors. Other outreach events are also scheduled for WSR 4th Grade classes, Seventh Day Adventist school, ChaCha Oceanview Middle School, Friends of the Marianas / ENRO Club, and BEQC/CRM Ridge to Reef and Ocean Fair for the remainder of February and coming months up until June 2023.

- The Sea Turtle Program research and monitoring team have been conducting morning / night surveys to collect data on non-nesting emergence, nest inventories, tagging, and collecting tissue samples from any dead hatchlings or nesting turtles from the four main nesting beach sites (Wing Beach, Obyan, LaoLao, Tank Beach) with occasional surveys at secondary beaches such as Bird Island Beach and Micro Beach. A total of 57 survey days were conducted between November 2022 to January 2023. Within this period, there were no nesting activities and no non-nesting emergence recorded.
- One stranding incident was recorded on December 1, 2022 of a turtle that was found at Aquarius beach with a possible propeller / shark attack wound. An assessment and consultation was conducted with both our local veterinarian and veterinarian in Hawaii. The team was instructed to conduct a field euthanasia as there was no medication available; however, the turtle perished before it could be performed. The team conducted it after death to ensure it had perished before a necropsy was performed.

CNMI's CARES Act –

- All applications have been provided to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission for final review and disbursement. The update provided by PSMRC is that processing of the PacWest applications, inclusive of Hawaii and the territories, are ongoing and the expected completion date for all processing will be around Spring 2023.

## **5. Rulemaking and Legislation**

The Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) will provide an update to the Council on the progress of the full implementation of the Mandatory Licensing and Reporting in the CNMI.