

Arnold I. Palacios
Governor



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David M. Apatang
Lieutenant Governor

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

March 9, 2023

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John E. Gourley
Chairman
Western Pacific Regional
Fishery Management Council
1164 Bishop St., Suite 1400
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Mr. Gourley,

I am forwarding for the Council's approval, the enclosed Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands' Marine Conservation Plan. The Plan was recently completed and is consistent with the Council's mandates in implementing the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, as amended.

Your continued assistance and support is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,


Arnold I. Palacios
Governor

cc: *Kitty Simonds, Executive Director*
Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

MARINE CONSERVATION PLAN

Prepared in accordance with Section 204 of the Magnuson
Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act



February 23, 2023

Department of Lands and Natural Resources

P.O. Box 10007
Saipan MP 95940

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I. Introduction

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996, as amended, authorizes the Secretary of State, with concurrence of the Secretary of Commerce and in consultation with the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, to negotiate and enter into a Pacific Insular Area Fishery Agreement (PIAFA). These agreements, which would be developed with the concurrence, and in consultation with the Governor of CNMI, would allow foreign fishing within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) adjacent to the CNMI. As stated in the MSA, prior to entering into a PIAFA, the appropriate Governor, with the concurrence of the Council, shall develop a three-year Marine Conservation Plan (MCP) providing details on uses for funds to be collected by the Secretary under the PIAFA.

In addition to PIAFA funds, the MSA provides that fines and penalties of violations by foreign vessels occurring within the EEZ around CNMI, including sums collected from forfeiture and disposition or sale of property seized by the federal government, are to be deposited into the CNMI Treasury and to be used to implement the CNMI MCP.

Also authorized by the MSA is the Western Pacific Sustainable Fisheries Fund, which allows the Council to use funds to implement projects contained in the CNMI MCP.

The MSA requires that the MCP shall be consistent with the Council's Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) for the Mariana Archipelago and the Fishery Ecosystem Plan for Pacific Pelagic Fisheries. The MSA also requires that the MCP include, but not limited to, the following conservation and management objectives:

- (i) Pacific Insular Area observer programs, or other monitoring programs, that the Secretary determines are adequate to monitor the harvest, bycatch, and compliance with the laws of the United States by foreign fishing vessels that fish under Pacific Insular Area fishing agreements;
- (ii) conduct of marine and fisheries research, including development of systems for information collection, analysis, evaluation, and reporting;
- (iii) conservation, education, and enforcement activities related to marine and coastal management, such as living marine resource assessments, habitat monitoring and coastal studies;
- (iv) Education and training in the development and implementation of sustainable marine resources development projects, scientific research, and conservation strategies; and (v) western Pacific community-based demonstration projects under section 112(b) of the Sustainable Fisheries Act and other coastal improvement projects to foster and promote the management, conservation, and economic enhancement of the Pacific Insular Areas.

This MCP was developed by the CNMI Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR). It identifies several activities which represent prioritized projects. This format provides DLNR with the flexibility it needs to address marine conservation and management issues through the implementation of a specific MCP project.

II. Objectives of the Mariana Archipelago FEP and Pelagic FEPs

The following lists the objectives of the Mariana Archipelago and Pelagic FEPs, which were approved by NMFS in 2009.

Objective 1: To maintain biologically diverse and productive marine ecosystems and foster the long-term sustainable use of marine resources in an ecologically and culturally sensitive manner through the use of a science-based ecosystem approach to resource management.

Objective 2: To provide flexible and adaptive management systems that can rapidly address new scientific information and changes in environmental conditions or human use patterns.

Objective 3: To improve public and government awareness and understanding of the marine environment in order to reduce unsustainable human impacts and foster support for responsible stewardship.

Objective 4: To encourage and provide for the sustained and substantive participation of local communities in the exploration, development, conservation, and management of marine resources.

Objective 5: To minimize fishery bycatch and waste to the extent practicable.

Objective 6: To manage and co-manage protected species, protected habitats, and protected areas.

Objective 7: To promote the safety of human life at sea.

Objective 8: To encourage and support appropriate compliance and enforcement with all applicable local and federal fishery regulations.

Objective 9: To increase collaboration with domestic and foreign regional fishery management and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations, communities, and the public at large to successfully manage marine ecosystems.

Objective 10: To improve the quantity and quality of available information to support marine ecosystem management.

III. MCP Objectives and Projects

This following lists the objectives and activities of the MCP, which are consistent with the MSA and Council's Marianas Archipelago and Pelagics FEPs. Each objective has several projects that have been ranked either as high, medium or low in terms of implementation priority. These activities are intended to fulfill the objectives of the plan. The following also lists evaluative criteria related to each objective, which serve a measuring stick to evaluate how implemented projects address objectives.

Objective 1: Improve fisheries data collection and reporting

Evaluative criteria: Currently, the only fisheries dependent data collection in the CNMI is through opportunistic creel surveys and dealer reporting. CNMI is moving towards mandatory commercial fishing reporting. This objective will have been met if DLNR, working with the Council and NMFS, improves fisheries data collection by broadening the current creel survey and/or requiring mandatory reporting for various fishing sectors.

A. Support activities to determine current status of fishery resources, and the possible impacts of proposed management measures, are based upon the best information available	Medium
B. Support efforts in the areas of collection, analysis, and dissemination of commercial, recreational, and subsistence fisheries catch and effort data	High
D. Support expanded data collection efforts necessary to assess the social and economic values of the different types of fisheries	Low
E. Support comprehensive fishery database that would function as the primary storage and reporting system for commercial fisheries data	High

Objective 2: Conduct resource assessment, monitoring, and research to gain a better understanding of marine resources and fisheries

Evaluative criteria: Fisheries are dynamic and subject to substantial variations depending on prevailing conditions. In addition, climate change has the potential to negatively impact marine resources and habitat. Based on potentially significant impacts from climate change, there is a need to monitor resources as well as conduct research to help identify adaptation strategies. This objective will be met through research and monitoring projects that provide useful information in the management of marine resources as well as responding to changing conditions.

A. Support activities that assess biological stock conditions and monitor changes in those conditions over time	Medium
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B. Support activities to determine ongoing changes in stock abundance and life history parameters, reference points, and species interdependence	Medium
C. Support activities to assess and determine the stocks of pelagic and insular species in the waters adjacent to the CNMI	High
D. Support activities to provide greater understanding of the connectivity of CNMI's marine resources, especially its fisheries and the utilization of modern assessment and research technologies, including satellite fish tagging and video data collection	Medium
E. Support cooperative research projects and joint project agreements with institutions, agencies, researchers and the fishing community to collect scientific fishery information, monitor fishery resources, assess research and monitoring programs, and support fisheries research	High
F. Support activities that would assess and monitor CNMI's nearshore and offshore fisheries habitats, which include coral reefs, shelf zones, offshore banks, and seamounts	High
G. Support activities that would determine the impacts from upland activities such as pollution and siltation from runoff, as well as from recreational uses and catastrophic events such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, vessel groundings, and oil spills	Medium

Objective 3: Conduct enforcement training and monitoring activities to promote compliance with federal and local mandates

Evaluative Criteria: Enforcement is a critical element in marine resource management as it promotes compliance. This objective will be met through establishing observer monitoring for foreign vessels under PIAFAs (if agreed) as well from training activities for local CNMI enforcement personnel to deal with day to day marine resource enforcement.

A. Support activities designed to provide effective compliance with fisheries management measures and controls, including the implementation of observer programs, inspection schemes and vessel monitoring systems for US vessels and foreign vessels operating under a PIAFA	High
B. Support training activities for enforcement personnel to investigate, arrest and detain poachers and other suspected individuals committing criminal activities	High
C. Support trial or pilot programs to test new technologies for information gathering in coordination with Federal, State and Industry representatives. To collaborate and share regional data as well as permitted fishing vessels	High
D. Support interagency cooperation through holding of regular meetings to enhance and coordinate enforcement efforts in the CNMI	High

Objective 4: Promote responsible domestic fisheries development to provide long term economic growth and stability and local food production

Evaluative Criteria: Fisheries development is a major issue in CNMI. Many fisheries are underutilized (e.g. pelagic HMS species and deep water bottomfish) and there are no major commercial fisheries occurring in the CNMI. With its tourism economy, close proximity to Asia with daily flight linkages, and increasing military presence in the Marianas, CNMI stands to benefit from responsible fisheries development. The objective will be met through funded projects that support fisheries development and resulting in the harvest of optimal yield of marketable species for both local consumption and export markets.

A. Support the deployment of Community Fish Aggregation Devices (CFADs), which have can provide community benefits such as accessible and maintained commercial, recreational, and subsistence fishing opportunities, community fish sharing, youth education of fishing knowledge and practices, and cooperative research	Medium
B. Implement activities that assist communities in developing their fisheries, including supporting construction of cold storage and fish processing facilities, fish markets, the procurement of ice making machines (CNMI), product transportation, vessel designs, training vessels, and fishing gear.	High
C. Support construction of or improvements to boat harbors, piers, boat ramps, and vessel access points that allow for more efficient and safer access for fishing vessels	High
D. Support the establishment of fuel storage facilities for communities that currently pay significant fuel costs for fishing vessels	High
E. Identify, develop, and fund fisheries training programs and workshops in seamanship, fishing technology, fish handling and quality, vessel or gear maintenance, etc.	Medium
F. Support sustainable mariculture in all branches to include mariculture development through partnerships with institutions, organizations, agencies, industry, and communities for best practices and environmentally responsible operations	High
G. Support fisheries technology and education program for commercial fishing , fish handling and quality control (e.g. HACCP) as well as value added product processing and product marketing could help promote local processing ventures	Medium
H. Support training in large vessel operation and navigation as well as vessel repair and maintenance methods could help provide qualified operators and mechanics, and could help promote a vessel servicing industry	High

I. Support activities to conduct recreational and subsistence fishing economic impact and use study	Medium
J. Support commercial fisheries baseline assessments, including charter fishing studies	Medium
K. Support utilization of quotas and catch and effort limits within the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.	High

Objective 5: Conduct Education and Outreach, enhance public participation, and build local capacity

Evaluative Criteria: Education and outreach is an important aspect of marine resource conservation and management. This objective will be met through projects that increase public participation in management related meeting and workshops as well as efforts to build local capacity in fisheries management. Although difficult to measure, the objective will be met through public understanding of marine resources related issues in the CNMI. Newly educated local personnel working in marine resource management jobs will also help address this objective.

A. Support activities to increase community awareness about the marine resources and fisheries occurring in the CNMI	High
B. Support activities to participate in national, regional, and international events, workshops, conferences, and meetings to showcase or provide information on CNMI fisheries	Medium
C. Support Activities to produce videos and audio programs on the importance of fisheries, public involvement, and community-based management develop radio and T.V. spots and print ads and articles to inform the public on upcoming meetings or issues; create lunar calendars, brochures, flyers, displays, and exhibits to inform the public; develop school curricula and educational resources on issues related to sustainable fisheries; develop school curricula and educational resources related to marine resource management to build local capacity	High

Objective 6: Promote Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management, Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, and Regional Cooperation

Evaluative criteria: CNMI is located in the western Pacific region and is a member of larger Pacific Island community. CNMI faces similar challenges to other Small Island Developing States. This objective will be met through the participation of representatives from the CNMI in regional and sub-regional meetings and workshops dealing with ecosystem based management and responding to climate change. This objective will also be met through coordination with the WPFMC to review consistency between the FEPs

and local CNMI regulations to promote an ecosystem-based approach to fisheries management.

A. Support efforts to help coordinate fisheries conservation and management in the Pacific region, including active participation in the Western Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Council, the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Forum Fisheries Agency, and other international organizations	Medium
B. Support efforts to monitor and enhance habitat improvements and addressing climate change.	High

Objective 7: Recognize the importance of island cultures and traditional fishing practices in managing fishery resources and foster opportunities for participation

Evaluative Criteria: People have been fishing sustainably in the Mariana Archipelago for thousands of years. There is a need to recognize the traditional indigenous fishing practices and importance of island cultures in the management of CNMI's marine resources. This objective will be met through the incorporation of traditional fishing practices into ecosystem based management plans that recognize the connections between the land and sea, fishing seasons, and adaptations to change.

A. Support projects identified and consistent with the Western Pacific Community Development Program, Western Pacific Community Demonstration Program, Western Pacific Marine Education and Training Program or other community funding programs that promote the management, conservation, and economic enhancement of communities in the region as well as to foster traditional and indigenous fishing practices and rights	Medium
B. Support and coordinate community meetings to assess needs and priorities within indigenous fishing communities	High
C. Support a workshop series on teaching the history of traditional marine sea foods, indigenous fishing techniques and practices to young people, along with development of curriculum for all grade levels.	High
D. Conduct study on economic and social impacts of regulations on indigenous communities	Low
E. Support the development and use traditional lunar calendars for community based management of marine resources	Medium

F. Support projects that help to document traditional fishing practices and generational ecosystem knowledge used by indigenous communities	High
G. Support village-based aquaculture facilities for certain valued seafood species	Medium
H. Support community fishing activities, including funding assistance for community based fisheries projects to be implemented in northern islands	High
I. Support activities that would review local and federal regulations to support ecosystem based fishery management	Medium
J. Support community-based management plan development that includes planning for climate change and adaptation strategies	High
K. Support community-based resourced monitoring handbook that communities can use to monitoring marine resources including changes from climate change and other ecosystem indicators	High