



WESTERN
PACIFIC
REGIONAL
FISHERY
MANAGEMENT
COUNCIL

Report of the Mariana Archipelago FEP - CNMI Advisory Panel Meeting

Thursday, September 8, 2022

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 a.m. (ChSt)

Hybrid Meeting via Webex:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) vice-Chair, opened the meeting at 9:01 a.m. (ChST) and welcomed the members. Members in attendance included: Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Mike Fleming, Perry Mesngon, Lawrence Concepcion, Jun Yamagishi, and Ray Dela Cruz. AP Member not in attendance Ray Tebuteb.

Others in attendance included: Floyd Masga, Matt Seeley, Zach Yamada, Felix Reyes, Joshua DeMello, Asuka Ishizaki, Mark Fitchett (Council Staff); John Gourley (MES), David Benavente (MINA), and Nathan Van Ee (DFW), Marlowe Sabater, Mia Iwane, Kirsten Leong, Danika Kleiber (PIFSC), Savannah Lewis (PIRO), Gary Sword (Saipan Tribune).

2. Review of Last AP Meeting and Recommendations

Council staff presented the report of the last AP meeting held on June 10, 2022. He reviewed and provided an update on the recommendations made at that meeting.

3. CNMI Fishery Issues and Activities

A. Pacific Remote Island Coalition Expansion Request

David Benavente, Mariana Islands Nature Alliance (MINA), provided a report on the Pacific Remote Island Coalition expansion proposal. He said this proposal started as a research project that led to the current proposal to expand the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument (PRIMNM). He said that the coalition have weekly meetings; however, he has no updates on their objectives. He said he would provide the AP with an update once new information arises.

Mark Fitchett, Council staff presented the proposal by the Pacific Remote Island Coalition to expand the PRIMNM off Palmyra and Howland and Baker islands. He provided an overview of the conservation, cultural and historical values outlined in the proposal, threats posed by the proposal, and impacts on American Samoa.

The Vice-Chair asked why the Pacific islands have to carry the 30x30 burden. He asked if there were discussions on leveling the playing especially in regards to American Samoa. Council staff said that the American Samoa purse seine fleet is treated like a US fleet. There is a need to recognize them internationally as their own American Samoan fleet, although they fly US flags, There are initiatives and mandates need to be considered for fairness.

The AP expressed their concerns with the monument and its potential impact access to fishing grounds for indigenous communities. The Vice-Chair shared that this will be challenging as the cost of fuel, bait and tackle remain high. Issues concerning fisheries are never-ending.

B. Smart FAD Project Update

David Benevente, MINA, provided an update on their Saltonstall-Kennedy grant project to deploy Smart fish aggregating devices (FADs) around CNMI. The objective of the project was to promote and enhance pelagic fisheries in the Mariana Islands. Dalia Hernandez-Ortiz was contracted by MINA to be the principal investigator to manage this project to completion. He said that there was a pilot project that was initiated in 2021 by The Nature Conservancy. To date, Guam has deployed one aFAD with an attached echo sounder. The echo sounders collected fish biomass and environmental data. He further reported that Guam's DAWR will be handling the data going forward.

An AP member asked if fishers will have access to the data and how many FADs will be deployed. He said that the CNMI could benefit from seven to nine FADs for fishers in Rota, Tinian and Saipan. He said that fuel, bait and ice are expensive and this technology could assist them to be cost effective for each fishing trip. With this technology, the agencies would not lose as many FADs as they would be able to track them. Benavente said that MINA will provide a link to access the data and this project will focus on deploying FADs in Guam during 2023.

Van Ee said the importance of securing the FADs is essential. An AP member shared that he has seen the Guam data and thought it was beneficial. Benavente said that they could learn from Guam and from their issues to expand this project to the CNMI.

A. Alternatives for Aquaculture Management Framework in the Western Pacific

Zach Yamada, Council staff, presented the alternatives for managing aquaculture in the Western Pacific region. He provided an overview and background on past Council actions and presented the alternatives that the Council will consider for final action. Alternatives included 1) no action; 2) a limited entry aquaculture program with limited gear types, commercial and research permits for 10 and 3 years respectively, and limited allowable species and marine aquaculture systems; and 3) an expanded limited entry aquaculture program with extended commercial and research permit terms for 20 and 10 years, no prohibition on marine aquaculture systems and allowable to culture all native species respective to the island regions.

An AP member said he supports Alternative 2. Due to studies conducted by Northern Marianas College (NMC). Council staff reminded AP members that this issue deals with Federal waters.

Another AP member supports Alternative 3. He shared that on October. 6, 2022, the NMC Cooperative Research, Extension, and Education Services will hold a symposium to discuss open ocean aquaculture and new fishing industries for the CNMI. Another AP member said that aquaculture projects should consider culturing more than one native species at a time to optimize their production.

The CNMI AP recommended the Council select Alternative 3 on the expanded aquaculture management framework for the CNMI and the Western Pacific, following options to amend the FEPs to allow aquaculture development in the territory's EEZ.

C. Young Fishermen's Development Act

Council staff reported that the bipartisan **Young Fishermen's Development Act** establishes a national grant program to support initiatives to educate, train, and mentor young and beginning fishermen. The Act implements a program allowing fishing associations, universities, tribal organizations, and others to compete for grant funding to train young commercial fishermen in sustainable fishing and business practices. To support local and regional training, education, outreach, and technical assistance initiatives for young fishermen, including programs, workshops, and services related to (1) seamanship, navigation, electronics, and safety; (2) vessel and engine care, maintenance, and repair; and (3) sustainable fishing practices. The program's \$2 million annual budget is fully paid for using monies from fines paid by fishermen who have violated fishing rules. Lastly, the grants cannot be used to purchase fishing permits, quotas, or other harvesting rights.

An AP member requested more details, especially with assistance with grant writing. An AP member shared that he was a board member of Tasi To Table (TTT) and will share with the group to apply. He said that TTT will be host a high school fishing derby on September 10. He shared that other meetings and events are held for Rota and Tinian participants in Saipan. He further stated that he is a member of the Board of Directors of the Western Maritime Academy training young folks to be Captains and fishermen and work as merchant mariners. Any available grant funds information will help support these initiatives. Another AP member said that they are all fishermen and we hope there are new ones and that TTT can get involved in it.

The Vice-Chair said that two million is not a big amount for the number of areas. Since it is a competitive grant, they would need assistance with grant writing to be able to get some of the funds which can be used to support the trade schools, TTT, and other fishery-related matters. Council staff said that the MET may be available with up to \$15K and will advise the AP when more information is known.

AP Recommends the Council request NMFS provide grant writing workshops to help the fishing community become competitive in grant funding opportunities such as the Young Fishermen's Development program, SK, etc. Further, the CNMI AP recommends the Council request NMFS PIRO provide funding to the Marine Education and Training Program to support fishery and maritime training in the Pacific Islands.

D. 2021 BMUS Guam August Meetings

Council staff, Matthew Seeley, presented a status update on the territorial bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) revision, as well as an update on the Guam Council family meeting held in August 2022.

The Vice-chair wanted clarification on the proposed BMUS list. Council staff provided an explanation on the BMUS list which was approved during the last Council meeting.

E. Catchit Logit Updates

Nathan Van Ee, DFW, reported on the current status and what's ahead of the CILI/SILI.

An AP member asked for the timeline for the implementation of the reporting system. Van Ee said they are looking at next January to begin the transfer of the app to DFW Saipan. Phase 1 by the new year. Phase 2, another year after, and so on. There has been some push by DFW to get some of the features of Phase 4 to be activated earlier.

Another AP member asked if there was a data base where fishers could access to log and store their own data, with access using a computer or Cloud. Van Ee said it will be a progressive data system. Even if there is no connection, it will store it until there is Wi-Fi access.

F. SFF Projects

Council staff provided an update on SFF-IX Garapan Fishing Base Revetment Project. Staff reported that clearing of the project site has been ongoing. Staff reported that the contractor, USA Fanter is processing permit requirements in order to move to the next phase of the clearing for placement of settlement traps.

G.5 yr. Nomination Review for the proposed sanctuary

John Gourley, Micronesian Environmental Services, provided an update on the status of the five year nomination review for the proposed sanctuary in the Marianas. The Office of National Marine Sanctuary (ONMS) is in a five year review on whether to keep the Mariana Trench on the Inventory List or remove it. It has been 5 months since the second comment period closed, and there has been no official announcement has been made on whether the Mariana Trench will be retained or removed from the ONMS Inventory List.

The AP said that there is a hidden agenda and a secret visit of the groups to the CNMI shows something is not right. Another AP member said that these sanctuaries had been discussed by the CNMI AP before and implementing a huge area into a sanctuary would provide no benefit. The AP said that ONMS should consider their position of opposing the proposed sanctuary.

Another AP member said there was only a select few of people who agreed to a sanctuary. He hoped they would ask for the AP assistance if offered. He said that this would be a rude awakening for their indigenous people, especially for the Northern Islands.

Another AP member said that a little more bottom-up approach is needed in the sanctuary designation process. He said that there was limited communication and there is a need to get community input.

H. CCH Proposed Role

John Gourley, MES, provided an update on the Coral Critical Habitat (CCH) Proposed Role. Gourley said that a letter will be sent tomorrow (September 09, 2022) from the AS, Guam, and CNMI Resource Agency heads to NMFS Acting Administrator Sarah Malloy requesting a briefing with affected Territorial Governments prior to publication of the final rule.

The Vice-Chair thanked Gourley for his work and for keeping track of these issues. Under the CCH, issues have popped up. He said that this proposed rule would set the CNMI back for potential fisheries development.

4. 2022 AP Activities Plan

A. AP Outreach and Education

Council staff shared with the AP the Council's outreach and education efforts within the CNMI over the last quarter (June - August). Council staff reported that during the TTT - Youth Derby (Trolling) – on June 4th. AP members assisted TTT organizers to organize the event as well as trained students with weighing and recording. During the 38th Annual Saipan, Int'l Fishing Derby – July 16-17 AP members assisted in taking photos and passing out AP brochures. Also, during the Tinian Beef, Band, and Beer Festival Fishing Tournament – on Aug 13. AP members shared information and encouraged onlookers and fishermen to submit their applications for Mariana's AP. Furthermore, during the TTT Tuna Mix – August. 20 – AP members assisted Tasi To Table Organizers, organizing the event as well as training students with weighing and recording. In addition, during the ISLA Fishing Tournament – on August 27th. AP members passed out Council outreach materials and assisted in taking photos. Lastly, AP plans to assist during the TTT Mini Fishing Derby this weekend Sept. 09, 2022, from 6:00 am to 1:00 pm

An AP member reported that next month will be the next fishing tournament. San Francisco De Borja Fishing Tournament, on Rota.

5. Feedback from the Fleet

A. CNMI Fishermen Observations

The Vice-Chair shared that Tinian is still having a good Atulai run. Also, the Ie'e run was also good. It has been a good season. Under fishing derbies on Tinian, they were very successful. Also shared that although limited participants it was a success.

Council staff also congratulated AP members that entered the Tinian Fishing Tournament and caught the heaviest Marlin at 772.5 pounds, a record for Tinian.

An AP member from Rota reported that Tuna being caught are small ranging from two pounds or less. Wahoo is not as active as in the Northern Marianas. He also reported that fuel is down to about \$6.90 or so, but still too high.

Another AP member from Tinian reported that Tuna and Wahoo catches have been good. He also shared that during the TTT tournament they caught a lot of Wahoo. The average weight was 25 pounds.

Another AP member said that sharks are still an issue.

An AP member said that this year for Atulai has been the best compared to the past 10 years. He also reported that fishing access has been cut off to the public due to private or government property being closed off. To include the Lower Base's Inos Park area. Under spearfishing, he reported that it is getting harder to catch Laggua (Parrot Fish), have to dive deeper.

Another AP member said he has observed that seabirds are not as active. Difficult to find fishing schools, and not see birds. This may be attributed to time when fishing but it's been difficult. Furthermore, he said that the Sharks are still active but noted he experienced recently no attacks in a four hours fishing period.

B. Advisory Panel Issues

An AP member said that AP members need to talk to the public via radio to share information, including students in schools. He also said recording fishing stories from the Manamko. He further said that Gary Sword had said there is a seafood festival, on Oct. 22, 202. Also, he and NMC are going to have a symposium called “Open Ocean Aquaculture, New Industry for the CNMI.”

The same AP member also recommended that the State to open MPAs to allow the people to fish. Council staff shared that Guam has a provision that allows seasonality take of MPA’s. He also shared that he will forward Guam’s Law to the AP members.

The CNMI AP recommended the Council writes a letter to the CNMI DLNR/DFW, to allow the harvest of seasonal species such as manahak, Kichu, Atulai, I’e’e, and Ti’ao in marine protected areas around the CNMI.

Another AP member said we need to come out as an AP, including inviting fishery folks, including the Island Coordinator, to talk to the public about what is going on with our fishery. We discuss

Recommendation: The CNMI AP recommended the Council’s Outreach and Education Coordinator work with the CNMI AP on community outreach, including talks on fisheries updates, issues, and matters, on the radio, in the classroom, and at other community events.

The Vice-Chair recommended that AP meetings be held on Tinian and Rota.

6. Public Comment

Gary Sword, Saipan Tribune, said that he was enlightened to hear Gourley’s presentation. It is unfortunate some of these agencies have motivations that are contrary to the community. He said that the fish festival will be on Saturday, Oct 22, 2022 for talaya, spear, shallow, and trolling. Next month, KKMP radio will have a station in Rota and Tinian. The symposium with the KKMP, joint with the Northern Marianas College will be available on Zoom and will include some folks from NOAA and others who will talk about fisheries.

7. Discussion and Recommendations

Regarding the Alternatives for Aquaculture Management Framework in the Western Pacific

- The CNMI AP recommended the Council select Alternative 3 on the expanded aquaculture management framework for the CNMI and the Western Pacific, following options to amend the FEPs to allow aquaculture development in the territory’s EEZ.

Regarding the Young Fishermen’s Development Act

- AP Recommended the Council request NMFS provide grant writing workshops to help the fishing community become competitive in grant funding opportunities such as the Young

Fishermen's Development program, SK, etc. Further, the CNMI AP recommends the Council request NMFS PIRO provide funding to the Marine Education and Training Program to support fishery and maritime training in the Pacific Islands.

Regarding Advisory Panel Issues

- The CNMI AP recommends the Council's Outreach and Education Coordinator work with the CNMI AP with community outreach, including talks on fisheries updates, issues, and matters, on the radio, in the classroom, and at other community events, to engage the community and provide them with awareness of what is going on with the fisheries.
- The CNMI AP recommended the Council write a letter to the CNMI DLNR/DFW, to allow the harvest of seasonal species such as Mañahak, Kichu, Atulai, I'e'e, and Ti'ao in marine protected areas around the CNMI.

AP approved all recommendations.

8. Other Business

The Vice-Chair requested that due to flight schedules from Tinian and Rota, he asked to move the FR AP meetings to 10:00 am instead of 9:00 am (ChSt.) by doing so AP members on Rota and Tinian can get to the meetings on time.