



Report of the Non-Commercial Fishery Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, September 8, 2022

1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Webex

1. Welcome and Introductions

Dean Sensui, Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee (NCFAC) Chair, opened the meeting at 1:05 p.m. NCFAC members in attendance included Gene Weaver, Ben Walin, Hongguang Ma, Keith Kamikawa, Steve Kaneko, Phil Fernandez, and Audrey Toves. NCFAC members Lee Alameida, Alex Castro, and Joaquin Cruz were absent.

Others in attendance included: Joshua DeMello, Zach Yamada, Floyd Masga, Felix Reyes (Council Staff); Clay Tam (AP Chair); Savannah Lewis, Kaipo Perez (NMFS PIRO); Adam Ayers, Marlowe Sabater, Kirsten Leong (NMFS PIFSC); Brent Tibbats (DAWR); Michael Tenorio, Frank Villagomez (DFW); Bryan Ishida (DAR); Mark Ladao, Tammy Harp, Alan Kauffman (Public),

2. Review of Last NCFAC Meeting and Recommendations

Council Staff provided a review of the last meeting held June 8, 2022 as well as a status of the recommendations made at that meeting. A few of the recommendations made at the meeting were included as agenda items for follow-up discussion. He said the Council continues to work on issues such as honu harvest, the importance of data collection, and regulations for the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands.

An NCFAC member asked if there are non-commercial data fact sheets available. Council staff replied that there is some information and provided the handouts to the member.

An NCFAC member asked if Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey (HMRFS) data is available for public access. Another member replied that data is available online but not the number of participants.

3. Fishermen Observations and Fisheries Issues

A CNMI NCFAC member reported that the government is working on a revetment project at Fishing Base which should improve fishing participation. He also noted that the atulai and I'e run was good this year and available in the markets. He also noted that the organization Tasi to Table held a half-day tournament for high school kids that have been involved with their program for two years. This program provides a general elective credit for high school and provides kids with lessons on fishing and resources. The high schools will also be forming their fishing clubs and recruiting new students this school year. He also noted that there were tournaments on Rota and Tinian, with a 700+lb. marlin winning the Tinian tournament.

In Guam, an NCFAC member noted that the recent Greg Perez Derby in August had 78 boats participating but the fish landed were small, including a 100 lb. marlin and 1.1 lb. mahimahi. A

kids derby was scheduled for September as well. She said that the season is in transition as there are only small mahimahi, wahoo, and bonita right now, although the atulai run is going at full-speed, which allows small boats and shore casters to harvest. There are a couple of schools outside of Agana Marina as well as one on the east side of the island. Current prices are \$10/bag for about eight pieces of atulai and it is sold on the side of the road. It was also reported that permits are available for fishing for manahak and I'e in the Achang and Piti Marine Preserves as the manahak are expected back on September 15.

An NCFAC member noted that the Big Island had experienced a mahimahi run that was good but smaller than the previous year. He said that there were a lot of 30 to 60 lb. mahimahi but not a lot of big ones. He said the ahi run was good but they didn't see a lot of ono as compared to other years. The blue marlin fishing has been moderate with a lot of small catches in the 100 lb. range. Overall it wasn't a bad year but more on the small size for average catch. He noted that for major events in Hawaii, the DLNR will be rolling out their "Holomua 30x30" plan in October that will impact nearshore fishing for the next 10 to 20 years. The plan establishes 30% of Hawaii's nearshore waters as marine managed waters and will be pilot testing the concept on Maui first. Maui currently only has 3% of nearshore waters as effectively managed and the plan is to increase it tenfold to 30%. He said that the Hawaii Fishermen's Alliance for Culture and Tradition are planning on meeting with fishers prior to the DLNR meetings to inform them on how to participate. After Maui is completed, the plan is to roll out the Holomua 30x30 to other islands. He said there is a need for fishers to prepare so they don't get steamrolled in the process.

The Chair asked if there was information available to send to fishers. The member said they are in the process of writing the information up as well as putting together a press release.

The Big Island member also noted that the ocean tour industry is taking snorkelers out to the FADs and with 30 to 40 people in the water, this has become an increasing user conflict as there is a large chance of people getting hooked or fights at the boat ramps to occur.

On Maui, an NCFAC member reported that the North Shore Hanapa'a tournament was held in July with 20 boats participating which was the lowest turnout because of it being windy. The largest ahi caught was 165 lbs., mahimahi sizes were about six to seven lbs. He said that overall fishing has been really slow and thought that the lack of rain may be affecting the bait fish populations. Another tournament, the Lanai Rendezvous was held in Maui in August due to harbor issues with the biggest ahi weighing in at 112 lbs. with the tournament again experiencing slow fishing. He noted that ahi in the 40 to 50 lb. range are being caught at private buoys between Maui and the Big Island and that the state buoys don't hold fish like they used to and wondered if it is because of the private FADs.

The Chair asked if the private FADs had structure beneath the water. The member noted that all the private FADs differ but he has seen some with volleyball nets, laundry, strapping material and even shade cloth tied to the ropes. The Chair suggested that could be the reason the private FADs hold the fish more than the state FADs.

One member noted that the BFISH 2022 project, a fishery independent project conducted by the Pacific Islands Fisheries Group and NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) was underway. Bottomfish fishermen participate in this project and go to assigned locations and drop two lines, four baited hooks, alternating fish and squid for half an hour each at each location. This work is complemented by camera surveys. The project started in August and will end in October.

Another member noted that oama are finally starting to show up, later than usual. He said the FADs on Oahu have been reasonably successful but fishers experience a lot of shark depredation. At T buoy, he said they counted 19 various sharks following lures and noted that nothing less than 10 lbs. made it to the boat. He noted that ono price was \$9.70/lb. and \$41/lb. for ahi sashimi blocks.

A member reported that when the RIMPAC exercises happen in the summer, the pelagic fish disappear for a bit. He also said that fishermen have noted that they also experience more cetacean depredation during those times and wondered if it was related. He also reported that the oama are back super strong this year as last year was kind of slow.

4. Council Issues

A. NWHI Fishing Regulations

Council staff, presented background information on the status of the proposed fishing regulations for the Monument Expansion Area (MEA) in the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI). He presented alternatives for the prohibition of commercial fishing and permitting of non-commercial fishing and an analysis of its impacts. He noted that at its 192nd meeting, the Council will consider taking initial action and may identify a preliminary preferred option.

An NCFAC member noted that some of the terms could be confusing because terms like cultural is not defined while traditional and cultural practices is defined. It can be ambiguous to which culture is being talked about. It was noted that the practices aren't limited to the native or indigenous populations and that may be limited in the law to what was traditional prior to a certain date.

The NCFAC discussed what common practice was as a lot of what is done today is a mixture of different cultural practices.

Another member asked what the difference between subsistence and sustenance as both involve eating the fish. Council staff responded that sustenance fishing involved catching the fish and eating it in the NWHI while subsistence is not yet defined. The member asked about customary exchange and the inclusion of cost recovery. Council staff explained the definition and noted that cost recovery was needed in other parts of the region to allow for participation of native peoples in fishing in those monuments.

One NCFAC member noted that not all fishing is the same and there should be different tiers of fishing, particularly for commercial fishing. This would help with record keeping and data collection as well.

The NCFAC supported permitting non-commercial fishing and subsistence fishing as a native Hawaiian practice with the ability for cost recovery. They noted that the NWHI MEA is far so there is no sense in limiting participation right now. Limiting the fishery would be tough without the data and be artificial.

B. Hawaii Small Boat Fisheries

Roy Morioka provided his presentation on improving the collection of non-commercial catch and effort data for Hawaii's deep 7 and uku fisheries. He provided the challenges to collecting data including fishermen apathy, lack of trust, and limited fishery specific data. This leaves the fishermen vulnerable to what information is available that may be dangerously inconsistent. To remedy this situation, existing systems need to be built upon and address gaps. What is needed is to determine how many non-commercial fishermen there are and target that population for collecting data. Fishing effort surveys should be mailed directly to fishermen instead of random coastal households, limited resources could be directed at specific seasons or modify the survey to allow for better intercept surveys; and known registries and licenses need to be used to ferret out the non-commercial universe. Morioka provided solutions and requested the Council and NMFS to continue working on making a least intrusive process to effectively manage these fisheries.

An NCFAC member asked if the answer is a recreational fishing license. Morioka replied that a license would be the ultimate solution but given the track record of the state and legislature in getting that passed, that option is unrealistic.

A member said that they tried to use the boat registry for the Hawaii Marine Recreational Fishing Survey but was told the data was confidential. Morioka responded that two surveys were conducted using the boat registry by NMFS so there is precedence that the state can provide access when the rationale is strong.

One member noted that uku is an interesting fishery because both boat and shoreline fishermen catch it. He asked how these efforts capture the shoreline catch and effort if the boat registry is used for a survey. Morioka noted that there are separate shore-based surveys as well as dive surveys for fishery independent information that could be used to get that data.

Another member said that specialized surveys are a good idea and that the MRIP surveys are general to cover a broad universe of fishermen. He also agreed that including the boat or bottomfish vessel registry would be useful to enhance MRIP. Morioka noted that his proposal would be a challenge for the Council but NMFS PIFSC is looking at conducting a sample survey to see if it can access the vessel and boat registry. He said that there is a push against using MRIP data because many of the recreational fishers on the East Coast consider the data garbage, but we should think outside of the box and logically address the issues to improve the data.

An NCFAC member agreed with Morioka noting the data collection efforts on Guam are based on numerous assumptions and that had an impact on the bottomfish stock assessment. She added that there needs to be more resources to address the issues with the survey in order to get accurate data. Collaboration is essential in collecting the correct data especially with limited resources.

Another member noted that the Hawaii Fishermen’s Alliance for Conservation and Tradition (HFACT) has put forth an effort to collect better data from nearshore non-commercial fishers. He said that there may be as many as 100,000 nearshore fishers so HFACT is conducting a survey to see how fishermen are willing to contribute in collecting that data. This study, in collaboration with the Hawaii Division of Aquatic Resources, Hawaii Monitoring and Research Collaborative, Hawaii Pacific University, and Conservation International, would characterize how fishermen would like to participate and what they can do study it and characterize what they are able to provide.

5. Non-Commercial Fisheries Discussions

A. MRIP Regional Implementation Plan Discussion

Council staff reported that the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) Regional Implementation Plan (RIP), which was developed in collaboration with the Council’s Federal Data Coordination and Research Committee and other advisors. The RIP provides a regional wish list for MRIP and includes five prioritized needs: a programmatic review of the territorial creel surveys, funding for surveys, improved timeliness of non-commercial catch estimates, developing an algorithm that extracts the non-commercial component of the creel surveys, and developing a mobile data entry system. The current RIP expires at the end of the year and Council staff solicited ideas for revisions and additions to the RIP as well as participation in the discussion and drafting of the next RIP.

NCFAC members Hongguang Ma, Steve Kaneko, and Dean Sensui agreed to be a part of the MRIP-RIP discussions.

The NCFAC discussed the MRIP-RIP in terms of the previous data collection presentation and agreed that the Plan should include utilizing the Hawaii bottomfish vessel and boat registries; Fishery specific surveys for Management Unit Species rather than a broad survey; and look at validation of MRIP surveys and data.

B. NOAA Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Policy

Council staff reported that the NOAA National Policy for Saltwater Recreational Fisheries was developed in 2015 to provide guidance for agency consideration of recreational fisheries. The Policy identifies goals and guiding principles to be integrated into NOAA Fisheries’ planning, budgeting, decision-making, and other activities. The policy is being revised and updated and staff noted that comments are due December 31, 2022.

C. Review of National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit Agency Actions

Council staff reported that the 2022 National Saltwater Recreational Fisheries Summit Report is now available and that NOAA Fisheries has committed to advancing the issues discussed during the summit. He provided some of the post-summit activities that NOAA Fisheries have been working on regionally, including projects and commitments in the Western Pacific. NOAA Fisheries is committed to additional actions to address climate and sustainability, data and surveys, management and policy, and partnership and engagement. Council staff provided the different actions noted being taken by NOAA Fisheries and asked the NCFAC to consider how the agency can provide regional benefits for non-commercial fishermen through this approach.

An NCFAC member asked if this was a specific grant program or an ad hoc group doing the work because some of the noted actions have been on-going. Council staff responded that it looks like NOAA Fisheries had categorized some of the work already being done as part of these efforts.

Another member reported that NMFS PIRO and PIFSC is conducting the project that is looking at the relationship between mahimahi and coral reefs. Fishermen that donate stomachs from their mahimahi catch will get a “punch card” and once filled, would be eligible for gift cards. It was noted that the project was delayed due to COVID but has since started.

An NCFAC member asked about the commitments from the summit and noted that they are Hawaii-centric and should consider including the territories.

Council staff added that the regional recreational coordinators were asked to develop plans in the past which is how funding was made available for regional projects. He asked if there are any efforts to renew this effort in the region. The response was that NOAA Fisheries is limited in its budget and that there hasn't been talk in updating regional plans. The existing project was a joint project funded by PIRO and PIFSC with a small amount of funding provided by headquarters.

The NCFAC agreed that they would like to see a region-specific plan for what the needs are in the region and provide a wish list of what they can do or support

6. Public Comment

Kirsten Leong, NMFS Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center, commented that in her work analyzing non-commercial fishing literature she looked at some of the definitions for subsistence fishing and suggested sticking to ones that are defined in law and policy. Subsistence is discussed but not defined for federal waters, however is defined and allowed in state waters of the NWHI. Alaska has a federal subsistence policy but not codified. Sustenance is allowed in the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument. She presented this information as ideas to use and suggested that any definitions be clear.

7. Discussion and Recommendations

The Non-Commercial Fisheries Advisory Committee made the following recommendations to the Council.

Regarding the NWHI Monument Expansion Area Fishing Regulations:

- The NCFAC supports Alt 3 and Alt 4 with cost recovery. Fishing in the MEA would be expensive due to the distance resulting in self-limitation. Additional limits on fishing would greatly limit participation.

Regarding Non-Commercial Data collection:

- The NCFAC recommends the Council include Morioka's suggestions for data collection improvements into the MRIP Implementation Plan to provide a way to fund these changes.

Regarding National Saltwater Recreational Fishing Policy/Summit:

- The NCFAC recommends the Council direct staff to work with NCFAC and others to develop regional approaches and a list of priorities/needs that address the summit and policy.

8. Other Business

There was no other business. The meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.