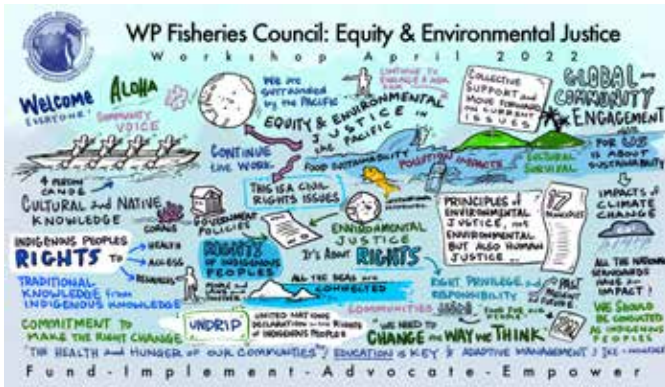


# WP Council—An Organizational Leader on Equity and Environmental Justice



As part of its overall equity and environmental justice (EEJ) efforts, the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council held a planning workshop April 29, 2022, to discuss the direction and vision to develop its regional strategy. The 25 participants, spread across Hawai‘i, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa, included Council and Advisory Panel members, NOAA, Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) and Council staff. A live scribe artfully captured the group’s discussions.

The workshop started with a panel of long-time environmental justice advocates: Uncle Charley Ka‘ai‘ai; OHA Trustee Mililani Trask; William Richardson School of Law Professor Malia Akutagawa; and Council Chair Archie Soliai. The participants then explored how:

- \* EEJ integrates with the Council’s work.
- \* The Council’s EEJ actions could impact and contribute to fair global and regional fisheries for our communities.
- \* The Council can use four key organizational tools for change—Implement, Empower, Fund and Advocate—to advance EEJ aims.

In closing, Council Executive Director Kitty Simonds shared the desire to gather with the larger community during summer 2022. Participants noted that the Council remains steadfast and continues as a voice for the community in the federal process, modeling how to respect cultural values within decision-making. Council Chair Soliai closed by empowering each attendee as an agent of change and noted each person has the ability through their own actions to promote and advance EEJ.

The Western Pacific Council is also taking a lead role on behalf of the Council Coordinating Committee (CCC) to serve as a co-chair for the EEJ Working Group. The CCC is the national body of all eight regional fishery management councils authorized by the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Management and Conservation Act (MSA). Council and

NOAA staff members came together to evaluate EEJ in U.S. fisheries management, how the MSA can support EEJ, past and potential future council actions, and barriers that fisheries managers should consider when advancing EEJ. The report concluded:

- \* While some challenges exist for meaningfully advancing EEJ, all regional councils are beginning to capture EEJ issue considerations in their work.
- \* Collaboration among the communities, regional councils and NOAA is key.
- \* The MSA allows for regional diversity and a bottom-up, open and transparent process for fisheries decision-making.
- \* There are opportunities to advance EEJ across the regions by investing in ongoing outreach, reimagining engagement and capacity-building, as a start.

The CCC met May 17-19, 2022, in Maryland and regarding EEJ passed a motion to “establish an EEJ workgroup to share information about different approaches to meet EEJ objectives, taking into account the draft EEJ strategy. The Workgroup should consider developing a terms of reference, holding an EEJ workshop, and publishing a peer reviewed journal article on their work.”

The National Marine Fisheries Service also presented their draft strategy for advancing EEJ to the CCC. The meeting participants discussed engagement strategies, how to move the research needs identified in the CCC EEJ report forward, Western Pacific underserved and disadvantaged fisheries, how to identify underserved communities in other regions, council representation, and the importance of MSA National Standard 8 and funding territorial science. The draft strategy is open for public review and comment through Aug. 19, 2022. For a link to the draft document and comment form, and information on upcoming webinars, visit: [www.fisheries.noaa.gov/bulletin/request-comments-noaa-fisheries-draft-strategy-advancing-equity-and-environmental](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/bulletin/request-comments-noaa-fisheries-draft-strategy-advancing-equity-and-environmental) 🐟