



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
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March 6, 2023

Ms. Kitty M. Simonds
 Executive Director
 Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council
 1164 Bishop St, Suite 1400
 Honolulu, HI 96813

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Dear Kitty,

This letter is in response to the Council’s input to PIFSC in the development of the FY24 PIFSC Annual Guidance Memo. I am pleased to share the Annual Guidance Memo and provide some insight into our prioritization of activities highlighted in the FY24 AGM, in the comment table below.

AGM Section	AGM language	Council staff comments and PIFSC Responses
1	Promote Sustainable Fisheries	<p>Council: In general, we would like to see greater focus on innovation to forecast and monitor pelagic management unit species (PMUS) with catch limits and specifications (e.g., bigeye tuna, swordfish and striped marlin). This could include use of electronic monitoring (ER) data to inform in-season adaptive management and utilizing electronic monitoring (EM).</p> <p>PIFSC: This activity falls into the scope of item 1.a.i: “Modernize PIFSC’s fishery-dependent data systems with focus on electronic reporting/monitoring technologies.” FRMD’s Fisheries Monitoring and Fisheries Reporting and Bycatch Programs expect to make significant progress this calendar year in modernizing catch projections for fisheries with annual catch limits. PIFSC looks forward to contributing to the development of an EM</p>



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		program through the Council process, the development and implementation of which we expect to take multiple years.
1.a.	Fishery-independent science and - dependent data streams in support of stock assessments.	<p>Council: The main Hawaiian Island (MHI) deep-7 noncommercial survey using the bottomfish registry should be prioritized. This effort would also provide information on the non-commercial uku fishery, as the same fishermen participate in both fisheries.</p> <p>PIFSC: This activity falls into the scope of item 1.c.iii, “Establish pilot studies to improve HMRFS/MRIP data for Deep7 and uku fisheries.” The pilot studies will explore the addition of sampling strata for the Deep 7 and uku fisheries. PIFSC looks forward to reviewing the MRIP sampling methods to determine if improvements can be made in the estimation of non-commercial landings for Federally managed species.</p>
1.b.	Stock assessments for priority insular and pelagic species.	<p>Council: We request greater focus on improving understanding of stock dynamics, including stock structure and stock connectivity.</p> <p>PIFSC: Understanding the stock dynamics of pelagic species are research objectives of PIFSC’s pelagic research, and is a focus of the International Billfish Biosampling Project. For insular species, PIFSC is focused on the Marianas. This year, a working group is exploring the feasibility of archipelago-wide assessments.</p>
1.b.ii	Evaluate the need for, and conduct research track assessments to include environmental parameters in operational assessments as well as evaluation of non-assessed PMUS	<p>Council: We suggest inclusion of life history work on PMUS as part of this item.</p> <p>PIFSC: The evaluation highlighted in this AGM item will include a review of current life history information, and a summary of the data/research gaps for life history information.</p>

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2.e.ii	Harmonize Federal and local territorial bottomfish monitoring through development and/or implementation of the Marianas and American Samoa Fishery Ecosystem Plan amendments and support of local fishery management plans.	<p>Council: We request that PIFSC continue to involve the Council when engaging with local territorial agencies to support local fishery management plans that include federal management unit species.</p> <p>PIFSC: PIFSC strives for coordinated action through clear paths of communication. We will continue to involve the Council as we engage with local territorial agencies.</p>
2.a.i	Complete cetacean surveys in the U.S. exclusive economic zone around Hawai'i to include PacMAPPS HICEAS and prepare and analyze data to be fed into stock assessment reports	<p>Council: We reiterate our request for prioritizing development of population dynamics-based models and species-specific post-hooking mortality estimates, especially for false killer whales.</p> <p>PIFSC: PIFSC is interested in undertaking feasible and reasonable research to improve stock assessments and species-specific post-hooking mortality estimates. PIFSC is currently sponsoring work on post-hooking survival and outcomes in the insular FKW population using existing photographic datasets. Standard approaches for assessing post-hooking mortality, such as deployment of telemetry tags, remain infeasible given the challenges of deploying such tags from fishing vessels.</p>
2.a.iii	Produce modernized annual population assessment reports (for the Hawaiian green sea turtles for now) that synthesize demographic parameters, survey data, telemetry data, and climate change impacts data.	<p>Council: We support the development of annual population assessments for turtle populations. However, higher priority for management would be North Pacific loggerhead and Western Pacific leatherback turtle populations.</p> <p>PIFSC: PIFSC only receives monitoring data suitable for incorporation into the assessment from week for Hawaiian green sea turtles on an annual basis. The data quality for the North Pacific loggerhead and Western Pacific leatherback turtle populations does not lend itself to this type of assessment report. However,</p>

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		<p>PIFSC will continue efforts to enhance data collection and sharing for these populations.</p>
2.b.ii	<p>Conduct research on methods to reduce bycatch and bycatch mortality of false killer whales in the Hawaii longline fishery.</p>	<p>Council: We request prioritization bycatch research for other species of management interest, including seabirds. It is important that PIFSC prioritize support for bycatch research beyond FKWs so that work is done in a proactive manner. Seabird measure research over the past several years is a good example of proactive approach, and we request PIFSC's continued support and prioritization to complete the SSLL portion.</p> <p>PIFSC: This priority is tied to Congressional funding, and PIFSC does not have the discretion to focus this funding on other species. This calendar year, PIFSC is conducting a bycatch strategic planning exercise that will inform prioritization over FY24 and into the future. For this reason, we do not specify bycatch priorities beyond what is mandated by Congressional funding.</p>
3.b.iii	<p>Conduct integrated ecosystem research that evaluates the impacts of multiple stressors (e.g., climate change, habitat loss, fisheries-related injury/mortality, disease) on living marine resources and the human communities they support</p>	<p>Council: We request that this priority include impacts of closed areas and marine managed areas, including the American Samoa Large Vessel Area Prohibited and the Marine National Monuments.</p> <p>PIFSC: PIFSC has conducted evaluations of closed areas such as the Southern Exclusion Zone using the Protected Species Ensemble Random Forest (PSERF) model and supported analyses of CPUE within and outside of closed areas (e.g., supporting the SSC evaluation of the monument expansion). PIFSC recognizes</p>

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		that the SAFE reports may be the appropriate vehicle for evaluating the efficacy of conservation and management measures such as the American Samoa LVPA. We would like to continue the discussion on the evaluation of large marine protected areas.

Please let us know if you have any additional questions, requests, or recommendations regarding this letter. We look forward to the next SSC and Council meetings.

Sincerely,



Tia Brown
Acting Director
Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center