

AGENCY REPORT

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Department of Land and Natural Resources,

Division of Fish and Wildlife

March 2023 - June 2023

195th Council Meeting

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation during the periods of March 1, 2023 - June 1, 2023. The report covers Fisheries Monitoring and Research, Resource Protection and Enforcement, and Other Fishery Activities.

1. Arongol Falúw

CNMI Council members and staff will report on various issues to include several projects involving community activities and issues. Members will cover fishery related activities since the last Council Meeting and include the following:

- a. CNMI Government
- b. CNMI Economy – CNMI Tourism
- c. National Parks Revetment
- d. MTMNM Superintendent Position

2. DLNR/DFW Agency Report

The Island Report entails activities performed by the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) and the Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) since the last Council meeting. The CNMI DLNR and DFW will provide a report on issues and activities regarding: CNMI CARES Act, legislative, enforcement, fishery, Data Collection, and wildlife resources.

DFW Fisheries Program updates:

Fisheries Data Collection Programs

- i. Boat-based & Shore-based Creel Survey Updates
 - a. Boat-based Creel Survey Update
 - Between the months of April to May, 12 survey days have occurred and 36 interviews were conducted. Of the 36 interviews, 4 methods have been conducted, 13 were trolling, 11 were bottom fishing, 4 were spearfishing and 4 were Atulai (caught with hook and line but counts as its own category).
 - Boat-based surveys are conducted at 3 main ramps on Saipan, which are located on the western coast of the island; DFW Ramp, Smiling Cove Marina and Fishing Base.
 - b. Shore-based Creel Survey Update

- Between the months of April to May, 17 sample days have occurred and 20 interviews have been conducted. Of the 20 interviews, 19 were hook & line and 1 was spearfishing.
- c. Data Section CREEL Updates
- Zachary Dela Cruz, a new hire under WSFR (Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration) was recruited in February to help with the collection, entry and validation of both boat-based and shore-based surveys. A tremendous amount of work has been fulfilled by this Data Tech.
 - Due to being understaffed, it has been difficult to keep up with scheduled surveys, data entry and data validation. 2 hires under WSFR have turned down the position due to the salary that the position holds.
 - 1 new hire under WSFR has been selected as of March and is hopefully going to start by the end of May or mid-June.
- ii. Commercial Receipt System (CRS)
- a. Commercial Collection, Entry and Validation
- All data collected for 2023 has not been entered into any system as of today.
 - Currently, there are 46 active participants in the CRS. Of the 46 participants, 13 are harvesters and 33 are purchasers.
- b. Data Section CRS Updates
- Commercial data entry and validation is currently behind as we are straying away from using the VFP (Visual FoxPro) application and moving towards the new online application. It has been established between the DFW and PIFSC (Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center) that the best way to move the data from VFP to SILI (Sell It Log It) and LIRI (Log It Report It) was to enter current data only up to the year of 2022 and 2023 data (and going forward) into SILI and LIRI. Both applications have yet to be completely finalized but trial entries using real data from 2023 are currently in progress.
 - A “walk through” of LIRI was done in March by the Acting Data Manager and the Data Technician, Kelsey Lizama, to provide feedback on the admin user’s end. Discussions were made to establish changes in the application to reflect what is best for the Data Section’s data entry and validation protocols. Emails have been exchanged since then, between the Data Section, PIFSC and Sudokrew, to make improvements to the site.
 - Reports cannot be generated in LIRI for the CRS currently as Sudokrew is still developing a tool called metabase that will allow pre-made and ad-hoc querying of the database.
 - Commercial collection has currently resumed in February. Some participants are behind on submitting their commercial receipts for several reasons. These

reasons include: illegible handwriting, not writing crucial information needed (lbs. total for each species/family & price per lbs.), having the harvesters fill out commercial receipt forms (commercial receipts forms are for purchasers, not harvesters), not reporting what is purchased based on what we see harvesters and purchasers posting on their social media, and simply not prioritizing reporting as there has not been consequences for purchasers and/or harvesters in the past. Attempts have been made by the Data Section to address these issues multiple times, but without any authority on our end to enforce the regulation, we get stuck in situations like these.

iii. Fish Life History Program

- Staff have been preparing for Agrihan trip to collect life history samples. This includes purchasing supplies need to ensure a successful sampling and data recording
- Preparation of *Scarus ghobban* otoliths for sectioning will continue
- Staff will continue to read/interpret gonad histology slides
- Sampling efforts for target reef fish species will continue

3. SFF Projects Updates

The Department of Lands and Natural Resources (DLNR) will provide an update on SFF-IX Garapan Fishing Base updates.

- SFF # 9 2017 - Garapan Fishing Base Improvements
Work on the site has begun. Dredging along the shoreline is being performed. Water quality monitoring is being conducted regularly at the project site.

4. Other-Fishery Activities

DLNR Endangered Species Program

- The program has filled numerous vacant positions. New staff members are Christina Tudela, Public Outreach Specialist for the Sea Turtle Program since December 2022, Sean Scott Songsong, Nursery Technician for Rota's Endangered Plants Program since March 2023, and Carey Demapan, Manager for the Endangered Species Program since April 2023.
- The Endangered Plants Program continues its ongoing project objectives to propagate and outplant endangered plants on the island of Rota.
- We have increased sea turtle community outreach and school educational presentations (approximately 1,429 people reached over 13 events) due to the recent hiring of the Sea Turtle Outreach Specialist. The Sea Turtle Program has also increased its online marketing presence through Facebook posts and the creation of an Instagram and Twitter account. Nightly beach monitoring continues and we have responded to four (4) community reports regarding turtle sightings, a distressed turtle, and the sale of illegal products during this reporting period.

- DLNR and the ESP recently submitted their ESA Section 6 Cooperative Agreement renewal package to US FWS on 4/27/23. We are awaiting their response to our submission.

CNMI's Coral Reef Initiative Coral Restoration Coordinator

- DLNR recently filled this position (Kalani Reyes) who started working since May 1, 2023.
- Coral Restoration Coordinator was introduced to the Coral Reef Restoration Working Group on 05/07/2023 and provided a summary of meeting notes to participants

5. Rulemaking and Legislation

CNMI Mandatory Licensing and Reporting Status

The Mandatory Licensing and Reporting Implementation plan has been finalized.