

193rd Council Meeting Highlights, December 5-8, 2022



WPRFMC Council members (or designee) and executive director at the Pagoda Hotel in Honolulu for the 193rd meeting, with Shaelene Kamaka'ala and Roger Dang joining virtually.



Noncommercial and Native Hawaiian Subsistence Fishing Returns to the NWHI After 15 Years

Fishery managers from across the Western Pacific recommended fishing regulations for the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument (PMNM) Expansion Area. Members of the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council urged the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to authorize noncommercial and Native Hawaiian subsistence fishing from 50 to 200 nautical miles around the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI).



For Native Hawaiian practices, this would include an opportunity to recover fishing costs up to \$15,000 per trip.

The Council members discussion on this action was lively.

“It is important to provide this opportunity for people in the Pacific, specifically Hawai‘i, to provide food for their community, especially areas that have been culturally their place to fish,” said American Samoa Council member Will Sword. “We can also take advantage of the chance to gather much needed data.”

“I’m concerned that any action we take here will define our culture and its evolution,” said Manny Dueñas, Council member from Guam. “In the end, we are looking at ways to sustain our native peoples and see them flourish like hundreds of years ago.”

In discussing cost recovery, Council member McGrew Rice said, “By my estimate, if a 1-day trip to the NWHI costs \$3,000 plus fuel, most people can’t afford this without being able to recoup their costs.” This echoes sentiments heard from the public at meetings the Council held across Hawai‘i in November 2022. Cost recovery includes actual trip expenses like fuel, bait and

ice. The NWHI are 400 miles from the main Hawaiian Islands, and take two days to reach by boat.

Some members disagreed with the final recommendation. David Sakoda, the State of Hawai‘i representative, was concerned with dissolving established Native Hawaiian rights under the State Constitution. “We don’t want to water down customary and traditional rights by extending beyond what is included in the Constitution,” said Sakoda. The State was amenable to cost recovery, as long as it was only included in the noncommercial fishing permit.

Hawai‘i Council member Shae Kamaka’ala said, “I feel the term Native Hawaiian subsistence is much too narrow. Native Hawaiian practice permits are in place for the original monument area, and it is a more appropriate term to describe the broader human interaction in that space.”

The Council has had an indigenous fishing rights standing committee since the 1980s, and from 2006 to 2017, a series of Puwalu conferences to identify traditional fishing practices in Hawai‘i to inform management decisions.

The Council approved the fishing regulations in the Monument Expansion Area with two dissensions and two abstentions, and included prohibiting commercial fishing, limiting gear types and catch limits for managed pelagic and bottomfish species. NMFS and the Council will include fishery performance indicators, such as number of permits issued and catch and effort information, in the annual Hawai‘i and Pacific Pelagic Fishery Ecosystem Plan reports.

In 2016, Presidential Proclamation No. 9478 set aside an area of 50 to 200 nautical miles (the outer boundary of the U.S. exclusive economic zone) adjacent to the PMNM. The Proclamation provides for management of activities and species under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, including noncommercial fishing and Native Hawaiian practices.

International Fisheries Commission Adopts Council's Recommended Shark Conservation Measure

An improved shark conservation and management measure proposed by the United States and Canada was adopted at the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission meeting in Da Nang, Vietnam held last week, effective Jan. 1, 2024. The measure to prohibit wire leaders and shark lines in tuna and billfish longline vessels from 20 degrees north latitude to 20 degrees south latitude is consistent with the Council's MSA 304(i) international recommendations. It also contains safe release provisions for non-retained sharks and extends obligations for fins to be naturally attached to carcasses through 2024. Fishing vessels are instructed to release non-retained sharks as soon as possible, taking into consideration the safety of the crew and observer by using a line cutter to cut the branchline as close to the hook as possible.



2023 North Pacific Striped Marlin Catch Limit

The Council recommended an annual catch limit of 457 tons of striped marlin for the U.S. longline fishery in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean, consistent with previous Council action and a WCPFC measure. The Council also recommended an annual retention limit of 443 tons as an accountability measure. If the limit is reached, the fishery would not be allowed to retain striped marlin, but other fisheries would not be restricted. The Council will reevaluate this catch limit when a new stock assessment is available from a scientific services provider (ISC), anticipated in 2023.

The meeting agenda and summary of action items are available at www.wpcouncil.org/event/193rd-council-meeting. 🐟

Scientists Work With Fishermen to Understand Bottomfish Data

The National Marine Fisheries Service's Pacific Islands Fisheries Science Center (PIFSC) is planning a new stock assessment for the Guam bottomfish fishery in 2024 and engaged the local fishing community in kicking off the process. PIFSC scientists, in collaboration with the Guam Department of Agriculture and the Western Pacific Regional Fishery Management Council, held workshops in January 2023 to ask Guam fishermen to help ground truth and interpret fishing catch data. The assessment is the first step in determining the status of the Guam bottomfish stock and setting an annual catch limit.

include multiple fishing methods and the method chosen is determined by the weather conditions (wind, waves, etc.).

The second and third workshops provided an opportunity for fishers to give their interpretation of the various bottomfish data collected by DAWR surveys to ensure that what scientists see in the numbers is comparable to what the fishermen experience. A common perspective was that there are not many zero catch trips because if you are not catching, you switch gears, methods, sites, etc. Bottomfishing is just one method and nearly everyone carries multiple gears. One fisherman said he brings his speargun because he will at



Guam fishermen gather to provide their insight to scientists on bottomfish fishing. Photo: Joshua DeMello.

A 2019 stock assessment determined that Guam's bottomfish fishery was overfished. A stock is overfished when the population is below a target level that maximizes harvest. The Council developed a rebuilding plan to address the overfished condition and return the Guam bottomfish stock to a level that can support maximum sustainable yield.

The first workshop allowed Guam's Division of Aquatic and Wildlife Resource (DAWR) staff members to offer their insights on creel survey implementation and data management. Surveyors described how they conduct surveys and their explanations for the historical data presented. Workshop participants noted that most trips

least come home with dinner if the fish aren't biting. Switching from deep- to shallow-water (<500 feet) bottomfishing also often allows fishers to catch fish even if they aren't biting at deeper depths. Another fisherman emphasized, "There are no bottomfish fishermen in Guam. We are fishermen, period."

PIFSC, the Council and the Guam Department of Agriculture appreciated members of the fishing community participating and providing their knowledge. For more information, come to the March Council meeting to hear a presentation and visit www.wpcouncil.org/event/194th-council-meeting. 🐟

