



WESTERN
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COUNCIL

DRAFT Report of the Mariana Archipelago FEP CNMI Advisory Panel Meeting

Saturday, June 3, 2023

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

1. Welcome and Introductions

Richard Farrell, CNMI Advisory Panel (AP) Vice-Chair, opened the meeting at 10:01 a.m. Members in attendance included Richard Farrell, Ray Tebuteb, Lawrence Concepcion and David Cabrera. AP members Cecilio Raiukiulipiy, Mike Fleming, Anthony Guerrero, Lino Tenorio and Perry Mesngon were excused.

Others in attendance include Zach Yamada, Joshua DeMello, Asuka Ishizaki, Felix Reyes Mark Fitchett (Council Staff), Adam Ayers, Mia Iwane, Marlowe Sabater, Kirsten Leong (PIFSC), Pua Borges (PIRO), Thomas Remington (Lynker), Floyd Masga (DFW), and John Gourley (Council member).

2. Review of the Last AP Recommendations and Meeting

Zach Yamada, Council staff, provided a review of the last AP recommendation from its Joint Marianas AP meeting held on Saturday, March 25, 2023.

AP members did not have questions or discussion

3. CNMI AP Project and Activities Update (AP Plans)

Due to the lack of meeting participation, this item was tabled until the next meeting.

4. Feedback from the Fleet

A. Second Quarter Fishermen Observations in the Marianas

AP members provided their fishermen observations from April to June 2023.

A member from Tinian reported that water has been choppy following Typhoon Mawar. Fishermen have not been gone fishing since Typhoon Mawar. Following the typhoon, people expected juvenile goatfish and trevally and have been targeting them every day after work.

B. Marianas Archipelago Fishery Issues and Priorities

AP members discussed fishery issues and priorities in the CNMI.

An AP member reported there were ongoing activities on public comment and hearings regarding the NOAA reef studies. The community felt that the hearings did not provide enough information.

AP member reported that the Commonwealth Ports Authority (CPA) held scoping meetings on Tinian to discuss their plan for the proposed commercial port and breakwater renovations. Members said community members brought up concerns on the effects on the marine and the breakwater and ensuring that environmental concerns are addressed throughout the development of the environmental impact statement (EIS) process. Another member brought up the issue of the landfill and what is the current status of that. The chair stated that your guess is as good as mine. There have been talks of certain areas being used but that's hearsay.

AP members reported on the public hearings on the Pacific Remote Island Area Sanctuary designation proposal held on Saipan and Tinian. On Tinian, there were a total of eight people who provided public comment. He said the comments were not focused on the sanctuary, rather statements asking why the Council was not present. One commenter said if there are no indigenous populations present, how could they bring up tradition and culture. On Saipan, commenters were concerned on the miscommunication and misconceptions on the Marianas Trench Sanctuary designation.

5. Council Issues

A. Options for CNMI Bottomfish Annual Catch Limits

Joshua DeMello, Council staff, presented options for specifying annual catch limits (ACL) for the CNMI bottomfish fishery for fishing years 2024 and 2025. Based on the 2019 Territorial bottomfish management unit species (BMUS) stock assessment, CNMI's bottomfish is neither overfished nor experiencing overfishing. The options presented to the AP included not specifying an ACL, setting the same ACL based on the same catch quota as in the previous fishing years, and setting an ACL based on the same risk of overfishing.

The AP had general consensus to support on option 3 to stick with the same risk of overfishing since the previous catch has not been close to the ACL.

B. 2022 Annual SAFE Report – CNMI Module

Thomas Remington, Lynker Contractor, presented the 2022 fishery highlights from the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report for CNMI. Based on fishing year performance, there was an observed decrease in catch and CPUE. For ecosystem component species (ECS), atulai was the most harvested species in 2022 through the creel and commercial survey. The priority species monitored exceeded historical averages. For trolling, there was a slight decrease in the number of trips and the charter fishery remains inactive. For the reef biomass surveys, that national coral reef monitoring programs

An AP member asked if the projected catch only accounts for Saipan. There is limited data on Tinian and wanted to know if it was incorporated. Remington said the catch was primarily for Saipan and may account for catch from Rota and Tinian.

An AP member asked if the Annual SAFE report displays data from 30 years back to identify the anomaly in the data. Remington said the SAFE report could include a long time series, but that data has been archived in the Council web portal for the SAFE report (wpcouncildata.org). For the SAFE report, the plan teams agreed to cut the data to 20 years. Regarding indicators, the plan team is trying to figure out how they can match the indicators to

the time series and predict whether catch will be better or worse. Remington said the spikes in change may be correlated with more compliance from vendors to report their catch.

Another member said the SAFE report may not have the whole picture of fishery performance due to the creel survey schedule. There are a number of fishers who have never been surveyed and fishers believe the surveyors should provide more effort in the field. Remington said the fishery performance report does not capture the whole picture, but the agency is looking at ways to get more data and adjust their schedules to capture more surveys.

An AP member said that the report does not show where fishers are catching their fish and they are worried that the catch is being double counted towards Guam and the CNMI. He asked if the stock assessment would account for the spatial dispersion of the species. Remington said he would need to follow up with DLNR DFW for clarification on the data. Another AP member said that data from other islands in the CNMI are limited since there surveyors are not found at night.

Adam Ayers, NMFS PIFSC, presented the final report of the CNMI Fisher Observation Summit Held on February 23, 2023. There were a total of 10 fishers who provided their observations for pelagic and bottomfish MUS and ECS. Based on the information shared, they grouped each of the observation on whether it was Social, Ecological, Economic or Management (SEEM) related. Based on the current draft of the report he asked the AP if they had any further guidance to better the report.

The AP had no comments.

6. Research Priorities

Mark Fitchett, Council staff, provided an overview of the Council's research priorities and plans. He said the Council will develop the five-year research plan based on the 2020-2024 plan for the 2025-2029 draft to be approved by the SSC and transmitted to NMFS. Council staff started with the Pelagic Fishery Research Plan that will fold into the MSA priority plan. Council staff had a discussion with the Council family that resulted in linking management objectives to research priorities. Council staff will work on the development of the management objectives and work on including socioeconomic research priorities that were absent. Local food and livelihood security is the primary objective, followed by strengthening underserved fishing communities (to meet EEJ), informing US international positions and management, enhancing climate-ready fisheries, optimizing fishery performance and efficiency, and developing dynamic/adaptive management opportunities. He asked for further guidance on the application of this process for the other program areas in the MSA five-year research priorities.

The AP appreciated the presentation. An AP member said the MSA five-year research plan should add a priority to archive practices from the past. He said traditional and ecological knowledge would be good information to record since the practices of the elders were affected by closures, sanctuaries and monuments.

Regarding the research priorities, The AP recommended the Council considering including priorities for research documenting traditional and local fisheries practices and knowledge.

7. Other Business

Zach Yamada, Council staff, reported that NOAA published an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR) for National Standards 4, 8 and 9. The proposed rulemaking provided questions on the effects of climate change and equity and environmental justice. This includes provided clarification on the effects of climate change on allocations and refining the definition of fishing communities. At its 194th meeting, the Council made recommendation to form a working group and the staff will be tapping on certain members of the AP to participate in the working group. The deadline for comments is due by September 2023.

There was no discussion from the AP

8. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

9. Discussion and Recommendations

The CNMI Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

Regarding CNMI Bottomfish ACL:

- The CNMI AP recommends the Council select option 3 and specify the CNMI bottomfish ACL at the same risk level. The CNMI AP notes that the recent catch has not approached the current ACL and therefore the current risk of overfishing is sufficient.

Regarding the research priorities:

- The CNMI AP recommended the Council consider including priorities for research documenting traditional and local fisheries practices and knowledge.