



WESTERN  
PACIFIC  
REGIONAL  
FISHERY  
MANAGEMENT  
COUNCIL

## **Final Report of the Mariana Archipelago FEP Guam Advisory Panel Meeting**

Saturday, June 17, 2023

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

### **1. Welcome and Introductions**

Clay Tam, Advisory Panel (AP) Chair, opened the meeting at 10:05 a.m. Members in attendance included Michael Dueñas, Jesse Rosario, Michael Gawel, James Borja, Jason Miller.. AP members Dale Alvarez, Dominick San Gil, Jonathan Deloso and Judy Amesbury were excused.

Others in attendance include Zach Yamada, Joshua DeMello, Felix Reyes, Mark Fitchett (Council Staff), Mia Iwane, Marlowe Sabater, Eric Cruz (PIFSC), and Thomas Remington (Lynker).

### **2. Review of the Last AP Recommendations and Meeting**

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

AP asked what the status of a previous discussion to request military support for fish aggregating device (FAD) deployment was.

Council staff said the recommendation was taken up by the Council at its last Council meeting and letters were sent to the appropriate Department of Defence (DoD) representatives for action. A follow up for their response continues.

### **3. Guam AP Project and Activities Update (AP Plans)**

#### **A. Military Mitigation Plan**

Council staff provided an update on the work the AP has been doing to list out potential projects that could be done by the military for impacts to the fishing community; ideas included putting boat ramps on the east side and assisting in FAD deployment.

An AP member asked about the status of the smart FADs.

Council staff said that there have been no updates to date. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are conducting a study to see if the attachment of echo sounder buoys to FADs will negate the intent of the FAD buoys.

An AP member said the manager of the shooting range joined the recent regional ecosystem advisory committee meeting in Guam and was open to meeting with fishers to ensure

their concerns about mitigation are addressed. The AP will extend an invitation to the shooting range people to join the next informal meeting.

Council staff noted as part of the AP's Action Plan under Education and Outreach, the development of the Guam AP brochures was done. The AP members noted they received their copies. In addition to the AP brochure, the Council staff requested if there still intent for the Guam AP to have a presence at local derbies and talk about fishery issues.

An AP member replied that yes but recommended the outreach be best done during the Captain's meeting and/or at the awards banquet.

Council staff also added that the Guam AP Vice Chair Judy Amesbury is planning on having the AP go into the classroom at the next school year to talk about fisheries and the Council process.

#### **4. Feedback from the Fleet**

##### **A. Second Quarter Fishermen Observations in the Marianas**

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

An AP member said during the last half of 2022, mahimahi was off to a good start. Wahoo stayed for a bit longer. The first half of 2023 was rough for most fishers with not as many fishing as in previous years. A few bottomfish but catches were not productive. With the summer coming and the start of typhoon season, some boats are starting to go out, including those targeting tuna. Some decent size yellowfin were caught recently. Ice is starting to become available. Last week fishing was slow. Fishermen had to go to the banks to catch fish. With recovery from the typhoon coming along, more fishers will go out starting July. As of this morning about 75-76% of GPA customers have power. The goal was to hit 95% by the end of June. There were major damages to homes to quite a few folks that may impact their fishing. Six boats at the Agaña Marina, two in Agat, and a couple in Apra Harbor were sunk or damaged. More storms may be experienced this year. The Micronesian boats have been fishing for the past two weeks. Since the ban of SCUBA spearfishing, people that target tataga, the talayerus, and spearfish along the reef, are all able to catch more fish. Banning one fishing method results in other methods having a better chance of catching. There was a reduction in the number of day spear fishers but those who went had nice catches.

An AP member asked how many FADs are still in place and if the seasonal nearshore species are normal.

An AP member replied that up to June 2023, the mañahak did not run this season. The Trevally run should be starting soon. On FADs, only #2 remains. South: Facpi 1 and North #2 remain on line. Wave Buoys were lost. Had all FADs been online, the mahi would have stayed longer. I'e should start soon which brings the larger predatory fish. Also, the experience gained from the recent HI shark tagging project, helps not to have anything hanging over the side to allow easier handling of sharks. And having a higher gunnel is also not conducive for shark tagging. The hosts were impressed by the work of the local fishers. The AP member noted the receiver range used to capture the presence of sharks is about 300 yards and 1,500 feet. Battery

life is about a year. A signal can be sent to release the receiver from the seafloor and it then floats to the surface for retrieval and download of the data.

Another AP who works for DAWR said he went fishing only once this quarter. The June 10, i'e Kid's Fishing Derby at Tumon Bay MPA was canceled due to the storm. The event will be tabled until next year. The AP member said he also joined in the shark tagging workshop held in Coconut Island by Carl Meyers. They learned how to tag several species of sharks from 4 feet to 15 feet. The team also learned how to acoustically attach tags and how to retrieve the acoustic receivers. The receivers can be attached to FAD buoys. He noted DAWR is a sub-recipient of the SK Grant. There is funding available to deploy six receivers around Guam. Regarding the recently awarded Atuhom project, they were awarded 30 receivers, allowing them to listen for tagged species other than sharks. The receivers are not specific to sharks. Hawai'i will be sending the six receivers and welcome any feedback from fishers on where to place them around Guam. Seven participants came from Guam and one from the CNMI.

Another AP member said that before the storm there was a lot of tuna. There were some yellowfin and bonitas closer to shore. After the storm, lots of schools of flying fish were observed close to shore. Reef fish are being caught in good numbers. Teh Cocos Lagoon is still being fished heavily. Finally he said wahoo seem to hang around longer.

An AP member said he went mañahak fishing earlier this year for two consecutive weeks. There were a sporadic numbers of fishers. 20-30 talayerus collectively caught only 20 pounds of mañahak. Atulai continues to stay inshore. He went net fishing a month ago along East Agaña Bay. Their total catch was about 50 pounds by 10 people.

## **B. Marianas Archipelago Fishery Issues and Priorities**

AP members discussed fishery issues and priorities in Guam.

Council staff shared that during his fishing from a boat about three weeks ago and before the typhoon, his electronic sensor noticed the water's temperature was 95 degrees. This was a week before the storm. He even caught a 37.5 pound bull mahimahi and two bonitas within 100 feet from the cliffline.

The AP Chair said in Hawai'i, the same was done on Ahi, Uku and a number of species. He said the placement of the tags on specific species matters. Tiger sharks in Hawai'i, tend to gather in October outside Maui. Many of the sharkbites happened around this time period.

An AP member said where to place the receivers depends on the types of sharks that have been caught in the past. Shark DNA sampling was done a few years ago and complements this project. Sometime ago, a FAD from Hawai'i was found off Inarajan but they were unable to retrieve the receiver attached.

Another AP member provided an update on the status of the Shallow Water Mooring Buoys (SWMB) and FADS. Purchasing was done for the placement for 15 SWMB sets. A large range of quotes were received with the highest at \$50,000 plus another \$25,000 to deploy all. Requisitions were reset to accommodate bids. In February, another round of outreach was done

and a \$7,000 proposal was received. DAWR is now waiting for the Government of Guam General Services Agency (GSA) to approve the vendor. The purchase order to date had not been approved or rejected. The hope is to have 15 sets deployed shortly. In early March, bids were released for 5 FAD sets. A requisition was put out for \$197,000 but the lowest bid received was for over \$200,000. Extra funding may not be available nor can DAWR amend the bid. This may result in cancellation of the process. A resubmission of a bid is not allowed. With only one bidder received, DAWR may reinstate the procurement as a Sole Source by the end of July. The vendor for the past 5 years has been the only responsive vendor to submit bids and may be selected as a Sole Source. After the storm, a letter was sent to the Governor of Guam to see if procurement can be leveraged to get FADs deployed. The Governor's office replied they will not use emergency procurement for this process. The AP member also noted that deployments are separate from the FAD systems. In March 2023, 8 bids outreach was done. Only one responsive bidder was submitted for \$225,000, for eight deployments and one recovery of FADs. It was anticipated to cost \$195,000. The responsive bidder came back with another offer at \$197,777, which was over the funding available. Additional funding was found and was added to the account. The GSA system lock needs to be amended to proceed with the lowest bidder. There is hope to have 7 FAD systems procured and 15 SWMBs deployed.

An AP member asked if DAWR was working to issue a Sole Source for the deployment of FADs.

An AP member replied that only Whole Marine was the responsive bidder. They subcontract Cabras Marine for the use of their vessel. Deployment includes painting, rigging, transport, and deployment.

An AP member asked if contracts can be separated into two, one for the procurement and the other for deployment and noted it is best to start planning now for the next fiscal year.

An AP who worked at the University of Guam (UOG) said to process their research projects, they formed a UOG Research Corporation used as a way to leverage procurement to avoid local procurement protocols.

## **5. Council Issues**

### **A. 2022 Annual SAFE Report – Guam Module**

Thomas Remington, Lynker Contractor, presented the 2022 fishery highlights from the Stock Assessment and Fishery Evaluation (SAFE) report for Guam. The Guam bottomfish catch remained high in 2022 and similar to 2021 and the current catch estimate is being verified to ensure that expansion of the data is sufficient for Annual Catch Limit monitoring. 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. For trolling, there was a slight decrease in the number of trips and the charter fishery continues to rebound.

An AP member asked who the representatives are to submit catch for otolith evaluation and why the secrecy on data being shared.

Remington replied Joel Sablan is the current contractor performing life history biosampling in Guam. There is a need to protect the identifiable business affiliation sharing the data if it is less than three. Having only one will result in the identity being known. A waiver has been received from the Guam Fishermen's Coop and but need to get the same from others. There is also a need to work with DAWR for more outreach with local fishers.

An AP said he was concerned about the importance of data and if they are accurate or exaggerated?

Remington replied that having the information will always be a benefit to the fishery.

An AP asked if there are any federal studies or research planned to track the effectiveness of the SCUBA spear ban in Guam and how it plays into stock assessments? He also asked for review by scientists that the biosampling was only done by the Coop and is not a good way to track life history over time. The current program is also being done by only one entity. Are there any evaluations or critiques of that program? Doing a biosampling program with another single entity without membership, marketing agreement or loyalty is getting fish at convenience, and is far inferior with a single entity with membership and marketing in place. He suggested an analysis of the differences. Current bio sampling program pushes a value on fish and are artificially putting an incentive for fishers to go fishing with the high price they are paying for fish. Fish are counted towards the ACL. It also inflates the urge to go fishing, including the number of trips.

Remington said he had not heard of anything, including any studies planned. There have been reviews of previous biosampling programs. It is no longer under the Council. It is now with the science center. A biosampling summit is scheduled for Guam soon.

Council staff added that as long as whoever is doing the biosampling is following standardized protocols, there should not be a problem. All those who do biosampling will be at the summit to provide input with all on the same page. The UOG Marine Lab also does life history work using the same protocols. He asked how the biosampling program affects the ACLs.

Remington said better life history information makes stock assessments in the future more reliable than the past. The biosampling program may be inflating fish price, but it may be necessary for the higher price to support the fishers.

An AP asked if it is possible to invite the PIFSC to AP meetings to present data and respond to questions.

An AP requested to have PIFSC look at how the biosampling program affects fisher behavior and thus the ACL. Fishers are going out fishing and selling the fish to the biosampling program whereas they would normally have to sell on the open market; so now they have a market to sell the fish where they normally would not have one which changes the motivation for fishing and in turn increases the effort and catch.

Tam said that with the rise in CO2 does that consider the eruption of volcanoes in Hawaii and California, does this also consider the wildfires in the West Pacific. For those who look at

the data face value there is a need to quantify and clarify what is going on and have that narrative available. When you consider the history of the fishery, there should be caution in interpreting the data.

Remington said for measuring CO<sub>2</sub>, volcanoes and fires are considered, but what is alarming is the rate of change since they have never seen the climate change as fast. There is a need to caveat this information and provide that picture

Another AP said when socio economics is considered, it does change the market. Early on when the project was started, the samplers were taking their fish but the bounty for the fish has increased. This gave them an incentive to go out and target those pieces. It was okay to provide fish for the sampling, but it does affect their customers to ensure their markets have fish. When you see a target with a dollar sign, then there is a possibility to market the fish, but what happens to the rest of the fish that the biosampling cannot take. There could be a spike, but it would affect their catch projections. A storm just hit and people are not going out fishing. He has not caught an onaga for the whole year.

Remington said the concern about non-fishing in 2023 is noted. Storm results in little fishing due to lack of ice, and more. No fish to sample so it impacts all fisheries.

Mia Iwane, NMFS PIFSC, provided the Fishermen's Observations Module of the 2022 Annual SAFE Report. Guam Fisher Obs Mtg attended by 9 Guam fishers facilitated by Clay Tam and Roy Morioka. Socio-economic findings show new entrants of 20-30 new boats, crowding at boat ramps, FADs off line, conversion to electrics. Economic: Fuel cost increasing. Eco and Bio changes: abundance of ECS, PMUS, BMUS, size of fish, lack of mañahak run in 2022. Strong run of mahi early. Mahi and wahoo closer to shore. Sharks continue to predate. Ecological: opposing currents, coole water temps. Collect demographic data from those providing obs. and find other ways to improve the process.

An AP clarified the 20-30 boats from Saipan may be the Chinesees that came to Guam and are not fishing boats. The confiscated boats remain at the Guam Customs and Quarantine compound. More were caught a few days prior with Chinese on board seeking asylum. The boat owners still retain the rights to the boats and may not be auctioned.

## **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.

An AP asked if there is any possibility for a cultural take of green sea turtles.

Council staff replied that in terms of research priorities, previous AP recommendations on population dynamics and as a part of the research plan, can be looked at. The entire Mariana Archipelago can be looked at.

## **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 providing clarification on the effects of climate change on allocations and refining the definition of fishing communities. At its 194<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council made recommendations 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.

## **8. Public Comment**

There were no public comments.

## **9. Discussion and Recommendations**

The Guam Advisory Panel made the following recommendations:

***Regarding the Marianas Fisheries Issues, the AP recommended:***

1. The Council request the Governor of Guam, in light of recent Typhoon Mawar's destruction and impact on Guam's small boat fisheries, to assist DAWR in navigating the Government of Guam procurement process and seek ways for expeditious procurement and deployment of FADs.

*Status: At its 195<sup>th</sup> meeting, the Council took up the AP's recommendation and sent a letter to the Governor of Guam on August 18, 2023.*

Meeting adjourned at 12:19 p.m. (ChST)