

AGENCY REPORT

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
Department of Land and Natural Resources,
Division of Fish and Wildlife
September 2023 – November 17, 2023
197th Council Meeting

This report describes the activities undertaken by the Department of Land and Natural Resources regarding fisheries and conservation during the periods of September 2023 - November 17, 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 Economy – CNMI Tourism
- b. Fuel Prices
- c. Meetings
- d. CNMI Touchback
- e. 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.

Fisheries Data Collection Programs

- i. Boat-based & Shore-based Creel Survey Updates
 - a. Boat-based Creel Survey Update
 - Between the months of September to November, 12 sample days have occurred and 39 interviews were conducted. Of the 39 interviews, 4 methods have been conducted, 22 were trolling, 8 were bottom fishing, 6 were spearfishing and 2 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 September to November, 18 sample days have occurred and 28 interviews have been conducted. Of the 28 interviews, 26 were hook & line, 1 was spearfishing and 1 was cast net.
- c. Data Section CREEL Updates
- Since the establishment of the new road on Saipan (Route 36), this opens the possibility of inshore data collection on the north east, east and south east side of Saipan that allows a connecting route for the roving portion of our Laolao surveys. Pilot studies may be conducted to see the best option to collect data from this side of the island. There has already been a rise in fishing activity and we do plan to capture this data.
- ii. Commercial Receipt System (CRS)
- a. Commercial Collection, Entry and Validation
- Data collection has been ongoing. Through the month of September to November, a total of 3,177.75 lbs have been reported to be commercially purchased. Of the total, 2,194.2 lbs is pelagic fish, 518.55 lbs is reef fish, 299.50 lbs is bottom fish, 33.0 lbs are invertebrates and 132.50lbs is miscellaneous.
 - Data entry and validation has recently resumed in October as well through the new software - Log It Report It. However, the Data Section is still without network connection which includes landline, internet and cellphone services.

Fisheries Research and Development Programs

- i. Marine Resource Assessment Updates
- ii. Fish Aggregating Device Updates
Staff completed splicing and rigging FAD systems for 10 of the missing FADs. Regular maintenance checks were established for active FADs (GG). Staff were able to successfully replace the old GG buoy and upper mooring. FAD outreach was conducted at several fishing events including the 39th Annual International Derby as well as the Council's Fishers Forum.
- iii. Vessel Refueling facility Updates
DLNR-DFW are actively searching for solutions to address the lack of a portside refueling facility for the island of Saipan. A proposal has been developed to initiate a feasibility study on certain areas within the Saipan Lagoon.

Other-Fishery Activities

DLNR Endangered Species Program (ESP)

- DLNR Sea Turtle Program submitted a competition proposal to the NOAA Species Recovery Grants to States – Section 6 Program. Proposed activities include in-water capture/tagging and turtle abundance estimation throughout the CNMI. If awarded, the project start date is 7/1/2024.
- We received four sea turtle reports during this period. These include (1) a nesting turtle sighting, (2) illegal sale of turtle jewelry posted on Facebook, (3) potential illegal harvesting incident in Laly 4, and (4) a sea turtle shell retrieved from Tanapag village (shell was found by a dog, the dog's owner collected the item and gave it to STP).

CNMI's Coral Reef Initiative Coral Restoration Coordinator

- DLNR recently filled this position (Kalani Reyes) who started working since May 1, 2023.

Marianas Trench Monument Advisory Council List and Council Nomination

- MTMAC confirmations have been set for CNMI members.

3. Rulemaking and Legislation

The DFW and the DLNR will provide an update to the Council on the progress of the full implementation of the Mandatory Licensing and Reporting in the CNMI.

PL 20-79 Coral Reef Protection Act of 2017

- DLNR/DFW is working on the development of regulations for this law to improve the management of coral resources within the CNMI.